

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Moral Vandals:  
Street Artists in the Service of Change

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

in

Art History, Theory, and Criticism

by

Lara Kathryn Bullock

Committee in charge:

Professor Norman Bryson, Co-Chair  
Professor Grant Kester, Co-Chair  
Professor Brian Goldfarb  
Professor Sheldon Nodelman  
Professor Kuiyi Shen  
Professor Charles Thorpe

2015

Copyright (©)

Lara Kathryn Bullock, 2015

All rights reserved.

The Dissertation of Lara Kathryn Bullock is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

---

---

---

---

---

Co-Chair

---

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2015

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my dad,  
for his unwavering love and support.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	x
Vita.....	xiii
Abstract of the Dissertation.....	xiv
<b>CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: JR and Ubiquitous Anonymity .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Swoon and Collaborative Evolution.....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: Os Gêmeos and the Cosmopolitan Imaginary .....</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>289</b>
Bibliography .....	301

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 JR, <i>Women Are Heroes</i> (installation in Morro da Providencia in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), 2008, jr.net .....	30
Figure 1.2 JR, Expo2Rue, taken May 21, 2006 by cex02, <a href="http://arturbain.blogg.org.expo-2-rue-jr-a115878686">http://arturbain.blogg.org.expo-2-rue-jr-a115878686</a> .....	35
Figure 1.3 JR, 28 Millimètres, <i>Portrait of a Generation</i> - Ladj Ly, Les Bosquets, Montfermeil, 2004, <a href="http://www.jr-art.net/projects/portrait-of-a-generation">http://www.jr-art.net/projects/portrait-of-a-generation</a> .....	36
Figure 1.4 JR, <i>Women Are Heroes</i> , 2009, Kibera Slum, Kenya, jr-art.net.....	58
Figure 1.5 JR, <i>Women Are Heroes</i> , 2009, Jaipur, India, jr-art.net.....	60
Figure 1.6 JR, <i>Women Are Heroes</i> , 2010, installation view <i>Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, photo by John Furlong.....	65
Figure 1.7 JR, <i>Women Are Heroes</i> , 2010, installation view <i>Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, <a href="http://www.mcasd.org/sites/default/files/styles/470w/public/391.jpg?itok=IOUeAWA8">www.mcasd.org/sites/default/files/styles/470w/public/391.jpg?itok=IOUeAWA8</a> .....	65
Figure 1.8 JR, <i>Eye of Kibera, Women Are Heroes</i> , 2010, <i>Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, <a href="http://www.mcasd.org/">www.mcasd.org/</a> .....	71
Figure 1.9 JR, Rafael Lorenzo and Obdulia Manzano, <i>Wrinkles of the City</i> , 2012, Havana, Cuba, jr-art.net.....	78
Figure 1.10 JR, Alicia Adela Hernandez Fernández, <i>Wrinkles of the City</i> , 2012, Havana, Cuba, jr-art.net.....	78
Figure 1.11 JR, <i>Reclaiming Education, Inside Out Project</i> , 2013, San Diego, CA, photo by Jon Alvarado.....	87
Figure 1.12 JR, <i>Reclaiming Education, Inside Out Project</i> , 2013, San Diego, CA, photo by Lara Bullock.....	88
Figure 2.1 Swoon, <i>The Music Box Fence</i> , New Orleans, LA, photo by Lara Bullock.....	119

Figure 2.2 Swoon, <i>Swimming Sisters of Switchback Sea</i> , 2010, <i>Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, mcasd.org.....	144
Figure 2.3 Swoon, <i>Miss Rockaway Armada</i> , 2006-7, Mississippi River, caledoniacurry.com.....	147
Figure 2.4 Swoon, <i>Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea</i> , 2008, Hudson River, caledoniacurry.com.....	147
Figure 2.5 Swoon, <i>Swimming Cities of Serenissima</i> , 2009, Venice, Italy, caledoniacurry.com.....	148
Figure 2.6 Sean Kelly Neutrino shares the Neutrino’s ideas for the design of the boats, caledoniacurry.com.....	150
Figure 2.7 Swoon, <i>Encampment Ersilia</i> , 2011, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), photo by Lara Bullock .....	166
Figure 2.8 Swoon, <i>Encampment Ersilia</i> , 2011, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), photo by Lara Bullock.....	166
Figure 2.9 Swoon, <i>Encampment Ersilia</i> , 2011, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), photo by Lara Bullock.....	167
Figure 2.10 Lina Bo Bardi, Preliminary Study for Sculptures-cum-Stage-Props on Trianon Terrace, Museum of Art of São Paulo, 1965, credit Luís Hossaka/Museum of Art of São Paulo Collection, <a href="http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/may/22/bo-bardi-architecture-perfect-imperfection/">http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/may/22/bo-bardi-architecture-perfect-imperfection/</a> .....	167
Figure 2.11 Erich Heckel, <i>Jüngling (Youth)</i> , woodcut, 1917, 14 1/8 x 11 3/4 inches, Syracuse University Art Collection.....	173
Figure 2.12 Swoon, <i>Untitled</i> , wheatpaste print, date unknown.....	173
Figure 2.13 Swoon, <i>Konbit Shelter Project</i> , Community Center, caledoniacurry.com .....	196
Figure 2.14 Swoon, detail of community center interior, <i>Konbit Shelter Project</i> , caledoniacurry.com.....	196

Figure 3.1 Os Gêmeos, "The Giant of Boston," Rose Kennedy Greenway at Dewey Square, Boston, MA, photo © Geoff Hargadon.....	210
Figure 3.2 Os Gêmeos, Wild Style letters, collaboration with Rime and Retna in Los Angeles, 1998, photo by Soulroach, <a href="http://blog.vandalog.com/2012/10/wild-style-wednesday-34/">blog.vandalog.com/2012/10/wild-style-wednesday-34/</a> .....	217
Figure 3.3 Paraisópolis favela next to the wealthy area of Morumbi, Tuca Vieira....	232
Figure 3.4 Os Gêmeos, Houston and Bowery Mural, 2009, New York, <a href="http://www.deitch.com">www.deitch.com</a> .....	241
Figure 3.5 Os Gêmeos, <i>Fermata</i> , 2011, exhibition at Museu Vale, Espirito Santo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock.....	243
Figure 3.6 Os Gêmeos, <i>Fermata</i> , 2011, exhibition at Museu Vale, Espirito Santo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock.....	244
Figure 3.7 Os Gêmeos, <i>Fermata</i> , 2011, exhibition at Museu Vale, Espirito Santo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock.....	244
Figure 3.8 Os Gêmeos, <i>Fermata</i> , 2011, exhibition at Museu Vale, Espirito Santo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock.....	245
Figure 3.9 Arthur Bispo do Rosario, installation at the 55th Venice Biennale, 2013, photo by Haupt & Binder, <a href="http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/venice_biennale/2013/tour/latin_america_exhibitions/02">http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/venice_biennale/2013/tour/latin_america_exhibitions/02</a> .....	246
Figure 3.10 Os Gêmeos, Instagram post of illegal street piece in Sao Paulo, Brazil.....	255
Figure 3.11 Os Gêmeos, <i>Untitled</i> (graffiti on the streets), Grottaglie, Italy, photo by Lara Bullock.....	259
Figures 3.12 Graffiti on the streets of Vila Madelena, Sao Paulo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock.....	262
Figures 3.13 Graffiti on the streets of Vila Madelena, Sao Paulo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock.....	262
Figure 3.14 Avenida 23 de Maio Mural, Os Gêmeos, Nina Pandolfo, Herbert Baglione and Vitché, 2002, <a href="http://osgemeos.com.br">osgemeos.com.br</a> .....	266



Figure 3.15 Avenido 23 de Maio Mural, Os Gêmeos, Nina Pandolfo, Nunca, Finok, and Zefix, 2008, <a href="http://osgemeos.com.br">osgemeos.com.br</a> .....	266
Figure 3.16 Avenido 23 de Maio Mural (detail), Os Gêmeos, Nina Pandolfo, Nunca, Finok, and Zefix, 2008, <a href="http://osgemeos.com.br">osgemeos.com.br</a> .....	267
Figure 3.17 Avenido 23 de Maio Mural, Os Gêmeos, Nina Pandolfo, Nunca, Finok, and Zefix, 2008, vandalized by pixadores, <a href="http://arrestedmotion.com/2010/03/streets-pixadores-attack-mural-by-os-gemeos-nunca-nina-finok-and-zefix/">arrestedmotion.com/2010/03/streets-pixadores-attack-mural-by-os-gemeos-nunca-nina-finok-and-zefix/</a> .....	276
Figure 3.18 Os Gêmeos, design for Instituto Ayrton Senna.....	282

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In embarking on an independent project requiring the dedication of years of one's life towards its completion means that depending on others is not only essential, but vital. In this regard I have been very fortunate to know many close friends and acquaintances who sometimes intentionally, but often unknowingly coaxed my heart and mind out of the depths of despair and doubt along this often solitary journey. I would like to express my gratitude to these wonderful souls here.

Firstly, I would like to thank Steve Fagin for too many impossibly kind acts, professional guidance, friendship, humbling honesty, and for teaching me the importance of living well over cocktails at the Marine Room, but especially by the sea. I would also like to thank my colleague Dr. Matthew Jarvis for his friendship, support, feedback, and overall good character. Thanks to Anya Gallaccio, Kelly Eginton, and Don Julio for taking me under their wings (and paws). I am lucky to have found such warm-hearted friends early on as we entered the program in San Diego and learned to make it our home. I am extremely indebted to Lucía Sanromán for her support, guidance, and for allowing me to assist her in realizing her innovative curatorial vision. Muchas gracias to Pedro Alonzo, without whom I would never have been able to complete this project; our frequent conversations about street art were essential in the formulation of my ideas and I am incredibly fortunate to have been able to contribute to both curatorial and book projects that have been critical in the institutional representation of the genre.

A tremendous thank you to Gustavo and Otavio Gandolfo, for showing me their incredible city and for countless adventures around the world from which I have a lifetime's worth of memories. Thank you to Caledonia Curry for her willingness to sit down and chat and for her inspiring generosity and intellectual inquisitiveness. And an overall thank you to each artist represented in this project for making the work they do, without which I would not have ventured into this incredible world.

I am thankful to Grant Kester, Kuiyi Shen, Sheldon Nodelman, Brian Goldfarb, Charlie Thorpe for their wisdom, guidance, feedback, and general conversation over the years. A tremendous thank you also to Jack Greenstein for his enthusiasm and support and for sharing a genuine interest in my project and subject matter. Jody Blanco deserves infinite thanks for enriching so many facets of my life; especially for providing me with such a graceful, brilliant, and compassionate support system. I am especially grateful to Norman Bryson; I have never known a greater combination of writer, thinker, speaker, and heart. Without these individuals, I would be a very different scholar than I am today.

Kate Edwards's tireless advice and support is a big reason why this project came to fruition. I can only hope to be as compassionate and hardworking. Thanks also to Yolie Torres, Asia Marks, Sheena Ghandbari, Jaqueline Griffin, and Tad Linfesty.

Lastly, there are countless friends and family members to whom I owe thanks, especially for providing me with the constant realization that there is a life and love

outside of my dissertation. I am grateful to each person whom I have been fortunate enough to call my friend, but would especially like to thank Stacey Seiders, Frances Ber, Antje Gamble, James Enos, Britany Salsbury, and Stephanie Nelson. An enormous thank you to my inspiring yoga family for instilling in me compassion, devotion, and for reminding me to breathe. Thank you to my mom, my brother-in-law, Patty, and Lepton for her care-packages and love. Thank you to my amazing and kind Mander, who has supported me regardless of what path I have chosen in life. And finally, thank you to my dad. There are not words weighty enough to express the enormity of my gratitude to you for believing in me no matter what and I know I am extremely lucky.

## VITA

- 2015      Doctor of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego  
Art History, Theory, and Criticism  
Chairs: Norman Bryson and Grant Kester
- 2007      Master of Arts, School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
Department of Art History, Theory, and Criticism  
Advisors: James Elkins, Joseph Grigely, and Mary Jane Jacob
- 2005      Bachelor of Arts (Departmental Honors), University of British  
Columbia  
Art History and English Minor  
Advisor: William Wood

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Moral Vandals:  
Street Artists in the Service of Change

by

Lara Kathryn Bullock

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory, and Criticism

University of California, San Diego, 2015

Professor Norman Bryson, Co-Chair  
Professor Grant Kester, Co-Chair

Street art is a term that has historically specified its site of display: the street. With its increasing mainstream popularity, however, the term “street” has become abstracted from this definition which implies a direct reference to art that is literally painted on the streets to refer to a much broader movement, which is often marked by defining principles rather than a uniform medium or location. This is not to say that street artists do not sometimes perform illegal actions, but that for them, street art is becoming more of an ideology rather than a particular aesthetic style. In other words, street art is not restricted to any medium, format, school, or technique; but instead, is

centered around messages. *Moral Vandals: Street Artists in the service of Change*, examines the ways in which contemporary street artists have shifted their practices from traditional, vandalistic graffiti to more socially based practices in order to effect more immediate and direct change. These artists dispel the notion of street and graffiti artists as vandals to reveal an ethical dimension of street art practice. This dissertation moves beyond the examination of simple, territorial interventions such as wall painting to examine artists who work with global communities, sometimes much like aid workers, but in the service of their art practice, which has social and moral aims. The traditional ethos of this contemporary street art has evolved into a complex matrix encompassing the ethics of philanthropy, social work, and colonization. This necessarily gives rise to many ethical issues and repercussions. This dissertation aims to reorient the reputation of street art as an outsider practice and situate it as a global contemporary art practice that not only has very real linkages to the high art world, but also aims to better society.

## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

**In your opinion, does the artist have to play a specific role in today's society?**

*I think as much as possible, an artist, if he has any kind of social or political concern, has to try to cut through those things, and to expose as much as possible what he sees so that some people think about things that they don't normally think about. Sometimes I do that by pushing things to the extreme; in the face of people who try to close their eyes I react the opposite, by trying to be more open and deal more openly with sexuality and violence for instance. An artist putting as many images into the world as I am should be aware or try to understand what that means and how those images are absorbed or how they affect the world. I don't think art is propaganda; it should be something that liberates the soul, provokes the imagination and encourages people to go further. It celebrates humanity instead of manipulating it.*

-Keith Haring interviewed by Sylvie Couderc<sup>1</sup>

Keith Haring's statement regarding the role of the artist in society could easily have been made by any of the three artists discussed within this dissertation: JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos. Social commentary, a concern for justice, a concern for context, and the belief that "art is for everybody,"<sup>2</sup> are sentiments shared by Haring as well as these three artists, and lie at the heart of this project. Haring further expresses his position by stating that:

I have created a reality that is not complete until it is met with the ideas of another human being (or, I suppose, animal), including myself, and that the reality is not complete until it is experienced. It has infinite meanings because it will be experienced differently by every individual.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Sylvie Couderc, "The Ten Commandments, An Interview," transcribed by Sylvie Marchand in Bordeaux, France. December 16, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Raphaela Platow, "Holding Up A Frame," *Keith Haring: 1978-1982* (Cincinnati: Contemporary Arts Center, 2010), 71.

<sup>3</sup> Platow, 88.



The three artists in this study share Haring's belief in equality and hope their art will make a difference in people's lives through the experience it provides upon its encounter. However, there are important differences between an artist such as Haring — who produced work in the late 1970s and 1980s and whose style is often compared to graffiti as well as street art<sup>4</sup> — and Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos who are producing a specific form of street art in the twenty-first century.

Haring produced imagery which would speak to a wide-range of viewers. In a public whose identities he felt were being threatened by a neoliberal ideal of homogenization stemming from over-saturation of media resulting in a culture where individuals were transformed into passive consumers; Haring waged an aesthetic assault on the East Coast artworld in its mecca, New York City. In addition to hyper-consumerism and over-saturation of the media, New York in the 1980s was experiencing a temporary economic boom as a result of Reaganomics: a policy which favored the rich by reducing income and estate taxes to historic lows, and which was marked by a new found liquidity and nouveau riche caste. It was during this period in which artworks were reduced to commodities and status symbols with a complete disregard for taste and connoisseurship. During this time, there was also a crackdown on graffiti which was very much entangled with burgeoning gentrification and the privatization of space in New York. Haring wanted to produce art that was available to

---

<sup>4</sup> In the late 1970s and 1980s, graffiti writers and Haring himself, considered their practices separate. It was only later, as Haring and Basquiat became part of the art historical cannon that they were grouped with graffiti artists.

everyone, sometimes giving it away for free; therefore, challenging the consumerist zeitgeist. In the United States today, economic inequality has reached historic highs not experienced since just before the Great Depression and far surpassing that of the 1980s. Professors Michael I. Norton and Dan Ariely estimate that almost fifty percent of the wealth in America is held by one percent of Americans.<sup>5</sup> As economic and social inequality continue to expand, we see the street once again becoming the site for social critique and the street artist using aesthetic practice to raise awareness. Moreover, technology has allowed for another difference with regard to contemporary street art and Haring. Haring was producing work at a time when new media and technology for the masses were in their nascency. Of an impending machine era Haring explains:

The artist of this time is creating under a constant realization that he is being pursued by the computers. We are threatened. Our existence, our individuality, our creativity, our lives are threatened by this coming machine aesthetic.<sup>6</sup>

This sort of apocalyptic fear expressed by Haring was very much a fear of the time.<sup>7</sup>

Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos embrace technology and it is very much a part of their practice and is often central to their collaborative efforts. The internet and social media has allowed the contemporary street artist unprecedented direct access to other street

---

<sup>5</sup> Michael I. Norton and Dan Ariely, “Building a Better America — One Wealth Quintile at a Time,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (Association for Psychological Science, 2011), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Platow, 92.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

artists and has aided in the dissemination of their work to a broader public than placing work on the street. Each of the three street artists I discuss utilize various social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Though, the street remains an irreplaceable arena in which to produce as it is on the street that the work has a physically experiential impact. Perhaps we may see our techno-lives as a double edged sword. As Ryan Moore points out by utilizing the example of punk music, a rejection of technology altogether can end up hurting a creative individual. The artists of today continue to feel the effects of advanced capitalism and Haring's prediction of passive consumerism is still a concern.<sup>8</sup>

Though they are producing work thirty years after Haring's death, with regard to medium JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos owe much to Haring and his career as an early street artist. Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos demonstrate that a certain impetus stemming from the world of the street has remained in tact. Each one of them is concerned with stimulating thought and challenging the viewer to consider issues through the politics of image-making. The nature of putting images in the public sphere and on the streets automatically means that they will have a greater reach than if they existed only in a museum or gallery. However, these artists come from a different generation and at a time after which street art has had several different incarnations: from graffiti to low-brow art and urban art and even post-graffiti. Since its proliferation in the 1970s in New York, graffiti has had a presence in art galleries. The 1980s saw street art's

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 93.

canonization with the rise of both Haring and Basquiat. Today, street art has been accepted into museums, biennials, auction houses, galleries and is a fixture at art fairs such as Art Basel Miami and others in Europe on a much larger scale. Yet somehow street art has generally not found its way up the ivory tower and into art history, though Haring and Basquiat have, and it has primarily been discussed in other disciplines.<sup>9</sup> For some, street art is a confrontation to traditionalism and is still commonly misunderstood as vandalism. And so there is a striking juxtaposition between overall acceptance and academic acceptance. Because of artworld attention, street art's characterization as a renegade art practice delegitimizes its characterization as avant-garde. The fact that it is not uncommon for street artists to have attended art school in some capacity, adds to this demotion. If these artists seem to be increasingly absorbed into the contemporary art scene, when does a street artist stop being a street artist?

JR says:

I don't think I'm a street artist anymore or photographer. I think I use those tools everyday. I love the artist title because you can do anything. I don't have a direct goal or direct mission, except that if I fail tomorrow I want to fail inside my field. I don't want to sell out basically.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> While one can find some Master's theses on the subject, there are not many doctoral dissertations. Master's theses have come out of the disciplines of Liberal Arts, Sociology, and Urban Studies. Art Historian James Daichendt at Asuza Pacific University is interested in street art and has written several publications on artists such as Shepard Fairey and Kenny Scharf.

<sup>10</sup> David Alan Harvey, "Conversation with JR," *Burn Magazine*, October 8, 2013, [www.burnmagazine.org/essays/2013/10/jr-conversation](http://www.burnmagazine.org/essays/2013/10/jr-conversation).

Swoon has said that working on the street is just one of many:

ways of working: on the street, in the institution, in the kind of community-based context in a natural setting and all those things, that each of them just feels like a spoke in the wheel of my process . . . I still work outside and I still do paste-ups outside . . . its just one piece of the puzzle for me . . . [and] fits into a larger puzzle and so I don't feel like 'oh, I moved on,' I just feel like I've kind of expanded in new different directions . . . It's the same thing that I've always done and I love to see that it sort of carries on.<sup>11</sup>

Os Gêmeos had the following response when asked about their alignment and self-definition:

We are simply Os Gêmeos. We hate labels and so we just like to classify ourselves as artists . . . we only do what we like to do and each part of our work is as important as the other. We can't define ourselves only as urban artists or as writers, because one without the other would mean that we weren't who are: Os Gêmeos . . . and we wouldn't be making our dream a reality.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Swoon, interviewed by Lara Bullock, 4 and 20 Blackbirds, Brooklyn, New York, May 1, 2014, transcript.

<sup>12</sup> "Os Gêmeos: Ultimate Graffiti Artists," *MTN-World.com*, October 15, 2012, [www.mtn-world.com/blog/2012/10/15/ultimate-graffiti-artists-os-gemeos](http://www.mtn-world.com/blog/2012/10/15/ultimate-graffiti-artists-os-gemeos). The term "writer" is used here to refer to graffiti artists, who used this term to refer to themselves as they traditionally painted their names on walls.

It is safe to say that street art exists as a facet of contemporary art.<sup>13</sup> As long as artists continue to work on the streets in order to project a message, they are producers of street art. ‘Street artist’ simply refers to an element of their practice; they are by no means restricted in terms of creative capacity. Moreover, the idea that an artist has to remain unrecognized by the artworld to remain a street artist is somewhat outmoded. To be sure, selling out and authenticity are on-going debates, as artists and subcultures more generally are in need of financial support to fund their practices. Ryan Moore, in his book *Sells Like Teen Spirit*, puts forth the example of punk music and its practitioners’ resistance to selling out due to a fear of a “crisis of authenticity” in an

---

<sup>13</sup> While there is overlap, there is a distinction between graffiti and street art. Graffiti is an act that is territorial, individualistic and insular, and often disrespectful of the environment in which it is enacted. Graffiti serves as a means to mark out territorial claims. There are two types of graffiti writers: gang related and graffiti crews that are not involved in gang activity. Gangs write to mark territory as a signal to rival gangs and graffiti crews also write to claim territory, but is not associated with physical violence. It is generally illegal, restricted to the medium of spray paint, and “depicts” a tag, which is usually a moniker for the sake of anonymity, intimidation, and identification with a certain group, called a crew. The tag, or street name, is usually rendered in a visually complex style of lettering that is only legible to other crew members, both one’s own and one’s rivals’ and adheres to a particular formula, such as moniker followed by street number on which you live. Several street artists do or have done graffiti, though only in terms of writing their tags. Most are not, nor were they ever associated with a gang. street art is similar to graffiti in that it is usually unsanctioned. street artists often use spray paint, but they do not restrict themselves to this medium, unlike graffiti writers. street artists also tend to include more characters and figurative elements beyond lettering. Though many street artists appropriate lettering styles from graffiti, many of them began by taking to the streets tagging. So, while street art may involve complex lettering and tags, it is not done by gang members or for competitive claiming of space, but rather a more a general reaction to or statement about the state of the world or often capitalism. The intention and audience constitute the main difference between graffiti and street art.

age of digital media and the explosion of the culture industry.<sup>14</sup> Moore notes that while it is indeed difficult to “realize authenticity in the society of the spectacle,” the culture industry has revealed an increased number of possibilities for for people to create alternative cultures through cultural reproduction using various media in the realms of art, music, and film.<sup>15</sup> However, due to punk’s insistence on maintaining adherence to its own authentic folk culture, which was defined by a certain style and sound, they ironically ended up stunting their own creativity which had often estranged some of punks more experimental and innovative performers.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the notion of selling out in the current age of globalization and digital media is a complex matrix in which, as Moore points out, “There are infinitely more opportunities to create networks of people linked through channels of communication and creativity, and so the technological possibilities for a revolutionary culture have redoubled, regardless of whether there is popular will or collective imagination to make it happen.”<sup>17</sup> There are some street artists who are concerned about selling out, and many are critical of neoliberalism and excessive commodification. However the use of the internet and social media platforms perform a central role in their collaborative relationships with others, just as Moore suggests. Resistance to so-called ‘selling out’ can be a virtue, but

---

<sup>14</sup> Ryan Moore, *Sells like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture, and Social Crisis* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 200.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 202.

also a hindrance. In general, if one sells out, that is where creativity dies and an artist stops being an artist regardless of the medium. And within the scope of my project, the practices of JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos have varying funding sources, financial support, and a certain amount of recognition, but they remain true to their core social values and critique of the state apparatus.

Work on the street is ephemeral, whether this refers to the natural decay of the work, or its attack by other artists or cleaning crews. Placing work in a public space such as the street, involves giving up a certain amount of control and ownership, in an act of giving over to the public. Globalization and the increasing reliance on social media platforms has affected street art's ephemerality in that it is preserved online and additionally in published media. The effect is that street art, which historically has been rooted on and attached to the street is being decoupled from the street through the internet.<sup>18</sup> Ephemerality is also interesting in relation to the auctioning of street art and its commodification. Traditionally street art has defied commodification by its being

---

<sup>18</sup> Another method by which street art is detached from the street is as a result of the phenomenon of cutting out street works from walls. This occurs with Banksy particularly, whose works are protected by plexiglass in London. Large blocks of concrete have gone up for auction with Banksy's work on them, which the artists does not endorse, as it changes the meaning. Because it is often difficult to ensure that a particular street piece is by Banksy, his endorsement is important to validate the work for sale; without it, the work is devalued.; On the subject of separating street works from their original contexts, recently, a resident in Gaza, Rabea Darduna, sold a door from his home that was destroyed in a battle between Hamas and Israel with a piece by Banksy on it, for the equivalent of \$175. Darduna did not know who Banksy was, and was tricked by a knowing buyer. Darduna thought he was simply selling the door and therefore lost an extremely valuable piece. Oren Liebermann, "Gaza Resident Sells a Door, Unwittingly Parts with a Banksy Masterpiece," *CNN* (April 6, 2015), [edition.cnn.com/2015/04/02/middleeast/gaza-war-door-banksy-artist/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/02/middleeast/gaza-war-door-banksy-artist/index.html).



rooted in space.<sup>19</sup> However, by circulating in the art market (usually in the form of prints, but sometimes actually appearing on cut-out walls), street art is deterritorialized or removed from its place of origin and the populations that inhabit these ordinary spaces, as it participates in a world of signs and commodity; which runs counter to street art's grounding in physical spaces. This is one of many paradoxes inherent in street art as a practice.

The street artist's aesthetic does not refer to a singular style. Instead, it falls somewhere between an aesthetic borrowed from graffiti and the development of an entirely disparate style that is unique to each artist which is dependent on where the physical work is situated on the street. The only prerequisite for being a street artist is that the artist is engaging with the streets through the insertion of their aesthetic forms or gestures. This encompasses a wide range of styles. The "street" in street art may mean anything from a literal street within inner-city neighborhoods, where early graffiti was born, to working openly in the public by pasting work on walls and surfaces in common view of the general populace. Other factors to consider in the difficult task of defining street art are intention and reception. Street art is not restricted to one class or race, but (at least in theory) is available to all.<sup>20</sup> The idea of a subversive, nomadic street artist still exists, but this identity is not mutually exclusive

---

<sup>19</sup> Graffiti artists since the 1970s, and 1980s, have painted on canvas for galleries, however, the nature of this work is inherently different than art on the streets, as it is devoid of the same context.

<sup>20</sup> Early graffiti was, however. And street art and graffiti continue to be limited in terms of gender.

in relation to also exhibiting in museums. In general, what distinguishes a street artist from just another contemporary artist who exhibits in various institutional spaces and who also creates public projects of various kinds is the street artist's continual dedication and connection to people and the streets. Access is a factor as well as a practicing street artists' images become familiar to audiences as they are part of their lived experience of a city. Therefore, there is a reciprocal relationship that occurs between a street artist and the street art audience in terms of access: the works themselves being accessible as well as the ability of the street artist to create meaningful work that accesses the public. Though, it is difficult to arrive at a hard and fast definition of street art. The term is more encompassing than graffiti and potentially overlaps with other art movements such as social practice. In fact, street art's increasing mainstream artworld acceptance owes something to the emergence of this genre of art. Like social practice and other socially geared art movements, there is a "complex interdependence of the aesthetic and the ethical" in the work.<sup>21</sup> Where the street artists in this dissertation depart from the social practice movement might be the general willingness to collaborate with each other, to share authorship, as well as an

---

<sup>21</sup> Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 102. For more on this movement see: Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, *Collectivism after Modernism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2007); Lucy R Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997); Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, Wash: Bay Press, 1995); Nina Felshin, *But Is It Art?: The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995); Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002); Claire Bishop, *Participation* (The MIT Press, 2006).

occasional rejection of the artworld in favor of an ongoing grassroots involvement with specific communities, and of course, their commitment to working on the streets. However, to draft a list of similarities and differences is ultimately futile as there are various points of crossover. My aim within this dissertation is not to define nor juxtapose one movement against other movements, but to instead shed light on three artists — JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos — who are working in particular ways dealing with social issues and who have an aesthetic commonality with regard to their work.

To reiterate, this dissertation examines three artists, JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos, who produce a specific type of street art. These artists share a commonality in their work which is that it is conversant in what I refer to as the ‘philanthropic turn’ or an interest in producing work that verges on activism. Each of these artists has a tripartite practice in which they maintain an illegal street practice, are gaining recognition in the artworld, and also have a socially-minded focus in their art regarding the betterment of humanity in some way. There are other street artists who have similar concerns, but JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos have worked together and share a similar ethos. They have also earned the widest recognition globally. While I acknowledge that the term ‘philanthropic’ has negative connotations regarding financial sponsorship by private entities, I have chosen the term ‘philanthropic’ to refer to these artists’ work in its original sense of the term as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary: “Love to mankind; practical benevolence towards men in general; the disposition or active effort to promote the happiness and well-being of one’s fellow

man.” While this term does not fit perfectly to describe these artists, I think that the reader will find that JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos adhere to these principles in their works and that these are themes that run through each of their practices.

There is an inherent intimacy in this type of ‘philanthropic’ work that is seemingly in opposition to the public realm of the street. The street is first of all public, which is antithetical to the intimate nature of forming empowering relationships that lead to the betterment of society; instead, the notion of the street has historically been associated with grittiness and crime. The street is the site of prostitution as depicted in artworks such as Edgar Degas’s *Women on a Cafe Terrace, Evening* (1877) and addiction as depicted in William Hogarth’s *Gin Lane* (1751). However, a dark side is also evident in the example of the privatization of urban space which has become the modus operandi of modern capitalist culture. Neoliberalism, globalization, and the privatization of public space are factors that JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos respond to in their work both directly and indirectly. Street art’s relationship to the street is unique in that the street is not only a backdrop for the “pieces,” but is actually a central part of the pieces themselves.<sup>22</sup> The setting of the street, unlike work produced in a studio and subsequently hung in a museum, features in the artwork: the site of creation is not only shown, but is part of the pieces themselves: the medium is the message and the message is the focus. The street is a place of transition; its occupants are often transient, so in some ways the idea of placing aesthetic objects on

---

<sup>22</sup> The term “pieces” is a street art and graffiti term that is short for “masterpiece.”

the street to be observed for a fixed amount of time on a street wall (though many street works are designed for quick absorption) until they themselves disintegrate, goes against the nature of the street. This example is yet another of many paradoxes intrinsic to the realm of street art. The projects on which I focus in this dissertation are site-specific and call for change versus serving solely decorative purposes or participating in an insular public dialogue exclusively with other street artists. Because of this, these projects are often the only ones of their kind in the places in which they are performed or installed. In other words, these artists are not simply pasting in places according to wider cultural and subcultural trends. Instead the placement of their work is governed by the type of message that the work expresses as well as the communities with which the artists work. This means that the question of gentrification occurring as a result of these artists works is often not a concern, as it has been with settings such as the Mission District in San Francisco or the Vila Madalena in São Paulo in which there is a critical mass of street art production in a singular space governed by popularity.

\*\*\*

The initial widespread proliferation of modern day street art in the United States can be attributed to two main sources: *Style Wars* and *Subway Art*. Perhaps the real origin for street art as the pervasive practice we know today can be pinpointed to the PBS airing of the documentary *Style Wars* in 1983.<sup>23</sup> This documentary exposed

---

<sup>23</sup> As an homage, there was a contemporary parody entitled *Style Wars: The Musical* in the exhibit *Art In the Streets* by Twist, Espo, and Reas.

the intricacies of New York graffiti style which went beyond simple tagging to complex wall “pieces”(short for masterpieces) and significantly, the crews<sup>24</sup> featured were not gang members, but simply young kids with something to say. *Style Wars* was significant for several reasons. This documentary introduced the viewing public to graffiti and made it an attainable endeavor for anyone with the financial means to buy paint.<sup>25</sup> Anyone could get their message out. *Style Wars* also dispelled certain stereotypes. As I will show in the formation of street art practices, *Style Wars* was seminal because it reached such a wide range of people and brought graffiti out from the ghettos and train yards into modern suburbia.<sup>26</sup> It demonstrated that graffiti is not restricted by race, as the main protagonists were Latino, African American, and

---

<sup>24</sup> The term “crews” refers to groups of graffiti artists who produced work as a team.

<sup>25</sup> Spray paint was invented by the owner of a paint store in northern Illinois, Ed Seymour, who invented it as an efficient way to demonstrate his aluminum coating for radiators. Therefore, it fairly inexpensive in the US, though in other places it was much more expensive. Hilary Greenbaum and Dana Rubinstein, “The Origin of Spray Paint,” *The New York Times Magazine* (November 12, 2011), [www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/magazine/who-made-spray-paint.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/magazine/who-made-spray-paint.html?_r=0) .; While it was cheaper in the U.S., Europeans developed best quality paint: “For [American] graffiti writers, the European paint was like trying a baseball bat after years spent swinging a broomstick.” Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon, 259.

<sup>26</sup> In the 2005 documentary *Piece by Piece*, Phresh, a writer from the BSK crew states “I watched it with my brother and my cousin, and I thought we were the only ones that [had] seen it . . . but as time goes on, I realize that I wasn’t the only one watching it that night. Vogue was watching it that night, Krash was watching it that night, Schmo was watching it that night.” *Piece by Piece*, directed by Nic Hill narrated by Senior One (2005; Underdog Productions), documentary.

white, including a red-headed, middle class male.<sup>27</sup> It gave a generation of youth a voice. Although the setting of this film was New York,<sup>28</sup> it was received by a global audience through their television sets and brought a new aesthetic to the world.

The second formative influence on street art practice is the “New Testament of Graffiti,”<sup>29</sup> a book of photographs of New York City subway graffiti entitled, *Subway Art*. It has been called “the most stolen book in 1984” and consists of photographs by Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, the first people to seriously document the graffiti phenomenon. Having a book with such a comprehensive collection of graffiti styles and elaborate compositions was invaluable as it served as a template for writers<sup>30</sup> to copy and could easily be purchased. It introduced New York Wild Style to the world<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> It was however, portrayed a less inclusive portrayal in terms of gender, as there were no female writers represented. The association of graffiti with race most likely derives from the prevalence of Cholo gang graffiti in Los Angeles and various other gangs in the Bronx and lower income neighborhoods in New York, which often housed African American and Latino communities.

<sup>28</sup> It was very specific to New York, as most of it concerned “getting up” (or painting in public) on subway trains. When graffiti moved to San Francisco, for example, it was translated to busses as there were no trains.

<sup>29</sup> Niko Koppel, “Showcase: ‘Subway Art,’” *NYTimes.com*, June 12, 2009, Lens: Photography, Video and Visual Journalism, [lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/12/showcase-5](http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/12/showcase-5).

<sup>30</sup> Graffiti artists are often referred to as “writers” because they often render their names or tags.

<sup>31</sup> Wild Style refers to a particular style of graffiti letters that developed in New York City that involves letter that are so complex (wildly stylized) that they are difficult to discern. The focus is on the ‘abstract’ design. Like gang writing, Wild Style is legible to those who are familiar with it.

and was the first of its kind. Both *Style Wars* and *Subway Art*, although they featured graffiti, have been very influential to street artists. *Subway Art* was especially influential in the 1990s when several artists were developing new styles that focused on letters, but also characters.

The street artist's perspective is not one of feeling burdened by tradition from a point of initial creation but from the perspective of a social movement having no art historical tradition, and is readily chastised within academic artistic communities, though this is changing. Unlike most contemporary art movements, street art is a derivative of graffiti: a movement more concerned with claiming territory than the creation of art *tout court*, thus most of its "writers" were not necessarily aware of the history of contemporary art. To begin with, we must immediately move beyond ideas of transgression in response to the space.<sup>32</sup> Instead, we find that street art, like all social art, transgresses the status quo as it reclaims the street as a democratic space. Street art's recent, gradual assimilation into mainstream artworld consciousness which has come by way of gallery representation and increasing numbers of museum shows,

---

<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, Hugo Martinez notes that graffiti gangs were initially formed by kids from the Bronx and Brooklyn who wanted to clean up certain crimes. This desire to do good in the public sphere resonates with the intention of many contemporary street artists. However, this crime-fighting movement was soon to be replaced by the territorial graffiti in the 1980s. Hugo Martinez and Peter Schjeldahl, *United Graffiti Artists 1975*. (New York: United Graffiti Writers Inc., 1975), n.p.



has not been without criticism.<sup>33</sup> Critiques pertaining to merit originate in a perception of lack: lack with regard to formal training and lack in knowledge of aesthetic theory and art history. In some cases, these critiques are accurate. However, as exposure to street art becomes more ubiquitous, contemporary street artists themselves are increasingly becoming well-versed in the history of art and traditional aesthetic values. Like conquests of history, these moral vandals have found that their various messages can still be heard and fought for by joining a community rather than blindly disregarding its history and traditions. Transgressive art on the streets has and will always exist. Whether or not the artworld considers street art relevant might fluctuate, especially as the practice is frequently operating from outside of art

---

<sup>33</sup> By street art, I mean the recent art that I am discussing in my dissertation, which had roots in the style of Haring and Basquiat, as well as from illustrative and Lowbrow styles as evidenced with the *Beautiful Losers* show in 2004. Graffiti, since its inception appeared in galleries located in soon to be gentrified neighborhoods in New York. The FUN Gallery, for example in the 1980s was known for its graffiti artists including Haring and Basquiat. Graffiti also made its popular media appearance in Blondie's "Rapture" video featuring Basquiat and on the television show *TV Party*, hosted by Glenn O'Brien in which Basquiat was also a regular. P.S. 1 hosted a *New York/New Wave* exhibition in 1988 which featured graffiti artists as well as artists who were not street artists. Despite this wide recognition in the 1980s, graffiti had been garnering a slow trickle of recognition since the 1950s and 1960s. Joan Rivers had a segment on season 1, episode 90 of *That Show* in 1968, entitled "Graffiti" (though it was mostly on bathroom graffiti and in the opening scene Rivers has trouble pronouncing the word and has to explain what it is to the audience). Graffiti artist Taki 183 was featured in the 1970s with an article in *The New York Times*: "Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals," *The New York Times*, Friday, July 21, 1971. In 1975, the UGA or United Graffiti Artists (a group formed to channel graffiti artists energies into pursuing art as a career) held an exhibition which featured graffiti on canvas and an exhibition catalogue which featured an essay by Peter Schjeldahl: Ibid. Despite these examples, it was not until the 1980s that graffiti significantly garnered the public's recognition as an (questionable) art form.

historical tradition and movements. The graffiti that was *en vogue* for galleries to exhibit in New York in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, is not valued in the same way, today.<sup>34</sup>

The center of the graffiti world in the 1970s and 1980s was New York City. Apart from gallery shows, the institutional emergence of this new genre took place in mid-February 1981, in the *New York/New Wave* exhibition at P.S.1 in Long Island City. This exhibition featured over one hundred artists and was curated by Diego Cortez. The exhibition received much criticism because it included established art historical figures such as Ray Johnson, Andy Warhol, and Lawrence Weiner alongside graffiti artists Dondi, Futura 2000, Fab 5 Freddy, Lady Pink, and Basquiat. Glenn O'Brien, an important figure in the New Wave movement and host of the television show *TV Party*, which regularly featured Fab 5 Freddy and Basquiat, reflected on the exhibition in an *Artforum* article in 2003. He ends his review by expressing nostalgia:

Alas, that was an age of showmanship and shamanship the likes of which seem most remote today. Not that there is no new wave of art ready to break- I sense its far-off presence, and we're praying for psychic surf daily-but that idea of art coalescing to reach the public without mediation seems so outside the realm of institutional practice it's practically dangerous. Nutty world, huh?<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> For example, Neck Face, a veteran graffiti artist was not well received by one reviewer: "some of the worst work, [was] a jejune installation of an urban alley, complete with a corny mannequin of a heroin addict, by California artist Neck Face." Christopher Knight, "MOCA's Art in the Streets Gets the Big Picture Wrong," *Los Angeles Times* (May 29, 2011), [articles.latimes.com/2011/may/29/entertainment/la-ca-knight-graffiti-notebook-20110529](http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/29/entertainment/la-ca-knight-graffiti-notebook-20110529).

<sup>35</sup> Glenn O'Brien, "New York/New Wave," *Artforum International* (February 2003),

In the 1990s, San Francisco became the hub of graffiti and street art. O'Brien wrote this reflective piece in 2003, a year before the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition opened in 2004, which featured many Mission School artists who like many of the *New York/New Wave* artists emerged from urban, American street culture, specifically the subcultures of skateboarding, graffiti, punk, and hip-hop. This show was important because it reintroduced street culture to the fine artworld and featured many artists who were answering O'Brien's lament as their work was geared to a larger public, through its illustrative qualities. The Mission School artists, named after the street and district in San Francisco, pioneered the new form. One of the most well known members of this school is Barry McGee. His unique style contains elements characteristic of the Mission — a focus on characters, a handmade quality, which borrows from lowbrow art, signage, and graffiti. This style represents a bridge between graffiti and contemporary street art, as it privileged image over text and was not concerned with marking territory as much as its impact on the surroundings. This is important because it departed from earlier graffiti which was not concerned with its impact or message reaching the public, as much as simple claiming of territory. This school is also significant because it was McGee who, in 1992, was responsible for introducing his particular style of street art by way of Os Gêmeos to São Paulo, Brazil.

By no means has this connection to a street-based lineage verified legitimacy within the “fine art” label. Auction houses and retail galleries struggle to group street artists. They search for and create myriad categories such as “street/urban artists” that

still distinguish street art pieces from other works of contemporary art. In one way this gesture isolates street art from a sense of time or even being. Removing the titular “contemporary art” only serves to disassociate street art from a given historical context. Placement of the artwork itself within the retail space commercially legitimizes street art as having monetary value — if not per se aesthetic value. Further labeling, then, exalts the stature of street art. And this is indeed logical. Street art becomes guilty of the crime of art by its association within the retail space with other art.<sup>36</sup>

Hugh Davies, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, which hosted *Viva la Revolución: Art in the Urban Landscape* in 2010, a show featuring the work of several street artists writes about how street artists are both within and outside of the artworld: “There’s an anarchic culture that doesn’t want to go through the chain of going to art school, [then getting into a] gallery and museum. It’s like, ‘I want to do it in my own way, I’m not in it for the market.’”<sup>37</sup> Scholar and graffiti critic Heather MacDonald misinterprets street art as purely reactive, explaining the street artist’s

---

<sup>36</sup> A topic that deserves further study beyond this dissertation is the central role that Deitch Projects Gallery played in the support of so many street artists. The irony of a controversial businessman and dealer such as Jeffrey Deitch, supporting so many artists who are critical of consumerism (he represented both Swoon and Os Gêmeos) and their simultaneous embrace of his support is a complex relationship that is indicative of yet another paradoxical element in the history of street art.

<sup>37</sup> Hugh Davies quoted in Andrew Blankstein, Richard Winton, and Andrew Ng. “Tagging outside an L.A. street art exhibit fuels debate,” *Los Angeles Times* (April 20, 2011) [articles.latimes.com/2011/apr/20/local/la-me-04-19-tagger-art-20110420/2](http://articles.latimes.com/2011/apr/20/local/la-me-04-19-tagger-art-20110420/2).

motives as trivial: "because big, bad corporations advertise, vandals have the right to deface other people's property."<sup>38</sup> The romanticizing and demonizing of transgression is understandable in a culture where the concept of enslavement to one's job and in which pressures of status and achievement have become so commonplace that they are hardly noticed. However, street artists are effected by these same pressures. Many street artists have families or partners and some pursue higher education.

While some street artists possess fine arts degrees, many do not, nor does the movement require such validation in the absence of lineage. How then can street art situate itself within a structure of art given the previously mentioned lack of contextualization that as art historians, especially in the West, we rely upon in order to make arguments, definitions, and even dissertations? Because each artists' practice is so varied — even beyond the typical site-specificity — we must acknowledge situation only comes from in-kind practices. By this I mean practices that reflect similar anthropological and sociological concerns as well as how the art and artist(s) are able to maintain fluidity as both social criticism and potential for retail exigency. To be sure, the unity of messaging is what will allow for us to place and contextualize the art both historically and aesthetically. I do not mean to suggest in my previous statement that monetary worth is the ultimate means of determining artistic merit; rather, it is one system that has become a cultural touchstone for such determinations, for better or worse, especially with regard to contemporary art. "Mainstream" itself

---

<sup>38</sup> Heather MacDonald, "Radical Graffiti Chic, *City Journal*, vol. 21, no. 2. (Spring 2011), [city-journal.org/mobile/story.php?s=7018#.UvGNH3ddWvk](http://city-journal.org/mobile/story.php?s=7018#.UvGNH3ddWvk).

remains an issue of contention for street artists.<sup>39</sup> As with any counter culture that begins to be absorbed into a dominant paradigm, in this case a capitalist museum culture, it is a likely criticism that street artists are judged as “sellouts” as soon as they start to gain wider recognition. Shepard Fairey sells merchandise as a way to support his practice; Banksy’s work sells for thousands at auction while the artist himself mocks the institutions of art. While some street artists are satisfied with the cultural gains that come with art stardom, many street artists use funds to support their art practice in lieu of seeking a larger brand and greater sales.

If an urban street can be said to be the site of greatest democratic voice, then the artist who manipulates the space keeps a constant vigil. Likewise, the street itself is a free and living place not bound by the tyranny of the white cube. Os Gêmeos describe that “the essence of graffiti is being free, changing the city’s routine, and having fun!”<sup>40</sup> By lending an aesthetic voice to the masses, street art can rise to the level of social movement. In one of the ironies of art, those who are being critiqued by and are the source for social protests are often the ones who are funding the commentary through the retail or gallery space. The division of wealth can be found between those who seek to purchase pre-approved taste and those who daily live and create on the street. A coldness and sterility comes from being on the wrong side of a social movement. However, as I say, through the desire to seem in touch and, indeed,

---

<sup>39</sup> Ironically, it is not the artists who take issue with the term so much as their fans.

<sup>40</sup> “Os Gêmeos: Ultimate Graffiti Artists.”

cosmopolitan, the wealthy purchaser is the cuckold in the love affair of street artist and the street.

In this project I do not seek to contextualize all of street art. Undoubtedly such an undertaking will be achieved one day, but for my purposes I simply seek to achieve as I stated earlier: contextualizing a brand of street art produced by three artists who possess similarities in practice.<sup>41</sup> To this end I will be examining works by JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos in order to better understand a particular kind of art practice whose primary medium is the street. The avant-garde, from its inception, as art historian Thomas Crow points out, “has defined its project by identifying with other marginal groups in urban society and the ways in which their contemporaries consumed and transformed the commercialized culture of the day.”<sup>42</sup> This is quite a different definition than the one first proposed by art critic, Clement Greenberg in his canonical 1939 essay *Avant-Garde and Kitch*, which positions the avant-garde artist as one wholly disconnected from consumer culture. Yet, despite variations, there is a common denominator in all definitions of the avant-garde: the aspiration to challenge the status quo. These artists are linked through efforts of critiquing globalization and calling into question the idea of purchased cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the work exposes

---

<sup>41</sup> There have been several successful attempts: Jeffrey Deitch, Roger Gastman, and Aaron Rose, *Art in the Streets* (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2011).; Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon, *The History of American Graffiti* (New York: Harper Design, 2011).; Patrick Nguyen and Stuart MacKenzie, *Beyond the Street: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Crow, “Preface,” in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), vii-viii.

the inauthentic nature of traditional values in terms of taste. We will find that through a practice of “selling out” the artists actually are afforded further opportunities to extend their critiques of inequalities that the artworld has been known to possess.

In preparation for writing this dissertation I conducted extensive fieldwork. The nature of this fieldwork extended far beyond formal interviews, and involved traveling to a variety of locations to study these three artists in the act of painting, and sometimes, participating in the act, myself thereby experiencing the actual process in addition to considering its theoretical repercussions. I have met each of the artists on whom I write, have ridden in the backs of vans, witnessed illegal and sanctioned acts, experienced the thrill of painting in a boom lift and climbing to the tops of buildings via scaffolding. Additionally, I have interviewed curators, gallery owners, filmmakers, photographers, festival organizers, and traveled around the world to view various works in situ, namely to Brazil, various countries in Europe, and the United States. When writing on an art form that is not historically researched in academic Art History departments, fieldwork is essential in the absence of scholarly texts, and I am privileged to write from a uniquely informed position.

To date, the literature on the topic of street art as an art practice is restricted mostly to exhibition catalogues as well as popular magazines. Street art has been the topic of several dissertations in fields such as anthropology, sociology, and urban studies which investigate street art from a variety of viewpoints such as its political efficacy or use, its relationship to crime, and its presence as an indicator of spatial



practices. In Art History, however, it remains a relatively untouched subject.

Therefore, this project attempts to address this gap by engaging in an in-depth study of three artists whose practice deserves much consideration as it is a particularly unique form of practice, especially within the context of art addressing globalization, urban culture and public space.

\*\*\*

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapters Two, Three, and Four each focus on a different artist that works in the philanthropic turn or with a socially-minded street art practice: JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos, and specific pieces from their oeuvre that exemplify this type of art. Each artists' work addresses both a local and a global population. Questions of collaboration, the effectiveness of their messages, the effect of media, cosmopolitanism, exploitation, and globalization are among some of the central themes I have explored.

Chapter Two, "JR: Ubiquitous Anonymity," examines JR's work in relationship with global communities with whom JR's work interacts through a sense of participation, agency, and the circulation of his images. Specifically, I look at his *Women Are Heroes*, *Wrinkles of the City*, and *Inside Out Project*. In this chapter, JR's practice of mobilizing others to participate in his work is analyzed in the context of exploitation and consciousness-raising, in the context of his work's reception amongst participants and his practice more generally.

Chapter Three, entitled “Swoon and Collaborative Evolution,” examines Swoon and her particular brand of collaboration. The works discussed in this chapter, the *Swimming Cities* Projects, *Encampment Ersilia*, and The Konbit Shelter Project employ collaboration within the works’ production as well as after, which involves an element of surrender that potentially changes the work altogether in Swoon’s creation of an in-between space. Swoon utilizes a non-hierarchical method of making, though she is usually credited as the author of these projects as they were born from her original ideas. Both literature and art historical practice influence Swoon’s work and the construction of ‘spatial stories’ which includes descriptive writing, the act of participation, as well as objects and two-dimensional designs, all of which imbue her work with a magical escapist quality.<sup>43</sup>

Os Gêmeos’s illegal street work, publicly endorsed street work, and gallery work is the focus of Chapter Four, “Os Gêmeos and the Cosmopolitan Imaginary.” This chapter looks at common themes and that emerge throughout Os Gêmeos’s practice regardless of site. Producing work in São Paulo, a city with its own history of illegal graffiti specific to the region (pixação) adds an interesting dynamic to the site-specificity of their work. São Paulo’s relationship to street art is becoming increasingly complex, as Teresa Caldeira demonstrates when she points out that “even under democratic rule, the police in Brazil frequently act outside the boundaries of the law,

---

<sup>43</sup> I borrowed the phrase “spatial stories” from Christopher Tilley who was influenced by Michel de Certeau, who has influenced Swoon. Paul Majkut, “Media,” *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, edited by Hans Rainer Sepp, Lester Embree (Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2010), 202.

abusing, torturing, and executing suspects, and the justice system is considered ineffective by the population.”<sup>44</sup> Their practice raises important questions as to the effectiveness of art in producing social change, especially if it is supported by the government.

The notion of public space is changing. Neoliberalism, globalization, the privatization of public space, and the division of rich and poor are factors that these artists react against and address. Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos each strive for a directness in their art in the hopes of making a positive difference in people’s lives. This dissertation examines whether or not these artists can effect real change through their art.

---

<sup>44</sup> Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3.

## CHAPTER TWO: JR and Ubiquitous Anonymity

*I would like to bring art to improbable places, create projects so huge with the community that they are forced to ask themselves questions.*

- JR, *Beaux Arts Magazine*<sup>45</sup>

*I am not trying to change the world, but you know, when I see a smile up there in the favelas, or down there in Cambodia, in a way I feel like I achieved my goal.*

- JR, *Stencil Revolution*<sup>46</sup>

Black and white faces peer out from colorful landscapes and demand attention [Figure 1.1]. Our eyes uncomfortably situate upon these unyielding gazes. By some tacit agreement, viewership upon these faces demands tribute. These eyes and faces hint at something both within the subject and also the surfaces they are pasted on. Perhaps one can decipher a message about culture, urban life, and the lives of the people who everyday wear and possess these faces, yet this message is intentionally ambiguous – begging further investigation. Not only are these faces anonymous, but so is the reason for their placement, as well as the artist who pasted them here: JR. JR adheres to the import of his own, personal anonymity with regards to his art. However, this anonymity functions more as a persona. JR’s so-called anonymity is very different than Banksy’s. Banksy is a street artist who remains anonymous in the sense that he is not publicly known (even in disguise) and as a result, there is an enormous mystique surrounding the details of his identity, to the extent that his very existence is

---

<sup>45</sup> Fabrice Bousteau, “JR à Paris: Les Yeux Braqués Sur Le Monde,” *Beaux Arts Magazine*, Issue 304 (October, 2009), 120.

<sup>46</sup> “JR Street Artist Biography,” *Stencil Revolution*, accessed July 3, 2013, [www.stencilrevolution.com/profiles/jr](http://www.stencilrevolution.com/profiles/jr).



Figure 1.1 JR, *Women Are Heroes* (installation in Morro da Providencia in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), 2008, jr.net

sometimes questioned. JR, on the other hand, is forced to be visible, as he works with people, unlike Banksy who inserts art readymade into the public sphere. The viewer may wonder if the identity politics present in JR's images are not merely reflections and shades of the artist himself: presented here in some unseen and unknowable teleology. In point of fact, these visual disjunctions in stark juxtaposition to the landscape are actually photographic portraits printed large-scale on paper. JR literally deploys prints of others' portraits in the service of a professed message; whether this message is shared and felt by those represented, or a surreptitious one by JR is often

ambiguous.<sup>47</sup> JR rightly expects we viewers will connect with these faces and that they will project a narrative on us as we, likewise, project upon them fears, doubts, concerns and, indeed, lives. As W. J. T. Mitchell writes, “The life of an image is not a private or individual matter. It is a social life [...] When we talk about images as pseudo-life-forms parasitical on human hosts, we are not merely portraying them as parasites on individual human beings. They form a social collective that has a parallel existence to the social life of their human hosts.”<sup>48</sup> It would appear that at best, JR seeks to aestheticize commonality as a starting point for us to dwell upon and learn about specificities of culture and struggle, and at worst he is looking for some mocking jay to echo back a hollow message of artistic vanity.

This chapter considers JR’s work stylistically, art historically, and explores its impact on the various communities in which he works as well as on a larger art audience. I will consider the parameters within which JR works, as well as issues raised by his political and ethical stance as an artist as suggested through his work.

---

<sup>47</sup> At this point, it is important to note that JR was not responsive to my attempts at contact to discuss his work for this dissertation (though, I had assisted him and met him previously). I was able to get a mutual friend to ask if he would be willing to speak with me, however the conditions under which this meeting was to potentially occur were not financially viable for me. He would not agree to meet me for certain, but stipulated that I could fly to New York and call him at night and only then would he let me know if he would meet with me the following day. As I could not afford to buy a plane ticket and pay for a hotel on such short notice, and potentially not meet with JR, this meeting did not occur and JR’s team has been unresponsive to my emails.

<sup>48</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 93.

More specifically, this chapter looks at JR's self-identification and relationship to outsider activism, his use of portraiture to connect with a global audience, and JR's ambiguous stance regarding his perception of hegemonic institutions including corporations, academia, NGOs, and what I refer to as the Hollywood machine. In order to examine these issues in relation to JR's work, I have chosen three projects produced in the period of 2010-2015: *Women Are Heroes*, *Wrinkles of the City*, and the *Inside Out Project*.

\*\*\*

JR was born on February 22, 1983 outside of Paris, France and currently produces work out of studios in Paris and New York City. His mother is of Tunisian decent and his father is Eastern-European. JR elects to use his initials instead of his full name because he believes that the disclosure of his full name would compromise his work and result in some form of discrimination. What specifically that might be is unclear; however, this prejudice could potentially affect JR in terms of his being held accountable for past vandalism (people could report him), or perhaps (as JR has indicated) this revelation could shift the focus from the persons featured in his projects to JR as an artist instead. Or perhaps there would be no prejudice at all, and this proclamation simply stems from a desire to maintain a separate identity in his private life. When corresponding with JR's assistant at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (MCASD) regarding the fact checking of JR's biographical information for inclusion in the catalogue for the exhibition *Viva la Revolución: A Dialogue with the*

*Urban Landscape*, which featured his *Women Are Heroes* project, it was made clear to me that revealing information concerning JR's identity would result in consequences.<sup>49</sup>

The desire to conceal his identity is likely a vestigial attempt at obscurity and self-preservation from his early days as a graffiti artist, when JR used the portentous name FACE 3, a name he invented to refer to an imaginary third side of a record, as he was an avid DJ.<sup>50</sup> JR began doing graffiti when he was fourteen. By eighteen, he had gained local recognition not for his graffiti tags, but for wheatpasting photographs printed on A4-sized paper. JR's choice of subject matter was at once a coy mirror and his first mask: the pieces documented other graffiti artists in action. He describes his beginnings, thusly:

I was doing graffiti when I was 14, 15, and I found this really cheap camera in the subway, and I documented writers in the street, our life, going on the rooftops or tunnels, with that cheap camera. I used film because I knew that in my high school I could use the lab. Then the cheapest way to do it was to develop the negative and then make a small print and then photocopy it—literally Xerox it. And that would make a really cheap print, but it worked for me. I've always been used

---

<sup>49</sup> “Dear Lara, JR STAYS ANONYMOUS, PLEASE DON'T MENTION NEVER [sic] HIS NAME AND FORNAME IN ANY PUBLIC DOCUMENTS !!!! THIS SHOULD STAY [sic] ONLY FOR ADMINISTRATIV [sic] INFOS [sic] LIKE PLANE TICKETS OR SOMETHING ELSE... IF EVER THE NAME THAT IS COMPLITELY [sic] CONFIDENTIAL IS BEEN [sic] REVEALED IT COULD CREAT [sic] A PREJUDICE. OUR LAWYER IS IN CC: AS IT'S A HIGHER MATTER FOR US. You don't NEED TO mention even where JR is living or when he is born. 27 years old is enough. Thank you very much for your attention. Cheers, Emile.” Emile Abinal, e-mail message to author, June 14, 2010. for the exhibition *Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape*. Emile is JR's assistant.

<sup>50</sup> Raffi Khatchadourian, “Onward and Upwards with the Arts: In the Picture: An artist's Global Experiment to Help People be Seen,” *The New Yorker*. November 28, 2011 edition, 56-63.



to that quality. It was never something precious to me; it was something that I could paste right away.<sup>51</sup>

JR then outlined these Xeroxed, wheatpasted photographs in spray paint, creating frames which would remain long after the printed photos disintegrated. He labeled them “Expo2Rue” (a play on “street gallery”).<sup>52</sup> Even now, a tension can be seen between his desire to remain anonymous while he, ironically, exposes others [Figure 1.2]. This shift in his work from spray painting tags to wheatpasting photographs marked a turning point in JR’s work as the focus within his images was now solely placed on others. His identifying tag, now nothing but a vague remnant. Initially, this was a way for JR to document the importance of his peers by temporarily memorializing them in public spaces. JR was not primarily concerned as to how they would be received nor the impact that these images would have on those who viewed them.

When he joined the collective Kourtrajmé in 2002, JR would discover “the power of paper and glue.”<sup>53</sup> Kourtrajmé (slang for “*court métrage*” or “short film”) was formed in 1994 by high school students Kim Chaperon and Romain Gavras, who came from artistic backgrounds and were particularly interested in filmmaking.

---

<sup>51</sup> “Photo Booth: In the Studio with JR,” *Artsy Blog*, April 30, 2013, [www.artsy.net/article/inthestudiojr-photo-booth#!](http://www.artsy.net/article/inthestudiojr-photo-booth#!).

<sup>52</sup> Khatchadourian, “Onward and Upwards with the Arts: In the Picture.” It was also at this stage in JR’s development as an artist at which he referred to himself as a “photographeur,” a play on photography and graffiti. Moreover, JR’s purpose in titling the piece was to make sure they were not mistaken for advertisements.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 1.2 JR, Expo2Rue, taken May 21, 2006 by cex02,  
<http://arturbain.blogg.org.expo-2-rue-jr-a115878686>

Eventually Kourtrajmé evolved into a larger group with interests that included graffiti, hip-hop, and photography. JR became friends with the actor Vincent Cassel, the star of the film *La Haine*, a film which Kourtrajmé venerated. It was Cassel who bought JR his first high-end camera. Also at this time, JR was introduced to Les Bosquets, one of the poorest housing projects in the working-class suburbs (or *banlieues*) outside of Paris by another member of Kourtrajmé and denizen: Ladj Ly. Residents in Les Bosquets would often ask JR to take their pictures. JR experimented with his craft and made their portraits billboard size. Ly had been photographing police brutality in Les Bouquets and one day JR took a photograph of Ly holding his camera as if it were a semi-automatic weapon, while boys posed playfully in the background [Figure 1.3]. JR and Ly then composed an exhibition on the streets of the *banlieue* in 2004 and included this photograph of Ly. This provocative image aroused suspicion from the



Figure 1.3 JR, 28 Millimètres, *Portrait of a Generation* - Ladj Ly, Les Bosquets, Montfermeil, 2004, <http://www.jr-art.net/projects/portrait-of-a-generation>

police who subsequently interrogated Ly. However, because JR only wrote his initials on the image, he was protected through anonymity.

In 2005 riots broke out for three weeks across Paris and neighboring cities. The riots originated as a result of a reported break-in at a construction site in Clichy-sous-Bois, an isolated Paris *banlieue* which is known for its immigrant population. When police arrived on the scene, they were noticed by ten youths who were in the midst of a soccer game, who subsequently fled the scene. Zyed Benna (17), Bouna Traore (15), and Muttin Altun (17), were three of the young “suspects” who fled.<sup>54</sup> They attempted to hide in a transformer at an electrical substation, which resulted in the electrocution of Benna and Traore, and the injuring of Altun, which caused a blackout across the

<sup>54</sup> David Rieff, “Battle Over the Banlieues,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/15/magazine/15elections.t.html?pagewanted=all>.

city. The death of the two boys became a symbol of police brutality as well as other issues stemming from inequality, such as racial prejudice and underemployment.<sup>55</sup> During the riots, JR returned to take photographic portraits of the rioters in the *banlieues* Clichy-sous-Bois and Montfermeil who acted out caricatures of their portrayal in the media by making angry and grotesque faces before the camera. The close-up composition of the photographs of these “violent” youths, revealed a non-threatening, human dimension of these “thugs,” not to mention a comfortable relationship to the photographer (JR). Unexpectedly, these photographs, which JR hung in central Paris, could be seen in the background of the media coverage in that area. As a result of this exposure, JR’s photographs gained positive attention from the mayor of the Fourth Arrondissement, Dominique Bertinotti, and Francois Hebel, the head of the photography festival les Recontres d’Arles.<sup>56</sup> JR describes his concept:

When the riots happened, suddenly all the French media were about what was happening in the suburbs [...] And I didn’t find the image of the people I knew – I would only see kids with hoods around their faces. They’re not angels, for sure, but this was creating a cliché. I told them, ‘From Paris, I can tell you, you all look like you’re going to invade!’ I wanted to play with that image, so I asked them to play their own caricature.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Crampton, “Behind the Furor, the Last Moments of Two Youths, *The New York Times*, November 7, 2005, [www.nytimes.com/2005/11/07/world/europe/behind-the-furor-the-last-moments-of-two-youths.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/07/world/europe/behind-the-furor-the-last-moments-of-two-youths.html?_r=0).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Alastair Sooke, “JR: Artist with the city as his canvas” *The Guardian*, February 28, 2011, [www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8351889/JR-Artist-with-the-city-as-his-canvas.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8351889/JR-Artist-with-the-city-as-his-canvas.html).

This project became known as *Portraits of a Generation*.<sup>58</sup> From this point on, JR's aesthetic in major projects would focus on portraits in this large-scale, black-and-white style and would be grounded by his personal experiences and relationships with people experiencing hardship.

The desire to share or yield the spotlight, in addition to the practicality of keeping his given name a secret, is another reason why JR insists on hiding behind his initials. However, unlike many graffiti artists who continue to hide their identity for fear of the legal repercussions of their work, JR who has gained a certain amount of artworld recognition along with the protection that accompanies such recognition, maintains an insistence on his pseudo-anonymity (which ironically draws attention to him in a century in which investigating private lives via social media has become commonplace). Instead of a masked graffiti superhero struggling to “get up”<sup>59</sup> in the night, JR wears his mask in broad daylight. In addition to using a moniker (his initials), he is never seen without his uniform of a fedora and sunglasses. JR has created for himself a distinct performative brand aside from his actual identity, which is good for the promotion of his art.

Despite exhibiting in museums and galleries — evidence of acceptance into the mainstream artworld — JR insists on maintaining his disguise which has now become

---

<sup>58</sup> *Portrait of a Generation* is part of JR's *28 Millimètres* series which includes the *Women Are Heroes* project and *Face 2 Face*. *28 Millimètres* refers to the camera lens that JR used.

<sup>59</sup> To “get up” refers to the act of putting work up in the street.

his brand, even though this crossing over into the mainstream artworld of museums would indicate JR is in fact no longer an anonymous street artist. He was awarded the TED Prize of one hundred thousand dollars in 2011, which exponentially increased his recognition on the public stage.<sup>60</sup> As a result, he has been embraced by an increasing number of mainstream art institutions and celebrated by various publicity outlets.<sup>61</sup> Interviews with JR have been published online and sometimes in print, he maintains a website, and shows up easily in internet searches, which was rare only a few years ago. In fact, he utilizes his website as a tool from which to spread awareness of his projects, which are somewhat dependent on visibility for optimal impact. “JR” has become JR.

## **THE QUESTION OF EXPLOITATION**

JR’s self-portrait is a typical example of his signature stylistic technique that he employs in the projects discussed in this chapter: a black-and-white photographic portrait, printed large-scale, in which the subject confronts the camera head-on.

Although his actual signature is never visible, the background often contains a pattern

---

<sup>60</sup> From the website: “The TED Prize is awarded to an individual with a creative, bold vision to spark global change. By leveraging the TED community’s resources and investing \$1 million into a powerful idea, each year the TED Prize supports one wish to inspire the world.” “TED Prize,” *TED*, accessed May 10, 2015, [www.ted.com/participate/ted-prize](http://www.ted.com/participate/ted-prize). ;The award was increased to one million dollars in 2013.

<sup>61</sup> In 2011 alone, JR was featured in group exhibitions at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, the MASP in Brazil, and The Pompidou among others. He has also had several solo exhibitions.

of dots or a specific patina altogether functioning much like a graffiti tag would in establishing his visual brand. These singular portraits represent individual members of a group and sometimes entire communities, and are placed throughout various landscapes. They are usually arranged together in configurations determined by the landscapes, themselves. However, effectually, JR is associated not only with a certain visual aesthetic, but with a certain morality. This morality is alluded to through his featuring of others' struggles in his work and the utilization of his platform as an artist to communicate with disenfranchised communities. As a result, this *potentially* introduces the plights of others to a wider, global public.<sup>62</sup> JR's empathic persona is central to the sincerity or effectiveness of his work. The people featured in his photographs are speaking to their own unique personal causes, but also act as advertising for JR, as it is ultimately their faces pasted in landscapes which signify his work.<sup>63</sup> This necessarily presents the issue of whether or not participants are exploited to further JR's artistic career. To an extent, JR's fame and recognition hinge on the portraits of various populations, as his work mainly consists of photographs of living people. The question of exploitation of participants, if it exists in this work (and I am not wholly convinced that it does), emerges as a result of the nature of JR's working

---

<sup>62</sup> Albeit, this is controlled by the artist who ensures that his projects are disseminated through outlets which he himself vets, such as his website, publications, and through select exhibitions and media coverage.

<sup>63</sup> Shepard Fairey is also known for grassroots advertising. He became famous around the world as a result of fans putting up his obey stickers which he sent them in the mail.

with populations from different socio-economic backgrounds whether or not it is JR's intention. The participants relate their stories knowingly to JR and he features their voices in his publications. Their images and testimonies are presented as unencumbered or reframed through the narrative lens of the artist. The benefits for JR in creating these projects is quite clear: they have contributed to his recognition as an artist, have resulted in his being awarded the TED Prize, and have given him access to Hollywood's elite. However, the benefits to the participants in JR's *Women Are Heroes* and *Wrinkles of the City* projects especially, are not as evident as they are largely restricted to JR's own recounting of them.

The majority of the interviews with the artist about his projects concentrate on the fact that he is working with people who have undergone hardship and that he hopes his work will be a vehicle for change, even if his images will not directly cause change in themselves. He explains: "the fact that art cannot change things makes it a neutral place for exchanges and discussions, and then enables it to change the world."<sup>64</sup> Global salvation is a frequently stated objective of JR's, though as far as objective solutions beyond inserting visual disjunctions which attract attention from various publics, he does not offer practical solutions. For example, on his *Women Are Heroes* project, the project which is the most indicative of JR's work that verges on exploitation, he states that "*Women Are Heroes* was created to pay tribute to those who play an essential role in society, but who are the primary victims of war, crime, rape or

---

<sup>64</sup> Khatchadourian.



political and religious fanaticism.”<sup>65</sup> It would appear that JR views himself as giving these women a voice on a public stage; a chance to get outside their villages, metaphorically, if not physically. One of the women featured in his *Women Are Heroes* project states in a video from the Rio iteration: “I only give this interview, as you would take it far from here, otherwise I wouldn’t because I’m scared.”<sup>66</sup> It would seem as if JR’s work serves not much more than a momentary cathartic function. Except for buying a building and designating it as a community center in Rio (called The Yellow House), there are few examples of JR’s projects making physically represented, lasting changes in these regions. Only with the *Inside Out Project* do participants actually get almost full control in that for this project, he provides free posters to paste up for anyone who desires to use them in order to speak out for or against causes of their choosing. In this instance, JR acts as a conduit for people to speak out. But many questions remain: What happens after this? Should more be expected of an artist who is well-intentioned and who works on the ground to create what he and the participants view as positive projects? What does it mean to “pay tribute” to women who suffered abuse in a favela in Rio? Is it possible for JR’s empathy and good intentions to override his now obvious position of privilege compared to that of the communities with which he works?

---

<sup>65</sup> JR, “Women Are Heroes On A Container Ship, In Le Havre,” *jr-art*, accessed April 1, 2015, [www.jr-art.net/news/women-are-heroes-on-a-container-ship-in-le-havre](http://www.jr-art.net/news/women-are-heroes-on-a-container-ship-in-le-havre).

<sup>66</sup> JR and Emile Abinal, *Women Are Heroes*.

## DELEGATION & PRIVILEGE

At this juncture, it is necessary to explore the relationship of exploitation in terms of the concept of delegation or, in other words to consider the underlying relationship of power through representation: is JR representing the people or are the people representing JR? What makes JR a fitting ambassador for the global poor? While JR has stated publicly that he hopes that his projects will enrich the lives of participants, he simultaneously places himself at the top of an unavoidable aesthetic hierarchy. He controls and manipulates what is seen and known. These tensions between knowing and unknowable — such as is present in the eyes described above — are central to the understanding of JR’s work.

I will begin to address this question by the examination of other artists who have been accused of exploitative practices. Santiago Sierra, is one such artist who is known for his work that intentionally exposes exploitation on the part of the privileged art audience by openly confronting them with it. Sierra hires performers onto whom he inflicts commensurate unseen punishments, such as inflicting pain on populations like undocumented workers as a sort of artistic dare, thereby effectively exploiting them further. He acts as a “moral trickster” in order to expose the hypocrisy of consumers who turn a blind eye to the source of the commodities that give them comfort and define their existence.<sup>67</sup> For example, in his video piece *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People* (2000), Sierra explains that:

---

<sup>67</sup> The phrase “moral trickster” is Jennifer Doyle’s; Jennifer Doyle, “Santiago Sierra,” *Frieze*, Issue 113, March 2008.

Four prostitutes [sic] addicted to heroin were hired for the price of a shot of heroin to give their consent to be tattooed. Normally they charge 2,000 or 3,000 pesetas, between 15 and 17 dollars, for fellatio, while the price of a shot of heroin is around 12,000 pesetas, about 67 dollars.<sup>68</sup>

Sierra's form of exploitation is overt and meant to incite discomfort in the viewers, as they realize they are complicit in supporting a form of bio-political global capitalism that enslaves, and would result in human beings being reduced to such desperate and degrading acts of spectacle. The main difference between Sierra and JR is that Sierra is aware of the controversially provocative nature of his work. Additionally, unlike JR, he is aware that it is nearly impossible to remain pure as the orchestrator of projects which feature less-fortunate participants as an aesthetic end product in his art. On the possibility of maintaining artistic purity while participating in the artworld, Sierra notes that: "In the art world you always work for the powers that be: banks, governments and so on. Who else can pay for an exposition in a museum? You have to be conscious that we all work for a machine."<sup>69</sup> JR's attempt to avoid certain institutions, while aligning with others, might be consistent with his personal beliefs on a case by case basis, but does not make for a consistent and easily legible or even logical stance overall.

---

<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth Manchester, "Santiago Sierra 160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People El Gallo Arte Contemporáneo. Salamanca, Spain. December 2000," Tate.org.uk, [www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sierra-160-cm-line-tattooed-on-4-people-el-gallo-arte-contemporaneo-salamanca-spain-t11852](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sierra-160-cm-line-tattooed-on-4-people-el-gallo-arte-contemporaneo-salamanca-spain-t11852).

<sup>69</sup> Teresa Margolles, "Santiago Sierra," *Bomb Magazine*, 86 (Winter 2004), [bombmagazine.org/article/2606/santiago-sierra](http://bombmagazine.org/article/2606/santiago-sierra).

Another example of exploitation in art on the other end of the spectrum from Sierra is Andy Warhol, whose exploitative power can be witnessed directly in films such as *Poor Little Rich Girl*. This is one of Warhol's underground films from the Factory, which features the troubled young beauty Edie Sedgwick who is intoxicated whilst going about different tasks as the viewer voyeuristically looks on. Factory member John Giorno corroborates this exploitative aspect of Warhol:

Andy exploited us and we exploited him. It always works both ways. We exploited Andy to become famous, which seemed the only real proof of being loved, but it was the 1960s and we were young and we didn't realize the other real proof was money. Andy understood both.<sup>70</sup>

In each of the cases above, the participant is complicit in and is made aware of the result of their participation. Sierra's participants know they will be tattooed. Andy Warhol's actors knew they would be filmed for the sake of art. Similarly, JR's participants are made aware of the result of their participation in his projects. In most cases JR asks what they desire as a result of their participation in his projects after he has formed relationships with them and subsequently attempts to address these needs in his work. For example, for his *Women Are Heroes* project, JR explains with regard to the iteration in the Morro da Providência favela in Rio de Janeiro:

That favela is in the center of town, but when you look at a map it is like it is not there . . . So the people were saying, 'Hey, we are there, we are right there in front of you, and you pretend that we don't exist.' It was like, 'O.K., my house is kind of fucked up. It's not the best one, but we are not missing food. We are missing dignity, existence—people

---

<sup>70</sup> "John Giorno," *Warhol Stars*, accessed April 20, 2014, [www.warholstars.org/warhol/warhol1/warhol1b/johngiorno.html](http://www.warholstars.org/warhol/warhol1/warhol1b/johngiorno.html).

think that we are living like animals, and that's what we want to change.'

JR's images of the inhabitants in Rio are moving, intimate, portrayals of this population in a manner that is different from the way they are portrayed by many non-profit organizations who use images in the service of specific objectives determined by the organization. JR's compositions cause viewers look at these images as portraits first rather than as visual aids used to solicit help or monetary aid, as an NGO or non-profit organization typically does. For example, Catalytic Communities is a non-profit organization that works in Morro da Providência. It employs images of smiling children in its advertising campaigns, which are most often accompanied by text asking for aid or describing the need for aid. These images are meant to be functional and are significantly different than JR's striking, large-scale outdoor compositions. Viewers have been inundated with NGO imagery almost to the point of its being part of the social consciousness. JR's images are unique and impressive: JR's work is art. Indeed, it is possible that participants in JR's projects are expecting to achieve fame or recognition as a result of their involvement with JR's projects (which according to Factory member John Giorno is a form of exploitation). It is also possible that they hope that JR might somehow directly create solutions to their various problems, though this is unlikely. However, if this is the case, because most of the documentation of JR's work is presented from his perspective, and because it is often difficult to locate participants in his projects, this is hard to know for certain. What is certain is that JR appears to be addressing the participants' need for self-representation (the

desire to be heard), even if it does not address the deeper question of *why* they seek to self-represent.

What separates JR from the examples of Warhol and Sierra is that with each project of his discussed in this chapter, he expresses his intention to help those with whom he works by temporarily commemorating them within their own communities by pasting their portraits in the public sphere. His personal identity is masked in the service of this intent; in the landscape, those not familiar with JR's work, simply see a striking assemblage of these faces pasted in an outdoor setting, unlike Sierra or Warhol whose identities are made known through their identification primarily within institutions. Perhaps exploitation on some level is unavoidable. JR intends to democratize the relationship between the artist and participants using a medium (photography) that has a historically democratic reputation for its ease of use and its ubiquity. However, if art has a chance to effect change from within cultures outside of the artworld, the language of the street, which incites public dialogue from its inception, is potentially even more democratic. Despite his mainstreaming, working on the street remains a key element of JR's work.

The attention that working in the public garners is directly related to the graffiti and street artists' reputation for being secretive (though the latter might not deserve this reputation) in order to protect their identity so that they are not persecuted for painting without permission. However, since the 1970s and 1980s, artists have had to come to terms with increasing openness and lack of privacy as a result of the growth

and development of technology and the internet in particular. The scope of publicness and the possibility of exposure has expanded. Yet, this virtual presence has had the unfortunate side-effect of reducing the actual presence and physical encounter of works in situ. The street artist's identity is often abstracted and reduced to an image, or what is represented online versus their recognition as a result of repeated experiential encounters with the work on the street. While it is and will always be important to see street works in situ, JR has accounted for the shift to the virtual world by designing his projects to also be viewed virtually through his website. This has an interactive component, which enables one to search for and view projects in hundreds of places around the world, which one otherwise might not have access to and as a result, provides an unprecedented educational opportunity.

Working in a digital age enables a potentially global audience to connect with JR's work away from the streets, yet it has also created its own form of alienation in reducing the necessity of experiencing images on the street or "on the ground" which holds the potential for a more poignant, contextual experience. This absence of engagement with the work in situ creates a disconnect from the contextual experience of the work and in JR's case, from the people who are represented. However, because some of the participants in his *Inside Out Project* have released email addresses on his website, at least in this instance, interested viewers can potentially interact with actual people in a manner even more intimate than encountering work on the streets. And it is substantially easier to access and view more works from a website than it would be to

explore various cities in search of them. Participants also have more agency and are able to speak to their images, which would typically not be the case if encountering their images on the street. To an extent, participants can control the level of engagement with them as people beyond JR's projects which feature them. However, in cases such as *Women Are Heroes* and *Wrinkles of the City*, the question of exploitation is not as clear, as each project is represented solely through JR's documentation of them. Because of this, there is a potentially exploitative aspect inherent in JR's work. He makes these people visible without guaranteed compensation and the benefits to his career and recognition as an artist are more apparent than the benefits for the participants. However, each participant featured in his pieces is aware of their representation. Yet, there is something unsettling about viewing images of people who are not present to represent themselves outside of JR's representation of them, though this is a common occurrence in the history of art.

The act of speaking on behalf of others under the conceptual auspices of art, potentially absolves one of questions regarding exploitation. However, JR's work is meant to be direct rather than conceptual, and so the question of exploitation is worth exploring in terms of JR's ethical or moral responsibility as a sort of cultural ambassador for his participants. The concept of delegation as it is expounded upon by Pierre Bourdieu in "Delegation and Political Fetishism," is particularly relevant to a discussion in which an artist in any manner "speaks out" for another person or group of persons, as is the case with JR. In fact, Swoon and Os Gêmeos also serve as cultural



delegates for the various populations that they speak to, work with, or refer to in their work as their work is exposed to an audience outside of these populations.

Traditionally, to be a delegate is to be elected to speak on behalf of others, and it is through this appointment that the power of this voice comes to supersede or stand in place of the voice of the group. This is less controversial in political settings in which a delegate is elected, but becomes suspect in instances in which the delegate has a grossly disproportionate amount of power and authority or in instances in which “people are dispossessed, above all culturally” and the delegate is from a different, more privileged background than those whom he or she represents.<sup>71</sup> It is important to note, that JR was not appointed to speak on behalf of or advocate for these publics, but that he inserted himself into various populations with the intention of “helping” in some way. Because he creates art, a product which represents these people to a wider art audience, he is by default, a self-elected delegate.

Bourdieu calls this instance in which the spokesperson essentially makes the group for which he speaks, the “oracle-effect.”<sup>72</sup> When a politician speaks on behalf of “the people” he invokes the oracle-effect, for example. Ideally, it is a sort of endorsed ventriloquism, as it is the public which makes the delegate speak. However, inherent in this act of speaking on behalf of others, an inescapable deciphering and translation must occur, which has the potential to enact symbolic harm on the individuals

---

<sup>71</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Kathe Robinson, “Delegation and Political Fetishism,” *Thesis Eleven* (February 1985 10-11), 59.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

represented. JR attempts to avoid or lessen the oracle-effect by staying out of completely, or making minor appearances in his films which document his projects, for example, or by recording firsthand testimonies of participants which are related in his books. While JR means to let participants speak for themselves, however, he ultimately represents them - they do not exist (to JR's audience) without him.

In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag discusses the role of photographs of victims of war. She notes how these photographs “are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus. Invoking this hypothetical shared experience (‘we are seeing with you the same dead bodies, the same ruined houses’).”<sup>73</sup> She then poses the question as to whether such shocking images of victims serve to unite “good” people.<sup>74</sup> While this is possible and undoubtedly occurs in some instances, Sontag goes on to remind the reader that if an image contradicts preconceived ideas about what she calls “cherished pieties” or prejudices solidified in the shared imagination, their veracity is questioned and they are viewed as staged.<sup>75</sup> This is interesting to consider in relation to JR's practice, as while his subjects are in control of their expressions in front of it, they are still performing for the camera. This puts them at risk for political fetishism, which Bourdieu defines as “the people, the things, beings, who seemingly only have an

---

<sup>73</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

existence as such through the social agents giving it to them; the constituents worship their own creation.”<sup>76</sup> While it is not JR’s intent to describe or represent entire communities, this is inevitable as often, the people from these communities are not present to speak on behalf of themselves at his exhibitions. And while JR does attempt to portray his subjects in the manner in which they want to be presented (in his films, one can find discussions with participants and dialogue discussing elements such as how to pose and what they hope their image will convey to a larger, often unknown public), as Bourdieu notes, delegates often operate from a place of good will and sincerity and become blind to any negative effects of delegation.<sup>77</sup>

Curator, Nato Thompson in his essay “Ethical Considerations of Public Art,” contends that an “ethical relationship is one of power, where the viewer gains agency to interpret the world around them.”<sup>78</sup> Often with public works, the frame of reference from which to interpret an artwork is unclear. Thompson cites an example of a “mockumentary” entitled *Episode III (Enjoy Poverty)* by the artist Renzo Martens. The film is meant to critique the forces of instrumentalization of state power and those in the artworld and features the artist teaching inhabitants of the Democratic Republic of Congo photography skills so that they can “capitalize on their own suffering.”<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Bourdieu, 57.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>78</sup> Nato Thompson, “Ethical Considerations in Public Art,” *Scandalous: A Reader on Art and Ethics* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 110.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 118.

Thompson notes that Martens takes advantage of his power as delegate to critique the DRC government and NGOs who often insert well-meaning training efforts such as the photography training as featured in the film. At one point in the film, the community members make sign that reads “enjoy poverty,” uncomfortably confronting the art-viewing public. Both Martens and JR’s projects focus a lens on poverty and aim for a positive outcome to result from its making, something that Thompson says is not common in art projects.<sup>80</sup> However, there are many differences between these two projects. Martens’s piece was always intended for the artworld, while JR’s projects are made for those featured in them primarily as well as the artworld. Martens piece is ironic, while JR’s works are sincere. Martens’s piece focuses on the suffering of the community, while JR’s pieces include this, but are meant to honor those represented. The most fundamental difference however, is the fact that JR’s works are situated on the streets, within the communities which they represent and for whom they are created. They become a part of the community members’s daily lived experience. JR arrived at the art world through his work on the street. His desire to “make his images travel” is essentially what the graffiti and street artist has always done. While JR is undeniably a delegate who capitalizes off of his work which features these community members, his primary focus is not his own financial gains (as we will see especially with his *Inside Out Project*), but on human connection.

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 119.

However, none of this changes the fact that overall, JR's work participates in a lineage of photography which focuses a lens on poverty. Regardless of his intention, JR's work straddles the line between an aestheticization of poverty and a collaboration with the subjects in their self-representation in an artistic, aesthetic way.

Photographers such as Jacob Riis, Diane Arbus, and photojournalists are representing the poor from a position of privilege. Through their portrayals, they become representatives for these disenfranchised people who in many cases never even see their photographs. Critics of Riis's photography accused him of being a missionary, breaking the spirit of his subjects, as well as misusing funds allotted for the poor,<sup>81</sup> and Arbus has been criticized for exaggerating the circumstances of her subjects.<sup>82</sup>

Questions as to the photographs ability to shock and whether this is enough to spur someone into action or not, are also raised. Douglas Crimp, in an essay on Warhol, describes an ethical artistic position when he says that "A truly ethical position entails not a toleration of difference, but an obligation provoked by the very fact of difference."<sup>83</sup> While the viewer might not be shocked into action, JR as an artist, in collaborating with the eventual subjects of his photographs, at least appears to feel this obligation. JR's photographic project is different than most in that he is collaborating

---

<sup>81</sup> Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Jacob A. Riis: Christian Friend of Missionary Foe? Two Jewish Views," *American Jewish History*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (September 1981), 42.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Tatham, "Unaccommodated Man: The Photography of Diane Arbus," *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 55, No. 655 (December 1974), 563.

<sup>83</sup> Douglas Crimp, "Face Value," *About Face: Andy Warhol Portraits*, ed. Nicholas Baume (Hartford, Conn.: The Wadsworth Atheneum, 1999), 123.

with, versus merely capturing images of these people from a distance, and because he pastes his images within the communities for them primarily, his projects are separated from these other portrait types.<sup>84</sup> As Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites note, certain images of poverty are circulated widely and meant to “orient the individual within a context of collective identity, obligation, and power [...] They have more than documentary value, for they bear witness to something that exceeds words. Objects of contemplation bearing the aura of history, or humanity, or possibly, they are sacred images for a secular society.”<sup>85</sup> Is JR participating in this ideology at work in images “disseminated, promoted, and repeatedly reproduced by large-scale corporations and seamlessly sutured into the material practices of ordinary life?”<sup>86</sup> Obviously not, because he is anti-corporation. Is he objectifying the other and participating in some totalizing narrative? Is he reinforcing dominant narratives about the poor as resilient and beautiful? While this is indisputable on one hand, if only by virtue of the scale and method of dissemination, he is also showing a side of them that is usually not represented in a Save the Children ad. JR is not participating in the reproduction of “exploitative conceptions of race, class, and gender as if they were the natural order of things, as real and unremarkable, and unchangeable as what you see in the background

---

<sup>84</sup> On this topic, see: Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites. *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

of any photo.”<sup>87</sup> Instead he is representing them as agentive individuals who dominate the frames, and who are in control of their images.

Many of JR’s portraits are of entire faces, and sometimes, even entire bodies, however, there are also faces which are fragmented, consisting only of eyes. This eliminates signifiers of class, gender, and race and zooms in on a primal relationship of acknowledgment to another human. As Emmanuel Levinas states:

[...] the face is meaning all by itself. You are you. In this sense one can say that the face is not “seen.” It is what cannot become a content, which your thought would embrace; it is uncontainable, it leads you beyond. It is in this that the signification of the face makes it escape from being, as a correlate of a knowing. . . . But the relation to the face is straightaway ethical.<sup>88</sup>

Instead of offering up the other for scopical investigation, this bodily partitioning serves to emphasize the humanness of the subjects; these images put the viewer in the uncomfortable position of relating to the subjects, while having the knowledge that they are in actuality, different. In fact, for the “Millions March NYC” protest that occurred on December 13, 2014 in New York City’s Washington Square Park, JR’s cut-apart image of Eric Garner’s (a man who was choked to death by a NYC police officer) eyes was used; the protest was about equality, and the eye represented a human first and foremost, separated from race. JR’s image was used because it was both specific to Eric Garner, but also because it was an impactful image related to a

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>88</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Phillippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 86-87.

cause that was on the collective consciousness of the time; the confrontational gaze and expression spoke to the fact of personhood. This image appeared in various mainstream media outlets and helped to draw attention to the injustice of police brutality (which has been a personal cause celeb of JR's since his *Portraits of a Generation* project).

**WOMEN ARE HEROES  
(Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Kenya, Brazil, India, and Cambodia)**

“Faire voyager leur histoire.” This is the promise that JR made to the women featured in his *Women Are Heroes* series. From 2008 to 2010, JR traveled to various communities that had a history of social or civil unrest: Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Kenya, Brazil, India, and Cambodia [Figures 1.1 and 1.4]. He featured women in these communities with the aim of spreading their varied messages of struggle and survival beyond their own communities, or in his words, “to take their stories around the world,”<sup>89</sup> in order to “underscore the dignity of women who are often the target of conflicts.”<sup>90</sup> JR's artistic method for projects such as this, consists of locating populations who have experienced hardship or social conflict, visiting their communities, and engaging in prolonged conversations with a variety of people within them in order to gauge their receptiveness to, and interest in participating in a project. He then installs his street projects with his team of assistants, as well as with people in

---

<sup>89</sup> JR, “Women Are Heroes/India/2009,” *JR-Art.net*, accessed March 2, 2015, [www.jr-art.net/projects/women-are-heroes-india](http://www.jr-art.net/projects/women-are-heroes-india).

<sup>90</sup> Marco Berrebi, *Women Are Heroes*, n.p.





Figure 1.4 JR, *Women Are Heroes*, 2009, Kibera Slum, Kenya, jr-art.net

the communities with whom he has spoken, which often results in unlikely partnerships such as between artists, young, and elderly citizens. JR often stays a month or more to get acquainted with the lives of the people who will become the subjects of his pieces. This working method is similar for most of his projects. For *Women Are Heroes*, after acquainting himself with these various communities, he then photographed these women and pasted their images in large-scale on a multitude of surfaces within the communities, “bring[ing] a haunting human presence to harsh environments of social conflict.”<sup>91</sup> The audience for these images is not primarily the typical art audience, but the villagers themselves: the women featured, their families, and other community members. Later, after JR documents the project photographically

---

<sup>91</sup> JR, “Women Are Heroes/India/2009.” There is much evidence that JR has earned the respect of those featured in his projects. But he never photographs without informing his subjects of the meaning and intent of his projects.

in situ, it gathers a global audience through social media, the press, the internet, the exhibition of his work, and his publications.<sup>92</sup> On his website, JR adds that his “intention is to highlight the dignity of women who occupy crucial roles in societies and find themselves victims of war, street crime, sexual assault, and religious and political extremism.”<sup>93</sup>

JR’s use of the medium of portraiture, a medium that has become ubiquitous in today’s selfie-obsessed culture, acts as a starting point from which to arrive at deeper, more personal issues regarding, in the instance of this project, the disparity of wealth, human strength and resilience, and an awareness of global lived experience. These images do not simply exist for the artist, but make an impact on the culture which is involved in their making, and has the potential to emotionally affect others through JR’s social platforms. The black-and-white patina of these large images juxtaposed against the colorful favela landscape in Rio, for example, commands a slowed-down perception, as giant, doleful eyes meet the gaze of the viewer; encountering these images in a landscape is powerful. One can view images of women’s faces on the walls of Jaipur, for example. The faces emerged from the seemingly innocuous white paper that JR had pasted as colorful pigments were thrown onto them during Holi, a religious festival in India. The faces but had surreptitiously been stenciled with adhesive to avoid attracting the attention of Indian authorities

---

<sup>92</sup> JR is on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

<sup>93</sup> JR, “Women Are Heroes By JR,” *jr-art.net*, accessed March 2, 2015, [www.jr-art.net/videos/women-are-heroes-by-jr](http://www.jr-art.net/videos/women-are-heroes-by-jr).

[Figure 1.5]. JR says in his book that “once the portraits had been revealed . . . the women were able to see their portraits and challenge the glances of passersby, symbolizing their desire to change their status and the way people see them.”<sup>94</sup> JR has



Figure 1.5 JR, *Women Are Heroes*, 2009, Jaipur, India, jr-art.net

stated that *Women Are Heroes* is a project “with many images and few words.”<sup>95</sup> However, words are necessary otherwise, JR’s project might be reduced to a spectacularized, female version of the Edward Steichen exhibition, *The Family of Man*, engaging in nothing more than trafficking in images of happy poor people or soliciting a kind of oppression tourism, glossing over real inequities and struggles of people in favor of a superficial impetus to aestheticize or worse, equalize and focus on a pared down version of human lived experience.

<sup>94</sup> Marco Berrebi, *Women Are Heroes*, n.p.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

JR's images are not meant to visualize struggle, but to symbolize survival; some faces are smiling and others are solemn, still others are mugging for the camera. They are shot hyper-realistically so that one can see every wrinkle and blemish which serves to individualize each face. In other words, the images are about individuals' lives instead of simply the photograph itself as an aesthetic object. Yet, JR reiterates that it is always his intention first and foremost to create an art project and nothing more. However, claiming to "raise awareness" is implicitly a claim to fix the consciousness of his viewers and presumably, to prod them into action. His intention is not to act as a missionary or savior, but simply to present these communities so that they have a global platform on which to represent themselves, though this is always through the filter of JR's art. The depiction of these women and their various struggles elevates them to heroic status on the streets, when they are enlarged. Their status is also elevated through the relation of their stories through JR's publications or enabling them to relate their stories through the screen, even if they cannot be everywhere their faces might be pasted in person. As many of these women are from populations or communities known for issues such as crime or poverty, JR recognizes these women by taking portraits that highlight their individuality. They are humanized and relatable, instead of "otherized."

While they share an interest in humanity, unlike an NGO, JR's projects do not have specific attainable goals that must be met to satisfy a funding agency. The nature of JR's work for *Women Are Heroes* was to create a relationship with women in the

community, to listen to their stories, and to represent them visually on the walls of their own communities for their friends, family, and neighbors to see. The visual disjunction created upon encountering a large portrait on the street in Cuba, led people to inquire as to who was represented and why. This acknowledgment created a sense of pride and value for the depicted. Angela Nzilani, a participant in the project in Kenya, who is blind as a result of meningitis, explains her involvement in the project:

The reason why I agreed to take the photos is that I accept the fact that I am not able to see. The other thing is that I'll be happy when people are able to see this picture, and I would like to know how people see the fact that I am not able to see. That is really a happiness. The other thing is my family. I want to tell them: "Look, I have accepted myself and this is how I am and I am ready to move on with this struggle that I'm not able to see." I understand from the explanation that the people who take these photos really don't have bad intentions. It's about the struggle of women, and women who are not able to see are also involved. So for me this is a happiness.<sup>96</sup>

For Nzilani, this project is an opportunity for her to move beyond a personal struggle, as well as feel a part of something as a woman who cannot see. It gives her a sense of inclusion in addition to giving her a sense of healing and hope that her struggle could help others.

Sheela Karki, a participant in the project in New Delhi who came from a highly educated family, studied French Canadian literature at the Sorbonne, but because she could not procure a work permit and therefore had no money in Quebec, she returned to Delhi where she teaches at a girl's middle school. She explains her reasons for participating in the project:

---

<sup>96</sup> Marco Berrebi, *Women Are Heroes*, n.p.

I think putting up those photographs of women in cities is very symbolic, because women are very important in every society, as mothers, women, and lots of other things. There are lots of women who are professionals today, like me. I don't just say and teach anything to my students at the university. I have to know what I am saying to my students, because their knowledge of this foreign language comes from me. And I think maybe it gives women an idea of power. When you put up photographs of women in the city, in certain neighborhoods, it definitely gives women a sense of power.<sup>97</sup>

Feelings of empowerment make an inequality visible. Pasting portraits of these women is a visual gesture which symbolically challenges dominant modes of interpretation of women in the public sphere in general, but also in terms of the specific relationships they have to the communities in which they live. JR describes his feelings upon hearing some of these stories and the request that he make their stories travel: "When you hear the story, you're like 'Whoa! Maybe the person is die [sic] inside.' But then, when you ask her to do faces, then you can see life. And then I say I'm gonna paste the photo back in your city so everybody can see. For you. And for the people here."<sup>98</sup> Ultimately, the power of these images lies in their reflection through the eyes of the viewer. This is where their real potential power for impact lies.

Footage of the making of the *Women Are Heroes* project was released by JR as a film, also called *Women Are Heroes*, which became an official selection of the Cannes Film Festival in 2010 in which it competed for the Caméra d'Or. In other words, in addition to their exposure via internet and JR's publications, JR fulfilled his

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> JR and Emile Abinal, *Women Are Heroes*, Blue-ray, directed by JR (2010, Paris, France, 27.11 Production, 2010), film.

promise to make these women's stories travel through film in addition to pasting their likenesses in other cities which featured him in exhibitions, such San Diego, where he participated in the group show *Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (MCASD), which was curated by Pedro Alonzo [Figures 1.6].

As mentioned above, JR's museum pieces are essentially documentation of the pieces done on the "street," or with the various communities with whom he collaborates. Furthermore, they allow for and demonstrate a knowledge of his work in a manner that is controlled by the artist and not subject to corrupting media. Likewise, his installation for *Viva* was representative of his museum installations in that it involved an installation indoors which included a semi-didactic video piece as well as an outdoor component. The project featured at the MCASD was *Women Are Heroes*. Once inside the museum, the viewer was confronted by a subtle, ominous, droning electronic music which was punctuated by upbeat drumbeats. The sound was washed out, but persistent and pointed as if it was accompanying an unseen ceremony. Its mysterious quality led the viewer, like the Pied Piper of Hemlin's song, to a video which featured a women living in unfortunate geopolitical circumstances: Morro da Providência, the poorest favela in Rio de Janeiro. The video opens with a shot featuring hundreds of illegally connected power lines in the foreground while in the background we see the surroundings sped up aided by a live-action stop-motion effect. Ships glide through the Atlantic Ocean in the distance, which we can see because



Figure 1.6 JR, *Women Are Heroes*, 2010, installation view *Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, photo by John Furlong



Figure 1.7 JR, *Women Are Heroes*, 2010, installation view *Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, [www.mcasd.org/sites/default/files/styles/470w/public/391.jpg?itok=IOUeAWA8](http://www.mcasd.org/sites/default/files/styles/470w/public/391.jpg?itok=IOUeAWA8)



Morro da Providência is on a hill, and kids and adults make fleeting appearances across the screen. Immediately we hear a women's voice. She introduces herself as Rosiete Marinho in Portuguese, which we know because of subtitles in English. She goes on to say that she was born and raised in Morro da Providência, that she is proud of being from this community as her roots and family are here, that she loves everything step she has taken in her 45 years of life, and that she hopes that the images of women's faces will boost morale and build community within the favela. As she speaks, she relates that it is not easy for a mother to pick up pieces of her son from the trash, alluding to the problem of senseless violence that Morro da Providência is known for. As she speaks the viewer sees a sunset, a colorful assemblage of houses, and Rosiete who looks calmly into the camera. After she tells her story, we hear commentary from other women in the favela as the camera continues to explore alleys, inside homes, follow a trail of water, all in a quick stop-motion style while the droning music has stealthily become a classical guitar solo. The camera angle is that of a first-person perspective, as if the viewer is being acknowledged by the inhabitants as he or she delves into the intricate make-shift conglomerative construction. As we watch, we explore spaces that most have not, and would not, ever explore: we see women breastfeeding their children, children playing, and a young girl who shyly holds a paper flower out while she playfully blows a kiss. By their gazes which the camera pauses on while the background action occurs uninterrupted, it is clear that we are a familiar, welcome presence. It is notable that except for a moment where we see a the

sped-up process of the wheat pasting of an image in the favela, we do not see or hear JR. Nor does the video contain any didactic elements. The viewer can see from the background that this community is not wealthy, but we also see the portrayal of human beings who are living out their lives. The film features women who had experienced especially challenging circumstances in places that had been the target of conflict; yet, they are portrayed with a style and depth that are not typically felt in video advertisements for NGOs. For example, Favela Mundo, an NGO in Rio de Janeiro that “develops activities for poor children and young adults” has a video that possesses similar elements to those found in JR’s video such as the use of stop-motion, music, a view of a favela, and a glimpse of people participating in activities arranged by the organization such as guitar playing and dancing.<sup>99</sup> There is no narrator from the NGO, but instead the children speak of the virtues of participating in the creative activities arranged by Favela Mundo. However it is also heavily branded with titles that indicate the virtues of the NGO. And the people featured are treated more as a group of interest rather than betraying an intimate relationship to the camera: the camera angles tend to be shot from above, and when singular people are featured, they do not look into the lens, but speak to what seems to be several people who are interviewing them. While the two films have similar elements, it is clear that one is didactic and attempting to achieve a specific goal of monetary support, while the other is more abstract and personal.

---

<sup>99</sup> “Favela Mundo - Brazilian NGO - short video,” You Tube video, 2:01, upload by Favela Mundo, October 20, 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF1DqLfEnL8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF1DqLfEnL8).

In order to arrive at JR's video in the MCASD, one had to meander through the museum. A piece by Swoon, related to her project *Swimming Cities*, called *Swimming Sisters of Switchback Sea*, stood tall in the center of the gallery; a sculptural ship/teepee/garden structure set upon a black-and-white, Xeroxed paper sea that was accented with a hint of blue. Floating on this sea were representations of corrugated metal buildings of the type that are used in favelas. As one followed the edge of the sea, tucked away, around the corner, one arrived at JR's installation featuring his *Women Are Heroes* project. The installation was contained in an alcove that resembled a cave. Or, perhaps it was meant to evoke a home in a crowded favela. JR's film was playing at the far end — and the floor, walls, and ceiling were papered with JR's signature black-and-white, wheatpasted photos [Figure 1.7]. Hundreds of one foot by one foot faces of women smiling mostly, but also grimacing and leering, looked out from the walls. Yet, instead of projecting a sensation of being trapped or cornered, the film's soundtrack and being surrounded by all of these smiling faces, created a reverential feeling for the viewer. We were experiencing something meaningful and sacred.

Each wheatpasted face was separated by a black border which suggested that they were part of enlarged filmic strips that one could read were produced with KODAK 400TMV film. They referred to their making, which is significant. For, in order to effect a sincere message, to make it believable, cracks and "reality" must be evident, there must be a trace of an actual versus mediated experience. This reference

to reality is in line with street art as a whole and its dependence on real versus solely symbolic context. Faces were aligned in imperfect rows, which betrayed the effort involved in their production: there were bubbles and wrinkles in the paper. Rows were jagged at certain points and a bit off. The fourth wall was broken as one took a step toward the screen at the far end of the alcove, from which light emanated. Glowing but not garish light created a contrast, as it was in color, projecting the stories of these women. The film which one proceeds toward when entering the alcove, is a medium which in contrast to photographs, seems more honest in color, and is a medium through which the viewer gets a glimpse as to how things “actually” are.<sup>100</sup> Viewers are meant to immerse themselves in the experience of entering the favela as they enter the dark space to watch the film, and potentially emerge with a new consciousness of the plight of others and empathy for these women. The sympathy inherent in these photographs and the film create an emotional connection and relationship to these women. However, of course, despite the elaborate procession that the viewer experiences, it is also possible that the viewer might emerge with a more touristic or

---

<sup>100</sup> The installation is simply the method by which the message of his work in situ is translated to a museum audience, in addition to through JR’s books and website.

even voyeuristic relationship to these images of extreme poverty, which is unavoidable in a space that draws in a varied public such as a museum.<sup>101</sup>

As part of *Viva*, JR and his team installed an outdoor piece entitled *Eye of Kibera*, 2010, a giant wheatpasted eye belonging to one of the women he worked with in Kenya [Figure 1.8]. On the streets is where the real projects take place both in the communities featured in his films and in his practice as a street artist as a whole, as this is where conversations can occur in an undefined public space. The *Eye* featured an African woman's eye who lived in the Kibera slum, one of the communities within which JR worked for *Women Are Heroes*. The piece was installed on a street corner over a storefront, which means that it was several stories high. Each wheatpaste is risky as it involves climbing to incredible heights, manual labor, and involves a team

---

<sup>101</sup> It might also be interesting too look at viewer's responses to this work in terms of compassion fatigue, a term coined in 1992 that refers to becoming desensitized to images of suffering or actual suffering. See: Coetzee, S.K., & Klopper, H.C. (2010). Compassion fatigue within nursing practice: A concept analysis. *Nursing and Health Sciences*, 12, 235-243. Doi: 10.1111/j.1442-2018.2010.00526.x. For more analysis on images of poverty see Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).



Figure 1.8 JR, *Eye of Kibera, Women Are Heroes*, 2010, *Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, [www.mcasd.org/](http://www.mcasd.org/)

of people interacting and facilitating the pasting of the work on scaffolding.<sup>102</sup> This is not the wheatpaste of a vandal in a hurry, but a methodical, intentional paper statement. To construct the whole piece, individual pieces of rolled up paper are cut and numbered so that their application is precise. They are pasted together according to the numbering system in order to create a cohesive large-scale piece. Sometimes this tedious process of adhering to a diagram up close, in the heat, many brooms and

---

<sup>102</sup> It is important to remember that these artists are street artists and they are doing hard physical work, often in the heat and for several hours depending on the pieces. In order to do this work, you have to haul all of your materials with you, usually not in a car because you do not want to draw attention to yourself, because even though these artists have found some recognition in the artworld, that does not affect the fact that they are still putting up work illegally in most cases. They are often covered in paper and glue if they spray paint or their hands are caked in paint and sweat and dirt. It takes a tremendous amount of dedication and passion, especially when you consider the fact that these artists are known first because of their presence on the streets, which means they had to put up a lot of work.

brushes dunking into sundry buckets filled with wallpaper paste, high in the air results in mistakes, but this becomes part of the piece. If eyes are windows to peoples' souls, JR is broadcasting souls all over a city.

What does it mean to have an African women's eye above the streets of San Diego's downtown area? These large, pasted eyes and faces do have an effect on the viewer. In order to see the eye on the streets of San Diego, one had to stumble upon it. This is how street art has typically worked. An eye above the streets in downtown San Diego has big brother overtones and recalls the NSA in our contemporary, ever-knowing state apparatus. What is not completely obvious is that it is an African women's eye, and even if this were obvious, we would not know she is from the Kibera slum. JR's answer to this problem is that the piece instills curiosity and leads people to ask questions that lead to awareness and connection within a community and about what exactly this piece might mean. In San Diego, the work attracted public interest, but there was almost no way of knowing what the piece signified without an interlocutor present to engage in dialogue about meaning. As I emerged from the scaffolding on which JR and his team were working, I was asked by a group of people what was happening. I informed them of who JR was and that the piece was being installed in connection with an exhibition at the MCASD. When I explained the context from which the *Eye* came and what it represented, they reacted respectfully and expressed admiration for JR's intention. When I returned weeks later to gaze upon

the *Eye*, I witnessed some puzzled, but interested tourists. One of them exclaimed “cool.”

From my experience in San Diego, it was clear that the specific significance of JR’s pasting was lost. Art does not have to “save the world” as JR implied in his aforementioned TED speech, but when dealing with subject matter such as this, the lines between art and activism become blurred, as does the potential for change outside of the community in which JR works, when the viewer is not informed. JR’s images function like most public art - as autonomous, yet, contextually dependent pieces. *Women Are Heroes* is most successful in communicating the specific, personal stories of women and the specific communities in which they live, as the piece assumes a different meaning in each new context it takes on. To really comprehend this work, one must ask around and retrace steps in order to stumble onto the discovery of JR’s website or someone who follows his work who can explain its significance. Therefore, as JR is making the women’s stories travel, the image and possibly the individual’s story becomes cosmopolitan even if the subject does not. As new viewers are exposed to JR’s work, they begin to know and are made more cosmopolitan in their communion with plights they may have been unaware of or which media has misrepresented from a singular viewpoint.

Pasted in within the communities, these images act as monuments to these women’s strength and resilience as they have lived through varied struggles. The hope is that they earn respect resultant from their public acknowledgement within their



communities. Beyond this, JR's exhibitions, website, and publications introduce these women to a wider audience that extends further than their specific communities. Of course, portraiture alone does not possess the power to elevate these women both within and outside of their communities, at least not enough to solve difficult socio-economic issues directly. So, while it is apparent that JR is circulating images of these women and in a sense fulfilling their wish to "make them travel," what is not as immediately apparent is exactly how he is highlighting the dignity of these women through his work. Ultimately, however, there is a disjunction between what JR states that he hopes to do and a straightforward realization of this goal as demonstrated by the *Eye of Kibera's* reception that I witnessed.

Most viewers encounter JR's work through his website and through his publications. It is through these avenues that middle class, art enthusiasts, as well as fans of JR's work (for one can assume this is who is purchasing his books) are also confronted by faces who are the victims of serious forms of conflict and violence. Viewers look upon these faces bound together in a gorgeous art publication, or as prints in an art gallery, with expectations that are typical in looking at art. JR's experience as a photographer is highlighted in these spaces in terms of the objects he has produced (here, prints or installations) in terms of composition, conceptual method, and overall aesthetic appeal. This valuation of artwork occludes the subject matter, and the relationship that JR has formed with these communities. It is easy for JR to appear in this realm as tour guide of oppression to gallery goers. When

confronted with images in a gallery, in an art publication, or on a screen versus happening upon them in situ, large-scale in the environment, it is easy to disengage. Habitual seeing is one of the potential problems regarding the effectiveness of JR's work. One way his work attempts to combat this problem is through his uniform black-and-white aesthetic and scale, which creates a striking display, particularly on the street. He reintroduces gravitas through the technique of human interaction and large-scale (outside of the screen) pieces featuring head-on portraits. This uniformity and repetition elicits an emotional response as viewers seek to differentiate and humanize the portraits so that they can recognize, identify, and empathize with human faces that are ultimately not so unlike their own. To reiterate, JR hopes that his art is a catalyst to conversations about the topics and people featured in his work which will eventually enable it "to change the world." If viewers are inspired or provoked into investigating these populations further, or even if viewing his works ignites a conversation about global poverty, for example, the world would be changed for the better. However, because there are no instructions as to how to help those featured in his projects or how to get in contact with them, the ambiguity of JR's expressed desire is not likely to remain much more than a nice thought.

### **WRINKLES OF THE CITY (Cartagena, Shanghai, Los Angeles, Havana, Berlin)**

On a warm summer day in 2011, I had driven to Los Angeles from San Diego to visit Os Gêmeos who were installing their piece for the *Art in the Streets* show in

the Geffen building at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. As I crossed a set of train tracks I encountered a tremendous pair of eyes rendered in a familiar style on the side of the building. I recognized these eyes as one of JR's pastings. They had expression lines, as if they were seeing through time and many years of lived experience. They were black-and-white, rendered in JR's signature style. Like the eyes in *Women Are Heroes*, this pair was abstracted and cut-off, preventing identification of gender, race, and the specific individual whom it represented; however, these eyes were part of the *Wrinkles of the City* project, a project which JR describes as one that "portrays older people who have lived through the changes and upheavals of their city."<sup>103</sup> The first iteration was in Havana, Cuba followed by Cartagena, Spain, Shanghai, China, Los Angeles, United States, Berlin, Germany, and Istanbul, Turkey. JR was the principle artist in each project, though in Cuba, he collaborated with José Parlá, a Brooklyn-based artist of Cuban heritage who rendered calligraphy alongside JR's portraits. As before, we may consider the subject to be part of the collaborative process within JR's aesthetic.

*Wrinkles of the City* is a project that features elderly members of communities. JR was inspired to do the *Wrinkles of the City* project when he began painting in Cartagena, Spain. JR states that for the project, "in each of the places I've done it [it] has to be a city where the walls speak for themselves, where there's [sic] wrinkles in

---

<sup>103</sup> Clara Astiasarán, Janet Betet, José Parlá, and JR, *Wrinkles of the City* (Bologna, Italy, Damiani/Standard Press, 2012), n.p.

the walls.”<sup>104</sup> In addition to the walls, the people featured in his photographs must be elderly citizens, or, in other words must have wrinkles. The piece is about history and the celebration of heritage and lived experience, and moves against the grain of a society obsessed with the new. JR elaborates:

[The] Wrinkles of the City project paints a picture of the twentieth century by exploring the lives of those who witnessed their cities become scarred by the course of history, economic growth and socio-cultural changes. Its goal was for the elderly's personal stories to symbolically confront the walls of their city, and for the city and its inhabitants to confront their wrinkles and the stories of their elderly.<sup>105</sup>

For this project, like all of his projects, JR met the locals, listened to their stories, and then represented them photographically on the walls of each city. In each city, the project ends up celebrating these individuals in different ways.

Unlike *Women Are Heroes*, this project featured both men and women. The cities chosen were determined not by bleak media coverage, but by other things, like where JR had been invited by galleries, or in Havana because he was selected to participate in the Havana Biennale [Figures 1.9 - 1.10], which sponsored the making of his film on the project. However, each location where the projects took place was a major city with a rich history. JR did not paste in the touristy areas of these cities. And, while JR approaches communities with good intentions, the fact remains that he is an

---

<sup>104</sup> Suzie Lee, Arrested Motion Interview, “Interviews- JR: ‘Wrinkles of the City: Berlin,’” *Arrested Motion*, April 17, 2013, [arrestedmotion.com/2013/04/streets-interviews-jr-wrinkles-of-the-city-berlin](http://arrestedmotion.com/2013/04/streets-interviews-jr-wrinkles-of-the-city-berlin).

<sup>105</sup> Jesse James, “Art In Istanbul! JR Takes Wrinkles of the City To Istanbul,” *Stupid Dope*, June 11, 2015, [stupiddope.com/2015/06/11/art-in-istanbul-jr-takes-wrinkles-of-the-city-to-istanbul](http://stupiddope.com/2015/06/11/art-in-istanbul-jr-takes-wrinkles-of-the-city-to-istanbul).



Figure 1.9 JR, Rafael Lorenzo and Obdulia Manzano, *Wrinkles of the City*, 2012, Havana, Cuba, jr-art.net



Figure 1.10 JR, Alicia Adela Hernandez Fernández, *Wrinkles of the City*, 2012, Havana, Cuba, jr-art.net

outsider projecting his work onto communities. JR says of the citizens of Havana: “The fact that they recognize that it’s an art project is really important because that takes off all of the boundaries of politics and the message that can go around that. And really focuses on an art project.”<sup>106</sup> JR enables people to connect to their surroundings and subsequently, or indirectly to their past. The message he hopes to impart and highlight is that the elderly in society have a lived experience and wisdom: the citizens featured in Cartagena lived through the Spanish Civil War and a fascist regime; in Shanghai they lived through communism, World War II, and the Cultural Revolution; Los Angeles is the land of plastic surgery, so those featured here are held up as beautiful to show beauty is more than skin-deep; in Berlin they saw the fall of the Berlin wall; in Istanbul they have witnessed economic growth, the shifting of the capital, and the Istanbul pogrom.

As with *Women Are Heroes*, the surfaces and architecture of the buildings become as much a part of the pieces as the faces. However, as the focus is on elderly members of these communities, a relationship is suggested by the history of lives in relation to histories of the various cities in which the projects took place. JR describes his intention behind the *Wrinkles of the City* project in Cuba, as to “give a majestic quality to ordinary citizens of Havana.”<sup>107</sup> In working with the people in Cuba like

---

<sup>106</sup> JR and José Parlá interview, "The Wrinkles of the City, Havana Cuba" project following the screening of the film at the SVA Theatre, NYC. May 22, 2013. Q&A moderated by Bryce Wolkowitz of Bryce Wolkowitz Gallery.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

eighty-three-year-old Elio Milanes who has worked in the same bodega his entire life, and Leda Antonia Machado who tells the artists that "displayed on the wall like that, I'm still good for something. If I were completely ruined, you wouldn't have taken my portrait,"<sup>108</sup> JR's project provides recognition and a change in the daily lives of citizens. In his short film about the project in Havana, one of the locals observes: "They are the same. The man is damaged and the wall as well. The only difference is that the wall isn't laughing."<sup>109</sup> Reactions amongst citizens included feelings of reverence and of value as demonstrated by one of the female citizens who wipes tears away as she says, "I can die satisfied because the world knows who I am." while a man exclaims: "I have more of an audience than Castro."<sup>110</sup> In a way, though these images, they came to know themselves as well as their community. *Wrinkles of the City* connects people through a direct line of aesthetic experiences and empathetic masks. I say masks as these too are but moments. And while these moments connect and make known the mediation provided by JR, the moment is ultimately a falsehood, like a mask, and a simulation of an individual.

Not everyone in the community embraced JR's project. In Havana, the streets are not saturated with advertisements but have historically contained portraits of Fidel

---

<sup>108</sup> JR, "The Art of Storytelling: Havana and the Wrinkles of the City," *CultureShockArt*, June 24, 2014, [cultureshockart.wordpress.com/tag/calligraphy](http://cultureshockart.wordpress.com/tag/calligraphy).

<sup>109</sup> José Parlá, *Wrinkles of the City: La Havana* (2012), Film; *Wrinkles of the City* was commissioned by the 2012 Havana Biennale.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Castro and Che Guevara. Because of this recent historical association of the streets with these specific portraits, JR's pasting on the street elicited some suspicions. One man had a problem with the indecipherability of Parlá's calligraphy which is a language of his own — almost a hieroglyphics of the street. He felt it was unfair to those who did not speak the language of Parlá. A couple who live in the neighborhood wanted to erase Parlá's calligraphy, but leave JR's photograph, while others, the people who own the house where the work was to be installed, defended it.

In Havana, JR and Parlá deliberately pasted in places which would not typically be visited by Biennale attendees. This was a strategy to bring people into these communities to see the work and the communities in situ. Classes and disparate populations intermingled. In doing this, JR gives biennial goers the option to see these works in situ; to have the experience of exploring the city and happening upon these pasted colossal faces. By allowing this choice of whether to view the works via his publications, website, and prints and/or to view them in situ, means the viewer is confronted with the choice to leave the comforts of "bourgeois subjectivity,"<sup>111</sup> or to potentially experience something new. The fetish becomes real. In a culture that is quick to find victims, JR creates openings for a culture of greater understanding through human connection as opposed to alienation.

---

<sup>111</sup> This is a phrase used by Buchloh to describe the shifting role of portraiture. I will return to this concept below.



**INSIDE OUT PROJECT**  
**(ongoing since 2011)**

Having now examined two projects which I experienced after their creation, I will now transition to a piece for which I added to the formal public structure. The final project I would like to address is JR's largest project in terms of scope and one in which I participated with my *Street Art & Graffiti* class at the University of California, San Diego in the summer of 2013. With both *Women Are Heroes* and *Wrinkles of the City*, JR and his representation of his subjects are meant to speak on behalf of their respective communities. The *Inside Out Project*, on the other hand allows the communities to speak for and by themselves to a greater extent.

Developed as a result of the TED Prize that was awarded to JR in 2011, JR began The *Inside Out Project* with the one hundred thousand dollar prize he was awarded to grant his wish of "using art to turn the world inside out."<sup>112</sup> JR announced this project via a TED talk filmed in front of a live audience in Long Beach, California. The TED prize states on its website that it is, "awarded to an individual with a creative, bold vision to spark global change. By leveraging the TED community's resources and investing [...] into a powerful idea, each year the TED Prize supports one wish to inspire the world."<sup>113</sup> The aim of the *Inside Out Project* is

---

<sup>112</sup> "JR: My Wish: Use Art to Turn the World Inside Out," *TED*, accessed May 15, 2015, [www.ted.com/talks/jr\\_s\\_ted\\_prize\\_wish\\_use\\_art\\_to\\_turn\\_the\\_world\\_inside\\_out?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/jr_s_ted_prize_wish_use_art_to_turn_the_world_inside_out?language=en).

<sup>113</sup> "TED Prize," *TED*, accessed May 15, 2015, [www.ted.com/participate/ted-prize](http://www.ted.com/participate/ted-prize); The year that JR won, he was awarded \$100,000. TED increased the prize to one million dollars in 2013.

to give a platform to the entire world. In order to participate in the project, those who are interested, begin by filling out a simple form on the website and uploading photos of participants. All that is required is that a group of people come together to collaborate on a meaningful project of their choice, supported by a mission statement detailing the issue they want to address. This statement is then accompanied by photographs of each participants' faces. Participants take photos themselves, following suggested guidelines detailing the best way to frame the portrait. Next, these photographs are emailed to JR's atelier, and if all elements are complete, JR and his studio approve it, print out the photos in JR's studio, and mail them back in a large, Xeroxed, black-and-white format that conforms to JR's general aesthetic which he uses in all of his projects. An additional method of participating in the *Inside Out Project* is through a photo booth truck which prints out photographs instantly as it travels to various cities. Therefore, people can print out photographs on the spot. In Long Beach, when JR was accepting the TED prize, there was a photo booth inside of which I had my photo taken. As I went alone, mine became a souvenir, but if one had a project in mind, they could get it in motion by visiting these trucks instead of having to wait for them to be mailed from JR's studio.

While possessing a similarity in aesthetic, there is a marked difference between this project and the rest of JR's oeuvre in that JR himself does not create the majority of the pieces for *Inside Out*, but instead, they are individually made by the various

people around the world who “participate” in it.<sup>114</sup> For the *Inside Out Project* JR facilitates the making of his work, via various publics. The cost of participation is potentially nothing, as JR will supply participants with posters. There is a suggested donation on the website, but if one cannot afford to donate the suggested amount of twenty dollars per person which goes to charity, then the pictures are printed out for free.<sup>115</sup> Therefore this project is theoretically accessible to anyone all over the world regardless of socio-economic status.

Nonetheless, despite JR’s intention and desire for the project to be accessible to everyone, some places have less chance of being exposed to this project than others. Access to computers hinders some populations’ ability to participate in the project. JR attempts to counter this, however by putting out calls through social media platforms

---

<sup>114</sup> JR has made several himself as well.

<sup>115</sup> According to the website, “INSIDE OUT is funded by The Sapling Foundation, Social Animals and generous donations from participants.” “Support the Inside Out Project,” *Inside Out*, accessed May 15, 2015, [www.insideoutproject.net/en/donate](http://www.insideoutproject.net/en/donate). Text from the donation page: The text on the donation page reads: “SUPPORT THE INSIDE OUT PROJECT. You can support the project by helping us send more posters around the world. Your donation will exclusively be used to cover printing and shipping costs for posters. INSIDE OUT is a large-scale participatory art project that transforms messages of personal identity into pieces of artistic work. Everyone is challenged to use black-and-white photographic portraits to discover, reveal and share the untold stories and images of people around the world. Everyone can upload their portrait to which they add a story or a message. They receive their poster printed in black-and-white at the format 90 x 135 cm and have to put their portrait in the city to share part of their identity, their beliefs or their fights. People can participate as an individual or in a group; posters can be placed anywhere, from a solitary image in an office window to a wall of portraits on an abandoned building or a full stadium. These exhibitions are documented, archived and viewable virtually. INSIDE OUT is funded by The Sapling Foundation, Social Animals and generous donations from people like you.”; For my class, I had each student donate \$10 if they were able.

such as Instagram to places that have yet to participate, in hopes that someone will do a project there. This is a discriminating factor setting the *Inside Out Project* apart from community service and setting it distinctly in the realm of art, due to the fact that JR is concerned with the symbolic reach of the project.

For my part, in the summer of 2013, I taught an upper level undergraduate course on graffiti and street art at the University of California, San Diego. During the scope of the class, we participated in JR's *Inside Out Project* [Figures 1.11 - 1.12]. The class decided on a topic that they felt was important to them: the educational system in America. The class drafted a statement, I photographed each individual, and then we sent this information off through the internet interface on JR's website. Their project was entitled *Reclaiming Education*. This was their project statement:

Inspired by JR's Inside Out Project and its capacity to effect real change, we decided to participate in an *Inside Out Project Group Action* entitled *Reclaiming Education*. As college students, we recognize our privileged position, as most people in the US and the world cannot afford a post-secondary education. We would like to acknowledge this inequity and also point to some other issues that stand in the way of making this education available to all.

*Reclaiming Education* is meant to draw attention to the deficiencies of a UC education and what we feel are misplaced priorities in the allocation of resources by the Californian government. Especially apparent is the prioritization of the over-crowded prison system and the military over the educational system. As students, we feel the effects of the accumulation of debt for a degree that is becoming increasingly irrelevant in today's economy, as it guarantees nothing. Yet, at the same time we realize our privilege in being able to take out the loans to get this education, as there are many others for whom this is merely a pipedream. Together our faces represent a rupture, the reality of the spectacle of education.

The posters arrived, minus three student's faces.<sup>116</sup> I scouted legal venues for the project, as I did not want to risk the safety of any student in my class.<sup>117</sup> The venue we secured is a non-profit gallery and artist studio space called Space 4 Art in downtown San Diego. I prepared several buckets of wheatpaste, the students brought brushes, and we pasted our images on the side of the building as a group. The project allowed the students in the class to work together and as a result, they felt that they were a part of something larger and meaningful. One of my students, Sophia Chiao, said that:

JR's project . . . made me feel a bit more confident in where I was going, like I wasn't alone. I went through school unsure of what I was looking for in terms of an education and career, but for a brief moment in your class it felt incredible to just enjoy my surroundings and feel like my surroundings accepted me as well.<sup>118</sup>

Another student, Tim Wang reflected on how the project has affected him over two years later:

In retrospect, the *Reclaiming Education* project we did a few years ago was powerful and has stuck with me to this day. Having gone from a public university to a private art college, I often question where my tuition money goes towards. Transparency is a problem and always will be. I really enjoyed how we came together to come up with an artist statement that we could all stand behind.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> This is a big oversight, considering this is about empowerment and one must note these dejected students.

<sup>117</sup> A few students expressed concern with possibly getting involved with the law, as the class brought up the possibility of pasting without permission; a reminder that street art is still a real crime.

<sup>118</sup> Sophia Chiao, email message to author, August 12, 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Tim Wang, email message to author, August 12, 2015.



Figure 1.11 JR, *Reclaiming Education, Inside Out Project*, 2013, San Diego, CA, photo by Jon Alvarado

These two testimonies speak to the power not only of collaborating, but collaborating toward a common goal that all members of the group felt personally affected by. The benefits from the project were rooted in the physical as well as the conceptual and symbolic act of connecting their own images publicly to speak to something they believed in. Even if passersby may not have been inspired or moved by the content of their projects, the project held meaning and created feelings of empowerment for the participants.

Pasting involves teamwork and so it was a bonding experience. Seeing their faces pasted large-scale in public made the student participants feel important, and as if in the act of making themselves visible to the public, they were not only expressing, but offering a statement that was inclusive and relevant to everyone. The project was



Figure 1.12 JR, *Reclaiming Education, Inside Out Project*, 2013, San Diego, CA, photo by Lara Bullock

an invitation dialogue and it attracted people in the neighborhood; young kids, families, the homeless stopped to ask what we for were doing, which in turn allowed the students to share their statement, of which the act of voicing is powerful in and of itself. Though interesting conversations were had when the students were present, the amount of curiosity and dialogue that occurred in their absence is unmeasurable. However, this is the nature of street art: once it is placed on the street, it belongs to the public more than the artist(s). Simply pasting faces on a wall does not make a clearly

discernible statement, yet it does garner attention and curiosity. Due to the fact that we pasted our project on the outside of a non-profit art venue, I was able to inquire as to the level of interest in the project on a daily basis. Without students and dialogue, interest in the project was less.

Indeed, even though I made handouts describing the project, these were kept inside Space 4 Art and so were only visible if one knew or had the desire to enter the building. Because of the nature of the space, the piece could only stay up a limited amount of time before it had to be removed. The impact of the project was limited by its length of exposure, which was only a few weeks, as well as the area in which it was pasted, an art space on the outskirts of downtown San Diego. However, the place where the project makes the longest impact is on the internet. On JR's website my class's project may be viewed alongside an expansive array of projects from across the globe.

## PORTRAITURE

*The portrait's claim for right of survival in depicting "the individual subject" borders on the obsolescent if not the obscene.*

- Benjamin H. D. Buchloh<sup>120</sup>

Faces featured in JR's work, rather in part or in whole, are portraits. Portraiture is almost synonymous with the visualization of identity, whether that created by the

---

<sup>120</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the Ends of Portraiture," in *Face-Off: The Portrait in Recent Art* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1994), 58.



camera operator or the sitter. Portraits are meant to be a means of knowing but in themselves act as a device of disinformation with what is not shown. In point of fact, portraits are masks. Anecdotes regarding the ability to read a person's life story through their eyes, wrinkles, and hands are plentiful in literature, art, and music. A person's inner existence is often believed to manifest itself on one's outer appearance. A face gazing out at us is striking. It captures us. It is primal, just as confronting an animal head-on is interpreted as a challenge; averting one's eyes is submissive. Case in point: the confrontational gaze of Manet's *Olympia* identifies her as a self-assured and self-aware demimonde. The faces in JR's portraits confront the viewer deliberately, yet their gazes vary. Sometimes, they look out at the viewer, but sometimes their eyes are closed. Sometimes they look off camera. Despite these varied gazes, each one is deliberate, and because of this, compelling. The viewer gleans informational cues about these sitters, whether these are factual or not, that help the viewer identify what they see. Portraiture as a mimetic statement about the subject has been accepted as both factual and spurious. From a classification and identification tool as it was employed by August Sander; to a diagnostic and deciphering tool; or trompe l'oeil as with surrealist collage, portraiture's gestural function is constantly in flux. In this section, I will touch on a few of portraiture's historical incarnations which intersect with JR's portraits in formal and ideological respects.

Benjamin Buchloh's statement above regarding portraiture's integrity as a reflection of reality, considers the constantly evolving history of photography and its

continual art historical shifts which include its mimetic abilities, to its obvious propagandistic properties, to its use in the service of social conditioning and conditioned viewership. Buchloh's essay on the end of modern portraiture marks cubism, specifically Picasso's "visual manifesto" consisting of the three anti-portraits of his dealers Kahnweiler, Vollard, and Uhde, as the death of the genre.<sup>121</sup> Buchloh's death of portraiture, or at least its existence as an unquestioned mimetic device, is caused by Picasso's paintings as they "fuse[d] the sitter's subjectivity in a continuous artwork of phenomenological interdependence between pictorial surface and virtual space, between bodily volume and painterly texture, as all physiognomic features merge instantly with their persistent negation in a pictorial erasure of efforts at mimetic resemblance."<sup>122</sup> Picasso's paintings signified identity through the use of both the mask and caricature which reduced identity, and created unknowing, to singular features or exaggerated traits. Picasso no longer allowed for an evolution in characteristic subjectivity nor a representation of a subject as a fluid identity, but instead fixed identity in abstraction. Portraiture was no longer credible as a visual signifying field of what Buchloh refers to as "humanist bourgeois subjectivity."<sup>123</sup>

Fixedness of subjectivity was perpetuated with the invention of photography and its use to capture bourgeois subjectivity — a dominant, privileged representation

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 54.

and reflection of subjecthood — through the study of physiognomy, as with Sander, whose photos equated to visual evidence of certain types of people according to factors such as gender, class, or occupation. Instead of simple mimetic representation, the photograph justified “essentialist and biologicistic concepts of identity.”<sup>124</sup> When the snapshot became popular, personal archives began to emerge which captured fleeting and random moments of individuals’ lives. These casually accumulated archives abolished the notion of a fixed existence. A person’s identity was now more malleable because of the medium’s democratization. Portraits were no longer reserved only for the wealthy elite few. Buchloh credits Rauschenberg with the artistic notion of the self as a performative construction. And, it was in the 1960s in which Warhol depicted “public substitutes of subjectivity” which were governed by a consumerist “dialectic of seduction and debasement that constitutes the logic of the commodity.”<sup>125</sup> In these works, the subject is replaced by a mere image. Buchloh concludes his piece in the 1980s with the photographers Thomas Ruff and Thomas Struth who in turn react against this spectacular Warholian notion of photography and instead, return to more intimate photographic representations of families and friends. Especially in Struth, the anonymous mechanicity of Warhol’s mug shot or photobooth portraits are eclipsed by a return to a conservative, almost painterly, pre-cubist consideration of subjectivity, in

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 62.

that the artist focuses on the intimate, unseen (but not untouched) realm of private lives.<sup>126</sup>

JR's photographs draw from each of these historical genres outlined by Buchloh. Like Struth's photographs, JR's portraits are personal and serve as indexes of an intimacy between the photographer and photographed. Yet, they also embody Warhol's aesthetic and the anonymous mechanicity of snapshots and photo booth shots, as some are precisely that, which means that the perceived comfort and intimacy is not the index of a relationship to another individual (the photographer), but with an apparatus.<sup>127</sup> However, despite this, JR is still essentially taking the photographs, as he directs their production and amasses an archive that exists and continually multiplies on his website.<sup>128</sup> When sitters enter one of his photoboosts, they are instructed as to how to "pose" in accordance with JR's uniform aesthetic. This is tied to JR's being a

---

<sup>126</sup> By this I mean that the photograph makes evident a relationship between the photographer and the sitter (something Buchloh argues) which was absent in Warhol's snapshots.

<sup>127</sup> For JR's *Inside Out project*, he employs a mobile photobooth that travels to various cities so that participation can be immediate versus waiting for him to mail photographs from his studio for others to paste.

<sup>128</sup> This is an important phenomenon of street art concurrent with the ubiquity of the internet. Whereas early graffiti artists and street artists did circulate photographs which they would Xerox and share, the work retained a sense of impermanence which is central to the idea of street art. On JR's Instagram account, there are frequently calls placed soliciting projects in places where there have not been any. This art takeover is a language of monetary corporate logic that he is applying to cultural currency. By co-opting this language, he is subverting the corporate logic and channeling it into a global project which unites people under the auspice of speaking out for various issues.; For more on the concept of the collection or archive see Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October*, Vol. 39 (Winter, 1986), 3-64.

street artist. JR works with recognition in mind in spite of a desire for personal anonymity; in a literal sense of wanting his work to be recognized on the street.

Therefore, JR is recognized through these portraits, which reflect both the sitter's as well as the artist's subjectivity.

In addition to the snapshot, the black-and-white production and bodily proportions of the sitters in JR's portraits, possess similarities to the second Warholian aesthetic discussed by Buchloh: the mugshot.<sup>129</sup> Mugshots are compelling because narrative is implied and yet not rendered. Mugshots confirm transgression. And, even if one is innocent, one is never absolved of a mugshot. Indeed, mugshots, as a form of portraiture, is a barrier between viewer and represented, which confirms presuppositions and instills feelings of alienation and curiosity, for these figures are dehumanized into evidence of an absent conscience. The ambiguity of JR's photos, for they are presented without textual support on surfaces on the streets, renders them

---

<sup>129</sup> The format recalls a piece by Christian Boltanski, entitled *Passion*. Boltanski's piece is about memory and loss and utilizes actual photographs of anonymous children that Boltanski has collected from various sources, which are presented in black-and-white and out of focus as a result of Boltanski's technique of re-photographing them into abstraction. Like Boltanski's passion images, JR's suggest a group as a whole. We look at these in the contexts of having a narrative that supersedes these photographs. Boltanski has said that his work is an attempt to preserve "'small memory' [which] is what makes people different from one another, unique. These memories are very fragile; I want to save them." JR's piece aims to do the opposite of remember – instead, wants you to take notice in the present. This is an effect of the different times in which Boltanski's piece and JR's piece were created. Unlike the viewer of Boltanski, the viewer in JR the viewer is alienated by a screen, though both are alienated by the essence of time and access; Boltanski's because of death, JR's because of remoteness. Tamar Garb, "Interview: Tamar Garb in Conversation with Christian Boltanski," *Christian Boltanski* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1997), 19.

unclassifiable. JR hopes this non-taxonomy will lead viewers to adopt a Morellian task of asking questions in order to investigate their significance further. However, there is no questioning their humanity. In fact, their range of expressions makes them extremely relatable.

Another important feature of JR's work that also must be discussed in relation to the history of portraiture is the fact that his portraits are on public display. The majority of JR's images of faces look/face the viewer. They represent a stare-down with the viewer, and more generally, because they are accessible online, humanity. These faces demand something from the viewer, whether this is mere reflection on the lives behind the faces individually or an active response to a community's concerns. If encountered on the street or in a village, they demand a unique type of looking. If increasing urbanization stemming from the Industrial Revolution contributed to a lessening of face-to-face interaction, the current Facebook culture that clicks and investigates faces from the security of one's screen, only indicates its continual progression toward total alienation. The viewer undergoes an experiential alienation from their lives outside of social media, choosing to experience the world through their handheld devices rather directly and unmediated through their own eyes. Encountering JR's work in realtime, physical spaces, presents a sort of rupture upon encounter. Uncertainty ensues: Are these famous people? What makes these people different or special? What sets them apart from oneself? Why are they up on walls like advertisements printed large-scale like billboards?

Photography presented on the street from its beginnings served as a documentary technological invention, but also as a means of social control, and is a byproduct of a corporatized, consumerist agenda of late-capitalism. In Cuba, where walls were once dominated by Che and Castro, for example, these pasted portraits of its citizens create a sense of confusion and wonder and also fear, as they rupture habitual ways of experiencing public space, but also recall the old government. Technology provides access to information that we are not given in JR's work, the surface is not enough. JR uses the medium of portraiture to force people to recognize each other in our modern times in which socialization is increasingly impeded by technology and urbanization. You cannot know a person's history by their face, but you could potentially have a conversation with them and ask them questions, and if not specifically with the people in the photos, with others sharing space with you.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century viewer is both struck by JR's images' theatricality in a Friedan sense: for they play to the viewer and are dependent on a viewer to give them meaning.<sup>130</sup> Yet, at the same time, JR's images are also absorptive by nature, in that

---

<sup>130</sup> Michael Fried put forth the concepts of absorption and theatricality in painting. The theatrical painting prevented the viewer from entering and interacting with it, and the absorptive painting such as Courbet's *Funeral at Ornans* implicates the viewer in such a way that s/he feels almost like they might merge with it. The 21<sup>st</sup> century or millennial viewer's experience of the world is so aligned with technology and media, that there is no longer any real theatrical experience, as our visual vocabulary is image-centric. On Fried's concepts of Absorption and Theatricality see: Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), .; Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism or the Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

they appeal to the visual irresistibility of the perfected image (real or manipulated) that almost everyone of the millennial generation participates in; there is real life, and the life everyone else sees (almost like the physical body and the soul): the public self and the private self, though these are increasingly blurred. Each of us is royalty, as we present ourselves surrounded by our best attributes: friends, status symbols, personal causes. It is the belief in these images that results in their successful theatrical performance.

By displaying portraits in this manner, the individual portraits are subordinated to the collective whole. Through muted collectivity, they might recall Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* or serial representations of Marilyn Monroe or Elvis. Though JR has claimed that he does not want credit noted on the images themselves, his name is still associated with the projects overall, if not only for the fact of them conforming to his signature style. JR's name, as he is the artist, is associated with the projects.<sup>131</sup> Whereas seriality in Warhol was directed towards brand names or Hollywood commodities, and making eerie parallels between them, JR intends to do something different. Though his compendium of images as a whole could be taken as commodifying or commenting on the specular economy of images of the poor (an idea I will return to below), because of the participation of his subjects who feel that they

---

<sup>131</sup> When viewed through a certain lens, there is an interesting parallel to be made in viewing JR as the quintessential example of neoliberalism in action, as he outsources his work. Though, participants benefit, because they are making work for themselves as well as JR.



are benefitting from his projects, JR evades this attack.<sup>132</sup> Despite visual homogeneity, JR sees his work as emphasizing individuals as part of, instead of subordinated to, a collectivity and his participants seem to as well. Juxtaposedly, Warhol was a symptomatic artist, who revealed the symptoms of a culture through Hollywood and the massification of these images, JR claims to be interested in the individual as part of, but not subordinate to, a greater collectivity of which we are all a part.

As mentioned, the face is automatically appealing and attractive, whether it is someone else's or one's own, as evidenced by selfie culture, the most contemporary form of self-portraiture, and JR's work is complicit in this dialectic of this spectacle culture. However, contemporary JR's work is, the use of black-and-white printing for these images serves several functions: it democratizes each individual, placing them on an equal level with each other while at the same time, fixes them in time as it refers to the past. The repetitious expressions of various emotions verges on characterizing individuals in the portraits as types and creates a visual archive.<sup>133</sup> They portray individuals within larger populations.

As it is necessary to situate JR's images historically, let us consider Susan Sontag's essay on Diane Arbus, as both Arbus and JR are photographing people from a place of privilege compared to their subjects. Arbus who was known for photographing types, and focused on marginalized people; JR focuses on the poor in

---

<sup>132</sup> Also, interestingly, JR has not received much criticism in the press.

<sup>133</sup> See: Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October*, 39 (Winter 1986), 64.

*Women Are Heroes*, especially - which is in our capitalist, consumer-driven society, are modern day “freaks” in a culture where people are deluded into thinking they are more well-off than they actually are. Susan Sontag, in her 1977 book, *On Photography*, writes about Diane Arbus as a photographer that features the freaks and pariahs, on the margins of society. Sontag notes that Arbus, far from “spying on freaks and pariahs, catching them unawares, the photographer has gotten to know them, reassured them—so that they posed for her as calmly and stiffly as any Victorian notable sat for a studio portrait by Julia Margaret Cameron.”<sup>134</sup> JR is similar in that there is a reliance on him to project an image of the sitter. Sontag claims that “the mystery of Arbus’s photographs lies in what they suggest about how her subjects felt after consenting to be photographed...Do they know how grotesque they are? It seems as if they don’t,”<sup>135</sup> as they “show no emotional distress,” but instead are having their “detachment and autonomy” stressed. Arbus had neither Warhol's narcissism and genius for publicity nor the self-protective blandness with which he insulates himself from the freaky nor his sentimentality. Sontag assumes that, for Arbus to get her subjects to cooperate and look into the camera, she must have gained their trust, which she could have only done by becoming “friends” with them. Sontag thus appears to have arrived at another revelation: Arbus herself was a freak. Sontag questions Arbus’s character:

---

<sup>134</sup> Susan Sontag, “America, Seen Through Photographs Darkly,” *On Photography*, (New York: Rosetta Books, 2014), Kindle file, 35.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

For Arbus, both freaks and Middle America were equally exotic: a boy marching in a pro-war parade and a Levittown housewife were as alien as a dwarf or a transvestite; lower-middle-class suburbia was as remote as Times Square, lunatic asylums, and gay bars. Arbus's work expressed her turn against what was public (as she experienced it), conventional, safe, reassuring--and boring--in favor of what was private, hidden, ugly, dangerous, and fascinating. These contrasts, now, seem almost quaint. What is safe no longer monopolizes public imagery. The freakish is no longer a private zone, difficult of access. People who are bizarre, in sexual disgrace, emotionally vacant are seen daily on the newsstands, on TV, in the subways. Hobbesian man roams the streets, quite visible, with glitter in his hair.<sup>136</sup>

The mission of photographers is to uncover the truth and depict reality as formerly unseen.<sup>137</sup> Sontag divides photographers into two camps, those who photograph in order to self-express and those who practice photography to express reality.<sup>138</sup> JR uses photography in the latter sense; expressing a greater socio-cultural reality.

Sontag claims photography's strength lies in its ability to see the beautiful in the quotidian, the mundane and "has served to enlarge vastly our notion of what is aesthetically pleasing."<sup>139</sup> Photography's ultimate strength, therefore, is in its democratization of beauty. Likewise, JR's aim is to express a wide range of lives in an accessible and equal way, democratizing global images while making known and cosmopolitan his aesthetic. Sontag also goes on to note that the democratizing of the moment reduced the aesthetic appeal of the beautiful moment, as it became

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>139</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Picador, 2001), 105.

popularized, inflated and thus overly accessible to the masses. JR's black-and-white aesthetic reacts against this desensitization, however. Contemporary advertising and its slick, glossy, Photoshopped perfection is easily overlooked when JR's colossal portraits are pasted in the landscape, suggesting a temporal and visual rupture, as black-and-white images are rare in today's advertising and media, suggesting a transgression of time. Though, JR's images are very much of their time. The scale of his images competes with media and billboard imagery. Yet, unlike these modes, he represents people without Photoshop, in their "raw and natural" states. Instead of a preordained message, the viewer focuses on the individual to arrive at an opinion based on interaction and confrontation with the image, in other words, an experience—what we would theoretically be doing if we were not distracted by the products of contemporary, techno-saturated culture.

### **AUTONOMY & AUTHENTICITY**

JR grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, at a time in which NGOs were receiving an increasing amount of criticism, especially surrounding the civil wars in Somalia and Rwanda.<sup>140</sup> During the Rwandan genocide in 1994, both development and relief agencies acted without thoroughly understanding Rwandan society and without including beneficiaries in the development of programs. Because of this, as Causton

---

<sup>140</sup> Jennifer Causton, "The Challenge of Mainstreaming Conflict Sensitivity: PCIA Methodologies and the Organizational Culture of NGOs," *Atlantic International Studies Journal*, Volume 5: Spring 2009, [http://atlismta.org/online-journals/0809-journal-intervention/the-challenge-of-mainstreaming-conflict-sensitivity/#\\_ftn103](http://atlismta.org/online-journals/0809-journal-intervention/the-challenge-of-mainstreaming-conflict-sensitivity/#_ftn103).

notes, vulnerable populations were overlooked and “development efforts ended up reinforcing the authority of a privileged few.”<sup>141</sup> During this period NGOs received increasing aid funding from wealthy donors as well as from governments, which compromised the autonomy of NGOs.<sup>142</sup> This is just one of many criticisms of NGOs, but one that is the most discordant with JR’s beliefs and working process as an artist.<sup>143</sup> JR is staunchly dedicated to his autonomy as an artist and the rejection of capitalist exploitation through advertising and corporate sponsorship.<sup>144</sup> However, a paradox exists as JR is often involved with the Hollywood machine (or, fame outlets). JR sometimes collaborates with film stars or other famous persons, which draws attention and blurs the tenuous line between JR’s adherence to his purported beliefs and his compromising of them. Likewise, JR’s situational and fluctuating disdain for

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Kim D. Reimann, “Up to No Good? Recent Critics and Critiques of NGOs,” in *Subcontracting Peace: The Challenges of the NGO Peacebuilding*, edited by Oliver P. Richmond and Henry F. Carey (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 40.

<sup>143</sup> On page 39 of “Up to No Good?,” Reimann points out that NGOs are generally criticized for whether or not they attained their goals; accountability, representation, and transparency; dependence on external funding; commercialization; ideologically and politically motivated critiques of the rising influence of Western NGOs. I was not able to interview JR directly to obtain his specific objection to NGOs, however, it is clear that by operating according to his own methodology and autonomously, his aesthetic vision will not be compromised.

<sup>144</sup> Again Swoon points out the complicated relationship that a street artist has to corporations and hegemonic institutions when she points out that even though a show might not be sponsored, the people that own various corporations might be patrons of your work. Swoon, interviewed by Lara Bullock, 4 and 20 Blackbirds, Brooklyn, New York, May 1, 2014, transcript.

educational institutions such as museums and academia, and his embrace of Hollywood, potentially implicates him as guilty of the same corruption that he implicitly and explicitly lobbies at governments and corporations in terms of control and manipulation driven by large amounts of capital.

In a contemporary world where we daily experience a capitalist hellscape of media, political ideologies, money, and existential threats, JR seeks a return to human connections with less emphasis on an individual identity and more on a collective responsibility owed to one another. Instead of working with with NGOs or other humanitarian organizations, JR works independently.<sup>145</sup> As much of his work focuses on areas and people for whom government has failed, he prefers to work separate from organizations that are sponsored by governments in order to remain somewhat autonomous as an activist artist.<sup>146</sup>

Through working with Hollywood stars, JR increases his recognition and cultural cachet, which is historically the street artist's praxis. However, the superficiality of image in these collaborations is betrayed and presents us with another paradox given the fact that actors often earn proportionally exorbitant amounts of capital and that it is not uncommon for movies to be filmed in the same impoverished

---

<sup>145</sup> However, he will accept sponsorship from select funding groups such as in the case of his *Wrinkles of the City* project in Havana, for which he was sponsored by the Havana Biennial. For his other projects such as *Women Are Heroes* or *the Inside Out Project*, JR works independently. He is never "placed" in these locations.

<sup>146</sup> JR has referred to himself as an "artist" as well as the media. The use of monikers like "artist" and "Photographeur" are terms that in hindsight explain how JR has thought of himself at various points in time and while making various projects.

countries and cities which JR seeks to help through his work. The specific stars in question may not themselves be guilty of such offenses; however, JR by associating himself with those with large public profiles, while insisting that he is still somewhat anonymous, is implicated in producing corrupted and hollow images that are revered in Hollywood which frequently assigns arbitrary value based on economic accumulation, often at the expense of meaning. This entanglement with the Hollywood machine, however, comprises a relatively small percentage of JR's artistic production. With regard to the three projects discussed in this chapter, a Hollywood relationship is absent altogether. Although he delves into the larger world of stardom, he also continues to work in and with communities that are socio-economically less fortunate. In this regard the high profile associated with his interactions in the world of fame could potentially aid in shining the spotlight on these other projects.

Perhaps as a result of his success, JR is drawn to situations and spaces that have experienced hardship or that the media portrays as violent or dangerous; and his work responds to on-the-ground social needs. Each project discussed in this chapter shares a similar visual aesthetic: large format black-and-white photographs, printed on stock paper, and wheatpasted into landscapes.<sup>147</sup> They also have a social component, in that they are participatory; JR works with people who help shape the projects.

---

<sup>147</sup> While this black-and-white aesthetic has become synonymous with JR and incorporated into almost every project he has done (even when he has participated in dance and video work), he does not exclusively use black-and-white aesthetic; he utilizes color and other techniques outside of the particular style of images discussed here.

Sometimes JR is the main decision-maker in these projects and sometimes he acts as an “assistant” to the participants, or those featured in his photographs. In the case of the *Inside Out Project*, for example, JR travels and helps install projects which address specific themes developed by the participants. For JR, the art lies in the dialogue and collaboration that occurs in the production of these works, as well as in the final visual effect. In his words: “The photo is the art, you could say, but that would be a lie [ . . . ] What is most fascinating to me is the involvement.”<sup>148</sup> As discussed above, his motive is to “raise questions”<sup>149</sup> in the hope of challenging negative perceptions of and in relation to the places featured in his projects as well as people living through varied struggles which range in degree of intensity from adjusting to the devastating effects of extreme poverty, to life as an immigrant in New York City. The notion of “raising questions,” implies that JR is attempting to fix the consciousness of others. While this is undeniably true on some level, JR’s main focus is on empowering those with whom he works, in a more intimate and immediate, microcosmic level.

Above all, JR strives for an authentic experience through his art both between himself as artist and participants, as well as for those who see the projects in situ. In accordance with this, because part of the process for JR is the dialogue that results from his projects, he has stipulated that if the media wants information about his projects, they must venture to the actual sites of the projects and converse with the

---

<sup>148</sup> Khatchadourian, “In the Picture.”

<sup>149</sup> JR quoted in Marco Berrebi, JR, Christian Caujolle, and Françoise Docquier, *Women Are Heroes* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2012), n.p.



people represented in the pasted photographs: the people living in these communities.<sup>150</sup> For his part, JR has a habit of disappearing as soon as the press arrive to cover his work. As a result, press coverage on projects in villages outside of major civic centers is comparatively sparse, which is why JR's website and the cultivation of his persona which garners attention, are integral for his works' circulation. This highly controlled method of dissemination (the artist's website) could be viewed as a thinly veiled attempt at consciousness fixing, in that the artist's own website is the main avenue through which to view JR's work unless one travels to remote locations, buys his books, or attends his shows. This is, however also consistent with JR's desire to

---

<sup>150</sup> On the media in relation to JR's work: JR quoted on his *Women Are Heroes Project*: "What was interesting is that the media couldn't get in. I mean, you should see that. They would have to film us from a really long distance by helicopter and then have a really long lens, and we would see ourselves, on TV, pasting. And they would put a number: 'Please call this number if you know what's going on in Providência.' We just did a project and then left so the media wouldn't know. So how can we know about the project? So they had to go and find the women and get an explanation from them. So you create a bridge between the media and the anonymous women." [JR, "Subtitles and Transcript," TED, accessed January 3, 2015, [www.ted.com/talks/jr\\_s\\_ted\\_prize\\_wish\\_use\\_art\\_to\\_turn\\_the\\_world\\_inside\\_out/transcript?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/jr_s_ted_prize_wish_use_art_to_turn_the_world_inside_out/transcript?language=en). Also from CNN interview: "But a year later, and then I could never plan, the riot started in front of my photos. Because the two kids died in that neighborhood. So the first car that burned started in front of the photo of the guy holding his camera like a weapon. And suddenly, my work was all around the media. And the people were like, 'Hey, who did this? How does he (UNCLEAR) when no one can enter this neighborhood? Let's try and connect with this guy.' When they contact me by email. Lots of media wanted to have photo from me. And I was like, wait, no one have ever asked me - a real job - you know, photography - I was just doing this, you know, for fun. And now, I have a big decision to make. Do I want to do that? Or do I want to continue on the other path? That's when I say, 'No, I want to continue to do image. That I'll do this or I'll paint the way and where I want.'" [JR and Kristie Lu Stout, "Interview with Artist and Photographer, JR," *CNN*, aired October 5, 2012, [edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1210/05/ta.01.html](http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1210/05/ta.01.html).

stay out of the spotlight. JR's desire for authenticity and purity while embracing the Hollywood machine and art galleries, but rejecting the corporate world, academia, and museum sponsorship is paradoxical. Or is it? Authenticity in the realm of graffiti and street art usually refers to the authenticity and originality in terms of the style and intention of the piece created on the street in contrast to other street works. In this regard, JR's work is certainly original.

However, authenticity also refers to the idea that the artist has not sold out, as street art has developed out of the underground movement of graffiti, which has an often inaccurate reputation of being raw and unaffected. JR is against corporate sponsorship for his exhibitions, yet he participates in museums, which have a history of soliciting such sponsorship, even though they might forego this practice for the exhibition of his work. He explains that "If there's one thing I've always taken care of with my work, it's that it's never an advertisement for anything other than the work itself and for the people it's about — no 'Coca-Cola presents.'"<sup>151</sup> Pedro Alonzo, street art curator has spoken frequently about the difficulty of working with JR on this front.<sup>152</sup> JR refuses to compromise and only participates in projects that uphold his

---

<sup>151</sup> Randy Kennedy, "Award to Artist who gives Slums a Human Face," *The New York Times*, October 19, 2010, [www.nytimes.com/2010/10/20/arts/design/20ted.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/20/arts/design/20ted.html?_r=0). Therefore, maybe this is not a complete contradiction in that it is possible that JR only cares about image and what is projected to the public. Most art audiences might not investigate beyond noticing that the specific exhibition has no sponsor, and for JR this might be enough. JR's attitude is also bold, as in maintaining his stance on sponsorship, he is effectively saying "take me or leave me," thereby reiterating his non-reliance on institutions (on the surface, of course).

<sup>152</sup> Personal conversations between Pedro Alonzo and Lara Bullock.

beliefs. He acknowledges a need to exhibit his prints and videos and as long as his exhibitions are not sponsored, he feels like exhibiting his work in a museum or gallery is in alignment with his beliefs.<sup>153</sup> If it is not, he simply will not exhibit there.<sup>154</sup>

In his 2011 TED talk JR emphasized how he works without brands or sponsors so that he has no responsibility except to himself and his subjects or the people with whom he works.<sup>155</sup> In the HBO documentary about his *Inside Out Project*, entitled *Inside Out: The Peoples' Art Project*, the opening credits state that the project is not affiliated with any sponsor or corporate organization and that it is funded by private donation and the sale of his work.<sup>156</sup> JR is openly averse to corruption stemming from an entanglement of art and commerce and refuses to align himself with any corporate branding entity that would compromise his *own* brand. The authenticity for which he strives, occurs at an individual level between two people or groups of people and at its core, is not economically driven. Of course, JR does make money from publications

---

<sup>153</sup> Kennedy, "Award to Artist who gives Slums a Human Face."

<sup>154</sup> Out of the three artists discussed in this project, JR is the most cavalier with regard to his museum shows. He has no problem pulling out of or refusing to do a show if he believes it compromises his beliefs in some way. This is unusual, as for most artists who make it into exhibitions at major museums do not come from a street art background. For them, a show at a major museum is an end goal. For JR, it is simply a side-effect of the growing popularity of his work.

<sup>155</sup> JR, "JR: My Wish: Use Art to Turn the World Inside Out," *TED*, accessed April 1, 2015, [www.ted.com/talks/jr\\_s\\_ted\\_prize\\_wish\\_use\\_art\\_to\\_turn\\_the\\_world\\_inside\\_out?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/jr_s_ted_prize_wish_use_art_to_turn_the_world_inside_out?language=en).

<sup>156</sup> *Inside Out: The People's Art Project*, directed by Alastair Siddons (2013, Paris, France, Social Animals), film.

and prints, but because of his stance on sponsorship, this means he often funds large parts of his projects himself or that he finds others with whom to work whose beliefs align with his own. Communication scholar, Sarah Banet-Weiser, points out in her book *Authentic(TM): The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, which examines the complex relationship between a corrupt view of branding and its relationship to, and inseparability from, contemporary culture. She puts forth the idea that the separation of art and commerce is virtually impossible, as art has always had a tie to commerce and will most likely continue to do so. This even includes street art:

Surely this idea of the authentic has never accurately defined the relationship of art and commerce, in that artists have always been involved in collaboration with those industries and organizations that finance, distribute, and sell their work. From simpler relationships such as the artist as apprentice and that of artists and art dealers to the much more complex market for books, music, television, and film, artistic creativity has been imbricated throughout its history in commercial interests. Yet, the idea that commercialization corrupts the authenticity of art appears to continue to structure tastes, policy decisions about funding federal artwork, and cultural boundaries.<sup>157</sup>

JR openly participates in a market system and economic exchange, he sells his books through various outlets, such as Amazon.com, and his work appears in auction houses.

JR's selective alignment with commercial outlets such as art galleries complicates any

---

<sup>157</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic(TM): The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 99. See also *Sells Like Teen Spirit* by Ryan Moore for more on the complicated concept of selling-out as it relates to subcultures such as punk: "These notions of anticommercial authenticity, however, proved to be increasingly outmoded in a post-Fordist economy, as it became more and more difficult to maintain the familiar opposition between bohemia, on the one hand, and mass culture, rationalized work places, and state bureaucracy." *Sells Like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture, and Social Crisis* (New York: NYU Press, 2009 ), 120.

complete identification of JR as a typical street artist who subverts the institution, as he is at times complicit with it.<sup>158</sup> The decision behind JR's rejection of some institutions and embrace of others is often unclear. This antithetical stance permeates his practice thoroughly in that it is also present in his visual aesthetic which straddles the line between highlighting the individual versus creating a compendium of JR-style faces in which the individual becomes one of many. While his stance and alignment with these cultural, economic, and consumerist outlets might seem contradictory, JR is operating within a contemporary society in which finite dualisms of pure v. impure and inside v. outside have become blurred, if not irrelevant. The contemporary post-Fordist cultural climate is one of amalgamation and hybridity. JR's subversion exists through the making of his own decisions within this climate, which often deviate from ideas about how an artist should behave in the artworld.

## CONCLUSION

*It's like people are so afraid to lose things, and so by being afraid to lose everything, they will do whatever. For example they will print the same thing over and over because it sells. I don't care. Inside Out was the example. Two years ago I decided to give my techniques away. This is how you print and this is how you glue it. I am going to print for you and I am even going to pay for you if you want...all these people were like 'wait, but if you give your techniques away, what's left? Keep your copyrights'. I said 'no I am going to give everything*

---

<sup>158</sup> JR has an exhibition history that includes solo exhibitions at the following galleries: Lazarides (London, UK), Lazinc (Los Angeles), Dallas Contemporary (Dallas, TX). JR is not opposed to exhibiting in museums, per se, however, museums often require sponsorship for exhibitions, and that is the cause of friction between the artist and organization, as JR prefers to stay unaffiliated with any brand outside of his own.

*away I don't care'. This has helped me more than has taken me down. Of course I have spent a lot of money in it, but I love the interaction. I meet so many people. I wouldn't change that for anything.*  
 - JR, *Burn Magazine*<sup>159</sup>

For JR, the mediums of print, photography, and street work are inseparable. His method of working is immersive to the extent that the participants become part of the work. For his projects *Women Are Heroes*, *Wrinkles of the City*, and *Inside Out*, participants' portraits are photographed, printed in large-scale, and then pasted outside on the "street," which could refer to a favela, the walls of a building, or literally on the street itself. By nature, the street is a space for collaboration and with his prints and his website, JR takes that to the next level by connecting people from various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

However, while Warhol was inclusive of his viewer in that his work critiqued culture at large, JR is more inscrutable. He straddles the line in which he rejects the mainstream, but also embraces it through his involvement with celebrity culture and participating in a select number of art institutions. Since JR works collaboratively, the meaning of JR's images to various publics is diverse. For example, his *Women Are Heroes* action in the Kibera slum in Kenya is activated for the participants (the slum's inhabitants) on a different level than for the viewers outside of the community. The participants benefit from the practicality of the medium (here, the photographs were printed on vinyl) which when installed over the tops of houses, prevented flooding in their dwellings. For the viewer, the piece is activated through an awareness of the

---

<sup>159</sup> David Alan Harvey, "Conversation with JR," *Burn Magazine*, October, 2013, accessed May 15, 2015, [www.burnmagazine.org/essays/2013/10/jr-conversation](http://www.burnmagazine.org/essays/2013/10/jr-conversation).

concerns of the inhabitants and the strength of the women that reside therein. JR exposes classes that are well-off to socio-economic inequality that is perhaps a consequence of their lifestyle. The black-and-white patina of these large images stands out from the frenzied landscape of the modern city and commands a slowed-down perception, as giant, doleful eyes meet the gazes of passersby in their daily lives in which the littlest things are often taken for granted; the comfortable life of the middle class is disrupted by faces who are victims of serious forms of conflict and violence, and thus confronts them with the decision to ignore, identify with, or react to the various messages.

Although JR's personal and artistic freedom results from operating independently of sponsors and protecting his personal identity, there remains the fact that he exposes the causes and identities of others. He desires the focus to remain on the projects and people themselves instead of on himself. However, JR is a working artist who needs monetary compensation to continue to produce art, and because of this, it is important that his name is attached to his work. If JR wanted all the attention to go to the certain causes or issues that he is exposing, he might act completely anonymously, but then he would not be making art. Regardless, remaining anonymous is impossible at this stage in his career. On his website and various press outlets, there is no question that JR is the artist or orchestrator of these projects, unlike with, say Swoon's projects which often seem like total collaborations (JR's collaborative practice may in some ways remind one of Barbara Kruger and the Guerrilla Girls).

Instead of a complete collaboration in which each member is an equal partner, JR's role as artist fluctuates between collaborator and facilitator of certain projects, begging the question of what effect his art practice has in relation to the various causes he addresses, such as that of the resilience of women, or the importance of the elderly.

One argument for the effectiveness of art is that it provokes thought.

Anthropologist Justin Armstrong states that street art's "existence as a text is used not to impact some aesthetic value, but rather as a means to transcend the pre-fabricated worldview of the average city dweller."<sup>160</sup> JR aims to do both. In fact, through his aesthetic value, JR hopes to transcend world views of not only the average city dweller, but the artworld, and anyone who experiences his work. The proclamation that "JR owns the biggest art gallery on the planet," recurs in articles about JR and on the artist's website. JR references the art gallery, usually a realm of commodity exchange more than the exchange of intellectualism and ideas and he turns it on its head. In his gallery, he carries out his primary art practice exploring themes of artistic collaboration, action, commitment, freedom, identity, and limits between cultures in spite of our hyper-modern, connected world. JR is comfortable using mainstream outlets to engender modes of critique that might be enabled through his work. An institution like the supposed art gallery that JR embodies, is the product of capitalism gone amok (especially with regard to street art) – galleries being the arbiters of taste,

---

<sup>160</sup> Justin Armstrong, "The Contested Gallery: Street Art, Ethnography and the Search for Urban Understandings." *AmeriQuests*, Vol 2, No 1 (2005). Accessed May 18, 2011, [libdig10.library.vanderbilt.edu/index.php/ameriquests/article/view/46/37](http://libdig10.library.vanderbilt.edu/index.php/ameriquests/article/view/46/37), 8.



for a collector. An artwork's monetary value is often influenced by factors that have little to do with the actual quality of the work, itself. Contemporary artwork, and especially low-brow art, struggles with authenticity and relevance inasmuch as the art is not judged by aesthetic or social worth, but rather, on the basis of fabricated cults of personality. JR's contention that the entire world is his gallery mocks the artworld's capitalist structure as nothing more than an antiquated leviathan that cannot and should not survive in a globalized, cosmopolitan world. Because of this he is afforded the ability to relish his celebrity while insisting on anonymity in the name of placing the focus elsewhere.

JR's is a gallery where instead of money being a factor as to whether you may possess the art, it is free and democratic in that everyone might encounter art within the fabric of a city. And the communities in which JR works are often ones that would not have art galleries. Therefore, by sharing his work, he is making the world more cosmopolitan because he (like Swoon and Os Gêmeos) is providing connections and exposure to global issues and populations through his trans-cultural connection. He uses his celebrity status to shed light on communities he works with; this is his cause célèbre.

But what exactly is this service he is providing? It is democratic, but still retains the author function, as we have established. His work is not quite art and life, but art in the service of life. At this point in time, the art/life artwork is no longer shocking as it was when it was considered avant-garde in its nascency and has become

somewhat mainstream. JR is working to some extent on the heels of Kaprow and Fluxus, but with more at stake in that he is actually working with people outside of the artworld. Andrea Fraser in her Whitney Biennale essay speaks about the artworld's corruption and love affair with capital over creating socially aware or conscious artwork:

Any claim that we represent a progressive social force while our activities are directly subsidized by the engines of inequality can only contribute to the justification of that inequality – the (not so) new legitimization function of art museums. The only “alternative” today is to recognize our participation in that economy and confront it in a direct and immediate way in all of our institutions, including museums, and galleries, and publications. Despite the radical political rhetoric that abounds in the artworld, censorship and self-censorship reign when it comes to confronting its economic conditions, except in marginalized (often self-marginalized) arenas where there is nothing to lose – and little to gain – in speaking truth to power.<sup>161</sup>

Fraser is an artist whose work is institutional critique. JR shares her view.

Though JR's work is poignant by virtue of its action, aims, and message, it becomes active through repetition outside of these institutions. Instead of a single image, his large-scale portraits depend on seriality to create visual and subsequently, often moral (perhaps, empathic) impact on the streets. His various projects can be seen globally: the more one sees something, the more they absorb it, the more it resonates. JR's clear, visual style uses the mode or operating modes of propaganda, but there is no overarching program he is serving other than that of assuring his artwork's recognition and awareness. However, street art is no longer the graffiti artist's proclamation that “I

---

<sup>161</sup> First published in: Andrea Fraser, L'1%, C'est Moi, *Texte zur Kunst* 83, September 2011, 114-27.

am here.” Instead it says “Yeah, you know I am here, now let’s focus on these people over here.” On one level, JR is simply facilitating the exposure of small communities. Working on the *Inside Out Project* with my class at UCSD, passersby would stop and inquire as to the subject matter and who the individuals were that were featured in the project. This led to a discussion of the project’s intention and in ideal situations in which the participants were present, people talked about the issue at hand.

JR’s work makes a statement visually and also sometimes through words, which the viewer can decipher. He states:

Much of the work is about revalorizing a place through its own history. The projects often bring to light a strong sense of local pride. You know, people are proud of where they come from, but these areas are stigmatized because they’re always seen through sad and violent events. I want to provide another point of view, to encourage others to look at a place with fresh eyes and re-evaluate it.<sup>162</sup>

JR intentionally does not discuss the meaning of his work in any real depth.<sup>163</sup> There is an element of secrecy involved in his art. As an artist, JR does not set out to provide solutions to problems faced by his subjects, but instead, his stated intention is to raise questions about habitual and conditioned ways of living. While participants are not helped in terms of getting aid in a traditional sense of an NGO, their exposure gained through JR gives them a level of acknowledgement and empowerment (which straddles the uncomfortable question of exploitation). And for JR, it is these

---

<sup>162</sup> Patrick Nguyen and Stuart MacKenzie, *Beyond the Street: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010), 351.

<sup>163</sup> Marco Berrebi, *Women Are Heroes*, n.p.

relationships that are the foundation of his art more than the images. On his essay on portraiture and its relationship to the cultural fixation of the other, Allan Sekula makes a poignant statement that resonates with JR's project:

If we are to listen to, and act in solidarity with, the polyphonic testimony of the oppressed and exploited, we should recognize that some of this testimony [...] will take the ambiguous form of visual documents, documents of the "microphysics" of barbarism. These documents can easily fall into the hands of the police or their intellectual apologists. Our problem, as artists and intellectuals living near but not at the center of a global system of power, will be to help prevent the cancellation of that testimony by more authoritative and official texts.<sup>164</sup>

JR highlights the problems in the communities with which he works by allowing participants to convey their own personal stories through his spray painted images, his publications, and his films. He also provides an experiential, empirical experience for the participants who might encounter this work in situ. He intends to provoke questions, versus to provide direct solutions. At its heart, JR's work is in the business of helping people over amassing capital, even if at times his approach and execution are somewhat naive and unenlightened.

---

<sup>164</sup> Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October*, 39 (Winter 1986), 64.

### CHAPTER THREE: Swoon and Collaborative Evolution

*In life we should bring our greatest strengths to bear on what we do.*  
- Swoon interview with author 2014<sup>165</sup>

*Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities.*  
- De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* <sup>166</sup>

A piece simply referred to as *The Music Box Fence*, contains elements that typify a quintessential street piece by the artist known as Swoon [Figure 2.1]. Linocut prints are interspersed with intricate paper cutouts, each wheatpasted and incorporated into an overall composition arranged against a background. For this piece, the background is a fence constructed out of salvaged wood. *The Music Box Fence* commemorates a collapsed 18th-century house that once stood behind the fence, and is located on Piety Street in the Bywater neighborhood in New Orleans. The house was devastated by the flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The history of the domestic structure is alluded to within Swoon's composition by the wheatpasted figure of a man who is absorbed in the task of building a structure that suggests a magical version of the Victorian homes for which the Bywater is known; it appears magical because the beautifully haphazard, rebuilt version depicted in the wheatpaste defies logical construction as its rooms are assembled in impossible configurations. The man represented in the wheatpaste is Swoon's friend and collaborator Ben Wolf, but he could represent anyone in this community of New Orleans; he is a survivor.

---

<sup>165</sup> Swoon, interviewed by Lara Bullock, 4 and 20 Blackbirds, Brooklyn, New York, May 1, 2014, transcript.

<sup>166</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 97.



Figure 2.1 Swoon, *The Music Box Fence*, New Orleans, LA, photo by Lara Bullock

Occupying a central place in Swoon's overall composition, he is hard at work rebuilding as hopeful and eager wheatpasted children look on. An old woman joins them as she peers out from the fence with a grin. On one side, a dark elderly specter of a man with an oceanic body alludes to the hurricane. Brightly colored paper designs punctuate these wheatpasted figures, imbuing the composition with an overall cheerfulness and optimism. Swoon's delicate pieces tremble in the wind which is a harbinger of temporality, and is almost always the fate of work placed in the space of the street. The beauty of New Orleans was in an instant eradicated by Hurricane Katrina; so too in a summer storm or, as is the fate of much street art, could the work of another street artist (or even another storm) cause Swoon's latest piece to vanish into memory. Swoon embraces this natural cycle of disintegration and rebirth that occurs with street works, as it alludes to a narrative of continual vibrancy through regeneration. Street artists in general are not concerned with permanence as much as

the longevity of a work's impact, or in other words, an experience. Swoon's paper cutouts allow the fence that they are pasted on, made of salvaged wood from the destruction of the house that still bears remnants of a faint blue paint, to show through them. A symbiosis between art and wood occurs and Swoon's work becomes one with a part of the history of this site. The piece itself contains a narrative of destruction marked by the empty lot and a lone, cement front porch stairway that sits disembodied in front of her composition. However, the piece also speaks to a narrative of regeneration through its subject matter. A basketball hoop affixed to a telephone pole stands in front of the piece and, like the stairway, becomes part of the composition and alludes to a past and present life of play which stands in contrast to this landscape of loss. In a neighborhood marked by blight, this work lives as an active testament to what occurred and what has yet to change. Swoon wrote her name in the cement by the basketball hoop, an action that would be impossible in a busy public place like Manhattan's Madison Avenue. Background elements (the salvaged wood fence, the basketball hoop), as well as the temporal atmosphere, are marked by passersby in the neighborhood and become part of a lived experience. All are subsumed into the piece. No finite demarcation exists as to where Swoon's work concludes and the neighborhood begins. Just as the swirling blue paper tendrils that drift off subtly from the center of the composition and toward the houses on either side, there are no definite boundaries. There is openness and room for many narratives, meanings, and experiences to take place in the context of this setting. Coming across this piece is like

finding a treasure. For the citizens in the neighborhood and in New Orleans, this street composition is a visual message of hope and a marker of reverence for of New Orleans's history. Similar to a novel in which a story is written, readymade for the reader to project her own experience into its interpretation, this narrative is open-ended and likely to garner personal meaning for individuals who pass by it.<sup>167</sup>

The *Music Box Fence* was constructed in association with a project called the *Music Box: A Shanty Town Sound Laboratory*, which consisted of buildings assembled out of salvaged materials from the flood such as plumbing pipe, floorboards, and old windows, which were reconstructed so that they had the ability to play music. The *Music Box Fence* was constructed in front of these musical architectural buildings which occupied the space of the empty lot. The *Music Box* was a project on which Swoon collaborated with a local artist-run initiative called New Orleans Airlift. New Orleans Airlift was formed by local artists Jay Pennington and Delaney Martin after Hurricane Katrina. They were motivated by a desire to reinvigorate the artistic community in New Orleans by introducing artists to audiences through cross-cultural exchange: by introducing New Orleans artists to other cities and countries and by introducing artists from elsewhere to the artistic community in New Orleans. New Orleans Airlift, according to its Mission, focuses specifically on highlighting “underground art and under-the-radar artists, transporting the dynamic

---

<sup>167</sup> My course on street art at the University of California, San Diego required students to produce blogs and the result is testament to this inventiveness. With no key, it becomes whatever one needs or wants it to be. Works become sites of projection on the streets.



street culture, living folk culture and growing contemporary arts scene of New Orleans to far-flung locations around the world for exhibitions, workshops, festivals, performances, and collaborative projects.”<sup>168</sup> The funding methods for these projects ranges from Kickstarter campaigns to support from the Joan Mitchell Foundation, a foundation renown for its support of the arts. Swoon wanted to help after the Hurricane and so became involved with New Orleans Airlift as one of the invited artists. Swoon initially came up with the idea of building a musical house called *Dithyrambalina* with which the community would be able to interact.<sup>169</sup> However, because many locals did not quite envision what exactly a musical house would be, Martin came up with the idea of initially building the *Music Box*, for demonstrative purposes, on which Swoon was the lead artist. *The Music Box* was a series of smaller musical structures, instead of one larger musical house, as *Dithyrambalina* was envisioned to be. Each of the structures featured a different musical element: musical floorboards, guitars built out of the sides of walls, an array of percussive chandeliers, and so on. In order to introduce these structures to the community, a series of performances in which all of the structures were simultaneously played under the direction of a conductor, were arranged. I went on the night of one of the inaugural

---

<sup>168</sup> “Mission,” New Orleans Airlift, accessed May 2015, [www.neworleansairlift.org/index.php/about/mission](http://www.neworleansairlift.org/index.php/about/mission).

<sup>169</sup> Dithyrambalina, “Musical Houses in New Orleans,” *Rally.org*, [rally.org/dithyrambalina#!](http://rally.org/dithyrambalina#!) Swoon’s titles are as flowery as her aesthetic and also meaningful, as dithyramb means a “a chant of wild and abandoned nature sung by the cult of Dionysus to bring forth their god” which alludes to New Orleans’s rich musical heritage, Swoon’s renaissance training, as well as the literary aspect of her work.

performances and it was like being transported to an alternate reality. A large, eager line of spectators crowded the street to participate. As the space was in a neighborhood, people were lined up so that they could walk up a driveway, through a corridor, and eventually to a yard filled with these musical house-like structures. Childhood dreams of magical portals were realized. Each structure, including an elevated treehouse and elevated rooms of various shapes and sizes could be played or performed in some way. They were operated by mysterious costumed figures and the main event was conducted by a New Orleans musician named Quintron. This spectacle was notable for its unique, magical qualities, but also for its integration into New Orleans's culture by featuring local New Orleans artists like Meschiya Lake and Quintron, as well as members of the New Orleans Air Lift collective themselves.<sup>170</sup> The *Music Box* was so successful that this concept of musical architecture has been utilized in subsequent projects, such as *The Music Box Roving Village: City Park* (2015) on which Swoon continued to collaborate. Swoon's *Dithyrambalina* has not yet been built, but as New Orleans Airlift's website states, it "is still on the cards.... when we get our permanent site she will be our grand, magnum opus, looking out over the rooftops of the village she has spawned."<sup>171</sup>

---

<sup>170</sup> Other musicians took part as well, including Thurston Moore, Solange Knowles, and Wilco.

<sup>171</sup> "Dithyrambalina," New Orleans Airlift, accessed May 1, 2014, [www.neworleansairlift.org/index.php/component/k2/item/64-dithyrambalina](http://www.neworleansairlift.org/index.php/component/k2/item/64-dithyrambalina).

*Dithyrambalina* and *The Music Box* are projects that are exemplary of several elements of Swoon's practice which I want to make the focus of this chapter: collaboration; an on-going commitment to the projects and the people involved; aesthetic importance; and a socially-minded or philanthropic drive. In this chapter I will consider how Swoon's practice operates between fine art, activism, and street art. Swoon's work employs themes of escape and the reclamation of space in order to create a shared experience between viewers and/or participants. This shared experience transforms the art experience into one that is highly personal through the viewer/participant's participation in its construction; what I refer to as Swoon's brand of collaboration. This participation occurs in the form of authorial involvement in Swoon's work in the sense that viewers (aka participants) are able to change and mold the pieces, thereby entering into a unique form of collaboration with Swoon, sometimes directly and sometimes when Swoon is not present. Swoon's brand of collaborative gesture is accumulative, generative, and experiential. Her projects strive for a general sense of equality through the relinquishment or diffusion of her authorial control. In order to achieve this, she employs several strategies including the employment of this brand of collaborative gesture as well as the use of narrative to facilitate the experience of her work. Such qualities will be the focus of the three central works discussed in this chapter.

The understanding of the three projects discussed in this chapter — The *Swimming Cities* Series, *Encampment Ersilia*, and The Konbit Shelter Project — is

bolstered by the multivalent experience of collaboration that results from the context and interaction of both the audience and the participants within each piece. The collaboration happens both during and after the pieces are created in Swoon's surrendering of authorial control and through this process, Swoon's pieces become personalized and relevant to the individual people involved. Each of these three works exists within parameters that Swoon sets at the pieces' conceptions, but that are intended to evolve through the participation of others. This participation results in a form of collaboration because often their involvement transforms the work in new, unexpected ways. The nature of these collaborative projects renders them more conducive to an extra-institutional setting in contrast to the installations and street works that she is most known for, which are more easily transitioned into the museum space.<sup>172</sup> Swoon's brand of collaboration and participation are generally accepted under the auspices of fine art in the vein of already institutionalized social practice. However, different issues regarding ethics, fetishization, and exploitation arise when she works with communities outside of an institutional art context, such as with homeless populations (*Encampment Ersilia*) or the victims of natural disaster (Konbit

---

<sup>172</sup> Though, of course, placing Swoon's street works themselves in a museum robs them of their context, and a complete understanding and experience of her work. However, the mediums of paper cutouts and prints are in themselves conducive to a museum space with some adaptation. Street art, as an offshoot of graffiti is by nature extra-institutional. However, as street artists, especially since 2004 with the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition, have received an increased museum presence, and because the term street art is often applied to things that contain a certain "style" associated with street art (as in the work of Mark Dean Veca, for example who is known for spray painting walls in the gallery and employing a graffiti aesthetic).

Shelter Project). Because these populations are not protected under the auspices of art, there is a wild, uncontrolled, and potentially irresponsible element presented when an artist from a comparably affluent background works with communities from disenfranchised backgrounds.

\*\*\*

A self-professed tomboy, Caledonia Dance Curry (aka Swoon), was born in New London, Connecticut in 1978 and raised in Daytona Beach, Florida by hippie parents, who struggled with addiction. She has explained with regards to her childhood: “It’s true, my parents were hardcore drug addicts and my mother stayed an addict for the whole of my life. When I was ten years old, and I found painting, it absolutely saved me.”<sup>173</sup> Perhaps as a result of this upbringing, the trope of escape is recurrent in her work. Escape is evident through the act of reclaiming space, thereby escaping socially and legally dictated boundaries, as well as through the inventive freedom of her specific brand of collaborative process, which embraces a constant evolution. Her early works on the streets featured portraits and cityscapes, that she placed in street corners, alleys, or other inconspicuous spaces. Pedestrians’ discoveries of these works on the streets allowed the public to take ownership of these works (or to “claim” them) in a small way along with the spaces in which they were located. This poignant gesture of creating potential intimate moments of connection facilitated by an encounter on the streets, provided momentary escapes and connections to space

---

<sup>173</sup> RJ Rushmore, “Tim Hans shoots . . . Swoon,” *Vandalog*. September 1, 2013, <https://blog.vandalog.com/2013/09/tim-hans-shoots-swoon>.

in a way that is not facilitated in an increasingly privatized world with diminishing public spaces. These figures, intermittently spaced throughout the streets of New York City, provided moments of connection amidst growing gentrification as an effect of neoliberalism, corporate capitalism, and the privatization of public space. “It just feels like the spine of my work,” she says of these pieces, “I still love all of the stories that get related to me about what different pieces mean to people, and how it affects the neighborhood and how they feel about the decay and passing of each piece.”<sup>174</sup> Swoon recalls a moment in which one of her pieces, a small scene designed to fit within an inconspicuous peephole on a street in New York was adopted by a local man who claimed it and called it “The Secret.” He would lead people to it proudly as if he was sharing something of his with them and it created a “slightly magical space”<sup>175</sup> for the neighborhood. Moments of personal connection with the work and relationships developed through the work are the crux of Swoon’s artistic output even when pieces are collaborative in the sense that the works’ meanings are dependent on individual relationships with the work or Swoon herself. Like much street art, the work comes alive through an often unexpected encounter on the street.

---

<sup>174</sup> Melena Ryzik, “Life of Wonderment: Swoon Blurs the Line Between Art and Activism,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 2014, accessed August 7, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/10/arts/design/swoon-blurs-the-line-between-art-and-activism.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/10/arts/design/swoon-blurs-the-line-between-art-and-activism.html?_r=0).

<sup>175</sup>Walrus TV, “Walrus TV Artist Feature: Swoon Interview from “The Run Up,” Youtube, 10:02, May 27, 2009, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtEDSQblGVo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtEDSQblGVo).

As a young adult, in 1999, Swoon moved to New York and enrolled in the Pratt Institute from which she graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 2002.<sup>176</sup> Attending a traditional art school indicates that she had every intention of becoming a professional artist.<sup>177</sup> An art school degree was not common amongst graffiti artists coming up in the 1980s, but it became increasingly common for artists of Swoon's generation regardless of whether or not they worked on the street. She developed her voice at the Pratt Institute where she initially practiced classical Renaissance style painting, but soon began working on the streets. She was interested in the idea that work on the streets could belong to everyone in the sense of its being immediately relatable as well as through its potential significance to a diverse public. Swoon was specifically concerned with public space where she was living at the time, in New York, and "how [its inhabitants could] make [New York their] own while real-estate developers suck[ed] up [its] coasts."<sup>178</sup> This interest in the authentic, underground culture of everyday people and reclaiming space became a focus in her work.

Swoon's early street work post-college began with very a specific interest in local geographical and financial concerns which developed as a result of her

---

<sup>176</sup> Swoon, interviewed by Lara Bullock.

<sup>177</sup> Pratt Institute is known for its commercial art programs in addition to fine art.

<sup>178</sup> Vanessa Grigoriadis, "Barging into Venice," *New York Magazine*, June 7, 2009, accessed May 15, 2012, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/57181>. New York and its boroughs are mostly surrounded by water. Swoon's reference to the "coasts of New York" here refers to the edges of the city where the land meets the water, which is usually prime real estate and the site of various businesses and warehouses.

experience living and working in New York. She became involved in various outsider movements such as freeganism as well as concerned with sustainability in her art practice. Despite her participation outside of the mainstream artworld, or perhaps because of it, Swoon's practice gained notoriety both within the artworld and the street art world, and has expanded its focus to global public spaces.<sup>179</sup> Unlike a territorial art form like graffiti, street art tends to be focused methodologically on the public's reception of it instead of the territorial claims of the artist. There is less of a concern with marking individual space; instead, a chief aim of street art is communicating a specific message that is legible to the public. In fact, especially since the ubiquity of internet access and the conception of blogs, street artists often meet in various countries to collaborate on projects which contribute to an ever-expanding, and increasingly complex global dialogue about public space. This turning inward, towards collaboration and a concern for fostering personal connection, especially with Swoon, within such a public genre, is but one of the paradoxes of modern day street art, as I pointed out in the Introduction.

Swoon's is one such art practice that is geared towards an expansive, less exclusive public on the streets. Most likely, the politics at work in her art are a direct response to producing work in an era of increasing neoliberalism and advanced capitalism. By placing work on the streets that is available to all, not for sale, and

---

<sup>179</sup> Swoon had her first gallery show in New York at Deitch Projects in 2005 and has since participated in national and international exhibitions at museums including the ICA Boston, the Brooklyn Museum, and Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, as well as various galleries.



focused on human connection instead of the desire for things or monetary gain, Swoon is providing a momentary, temporal escape from what Mike Davis defines as, “an authoritarian utopia that is nothing less than ‘a program of the methodical destruction of collectives.’”<sup>180</sup> In providing an accessible, open, and free artwork on the street, Swoon potentially connects various populations through the common, shared experience of encountering this work on the streets. Davis argues that social inequality is not a consequence, but a goal of the contemporary economy, which privileges and enables “evil paradises” or, depending on perspective, “dreamworlds” to exist in an environment in which the distribution of wealth is exorbitantly skewed to the extent that “desires . . . are clearly incompatible with the ecological and moral survival of humanity.”<sup>181</sup> Gentrification is a direct result of this neoliberal drive, and New York with its Donald Trumps as well as its blend of hipsters and artist communities is subject to an inevitable roulette of displacement. In other words, the domestication of grittiness or “cool” aids in the creation of a Disneyland of cultural diversity. Since the 1970s with the introduction of informal social controls such as the Broken Windows Theory and the financial boom in the 1980s, there has been a not so silent struggle

---

<sup>180</sup> Mike Davis, *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*, Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk, eds. (NY: The New Press, 2007), x.

<sup>181</sup> Mike Davis, xv.; for more on Neoliberalism and its effects on art and development see: Rosalyn, Deutsch, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* Graham Foundation/MIT Press Series in Contemporary Architectural Discourse. Chicago, IL: Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996) and "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City." *October* Access full text 47 (1988): 3-52.

over the use and production of space, not just in New York, but globally.<sup>182</sup> As Neil Smith points out, this struggle is “heavily inscribed by social class (as the nomenclature of “gentrification” itself suggests) and race, as well as gender.”<sup>183</sup>

Swoon’s concern for the individual as person (and producer) versus as consumer and her desire for an inclusive experience to result from her work, play out as an attempt to reclaim space by reinstating on-the-ground interventions and relationships between individuals at street level. Swoon’s practice is not marked by pseudo-individualistic desires for fame, fortune, and status; these desires are pseudo-individualistic in that they are implicitly understood as unique, when in actuality are part of a dominant pop cultural paradigm that is based on box-office or chart topping — i.e. monetary — success which, as part of a universal “globalized” metric of success, is in reality homogenized via its manufacture as it is all governed by capital.<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>182</sup> For more on informal social control see the concept of the Broken Windows theory introduced in the 1982 issue of *The Atlantic*: George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson, “Broken Windows: Police and Neighborhood Safety,” *The Atlantic*, March 1982.; Philip G. Zimbardo, “The human choice: Individuation, reason, and order versus deindividuation, impulse, and chaos,” *1969 Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, ed. W. J. Arnold & D. Levine (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 237-307. Mayor Rudolph G. Giuliani and Bill Bratton, commissioner of the New York City Police Department, in 1994 were big proponents of the Broken Windows Theory and used it in his arguments to remove graffiti from New York City subway stations.

<sup>183</sup> Neil Smith, *New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the New Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996), 89.

<sup>184</sup> Swoon has been involved in the freegan movement and has established several art collectives throughout the years, such as Toyshop Collective and Rockaway Armada and is a member of Just Seeds and the Transformazium.

Swoon's practice which explores a liberating visual, verbal, and moral aesthetic, recalls Michel De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which explores how ordinary people subvert the dominant hegemonic economic order from within. He argues that through a pedestrian existence governed by on the ground tactics and experiential maps, one can and does exist within these dominant structures while also subverting them. Employing a linguistic metaphor, De Certeau portrays the poetic geography of the city (or, a more authentic, real city versus a mediated one) as made up of both ambulatory exploration as well as its construction through naming and spoken word. This stands in contrast to a geography that is imposed upon it, such as the less experiential and carefully orchestrated design of the city as determined by a map or the creation of major thoroughfares. This notion of a division governing modern, capitalist modes of existence in which methods of control are instituted (à la Foucault's panopticon), and in which social relations (that are often also tied to the economy) are played out - is the sort of in-between space in which people usurp control over everyday life (and actually create a modern society) or, to use De Certeau's metaphor, how they take control of writing the text (that is supposed to govern the operation of the dominant social order). De Certeau uses the term "text" to describe the temporal construction of lived experience, or the creation of spatial stories which define and redefine the city. Swoon's work participates in and facilitates the creation of alternate universes or cities through interactive experiences, especially in moments of connection through collaboration. De Certeau points out a phenomenon of

contemporary culture in *The Practice of Everyday Life* in which there is an opposition between stories which are of the private realm of the individual, family, and neighborhood, and those of the media which propagates rumors that cover everything and assume the power “under the figure of the City, [of] the masterword of an anonymous law.”<sup>185</sup> Therefore, it is the job of the “swarming mass” made up of individuals and their experiences to create real, authentic moments which are the heart of the city.<sup>186</sup> He comes to the conclusion that a meaningful interaction and experience of the city occurs through on-the-ground tactics, conversations, and experiences. I see Swoon’s working with locals and her slipping fluidly between actions that are sanctioned and unsanctioned, as conversant with De Certeau’s theory.

De Certeau sees the act of penning one’s own spatial stories as an act not of production, but of consumption. He argues that in our consumer driven culture (or to use De Certeau’s term, “showbiz society”)<sup>187</sup> consumption instead of production is the site of real transgression and action. Accepting that we have become a consumer society and that it is impossible to survive or exist without consuming, it is the method of consumption (or tactics) the consumer employs that holds real, subversive potential. De Certeau states that consumption is “devious . . . because it does not manifest itself

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>187</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xxi.

through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order.”<sup>188</sup>

The collectivity of the masses undergoing various tactical maneuvers, creates an “indiscipline”<sup>189</sup> in which “the weak make use of the strong, thus lend[ing] a political dimension to everyday practices.”<sup>190</sup> De Certeau suggests certain arenas in which these tactics are carried out, a central one being the act of walking, which is characterized (like reading) by elements of drifting, wandering, improvisation, and “leaps over written spaces in an ephemeral dance”<sup>191</sup> which results in a unique, independent, and unprescribed poetic geography of the city; or in other words, the creation of a “fictional space”<sup>192</sup> (as it is not hegemonically determined) which helps people escape from and balance with the present.

Swoon’s concept of a “magical space” that is created through the collaborative and experiential nature of her work, as demonstrated on a small scale by the man’s discovery of “The Secret,” but more so in the following three projects that will be discussed in this chapter, is conversant with De Certeau’s search for “practices that are foreign to the ‘geometrical’ or ‘geographical’ space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., xxi.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 79.

constructions.”<sup>193</sup> These ‘geometric’ or ‘geographical’ spaces that De Certeau refers to are the expected, prescribed methods of experiencing a city; the city as viewed by those removed from the street. These are contrasted with alternative, subterranean spatial realities.<sup>194</sup> The flaneur or drifter dwells here, and through his organic, whimsical explorations, he forms the lifeblood of the city. This is ultimately freeing, as this pedestrian drifting represents an independence from the planned, panoptic, controlled experiences of daily life. This is effectually what Swoon’s work is achieving when she creates alternate universes or even literal cities in her works which will be the focus of this chapter. Swoon’s frequent references to a “magical space” which is achieved through collective activity, creates, or at the very least hypothesizes an alternate mode of being within dominant modes of consumption as evidenced by things like funding sources, institutional supports, and barriers. As we will see with *Swimming Cities* series and *Encampment Ersilia*, “a different world (the reader’s) slips into the author’s place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment.”<sup>195</sup> This fictional space (or in Swoon’s case, this magical space), De Certeau’s concept of existing in a poetic geographical “in-between” space, is a way in which to frame Swoon’s work.

---

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>194</sup> Ironically, de Certeau states that the only suitable inscribed literal text of this metaphorical space would be New York subway graffiti. Ibid., 102.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., xxi.

Swoon's carefully cultivated style and brand has earned her a position as one of the most recognized street artists in the world, which is especially rare because of her gender, as street art is predominantly associated with male practitioners, though this is slowly changing. Her admiration by fellow artists, the artworld, and the public, speaks to the merit of her art. In addition, it indicates that there is room for her in this historically male dominated field. Since Swoon is the only female artist in this study, I feel it is necessary to mention something of the role of women in street art. In the street art world there are practical as well as ideological reasons for the underrepresentation of women. As both graffiti and street artists often do their work at night, certain risks are involved. As one woman writer put it "guys only have to worry about getting arrested, jacked or killed. We have to worry about all that plus more like getting kidnapped or raped."<sup>196</sup> It is certainly not because women are not strong enough to carry a can of spray paint, or because they may get their hands dirty that explains their virtual absence. Instead, it is often a fear for their safety. However, as the street artworld is increasingly embraced by the artworld and recognized by a

---

<sup>196</sup> Nicholas Ganz, *Graffiti Women: Street Art from Five Continents* (New York: Abrams, 2006).

greater public, this is changing, as writers and street artists do not face as much danger as they did during the various “Wars on Graffiti.”<sup>197</sup>

There is no overt signifier that betrays the street artists’ sex. In fact Swoon recalls “I had been at it for a couple of years, making work on the street, when suddenly people started to want that Swoon guy to come to their town and do shows . . . I decided to go ahead, travel, and participate in those shows, and I found that so much of the time the only females represented were girlfriends or sidekicks.” She asks, “Where were my lone wolf she mamas, tearing themselves a clear place to stand on?”<sup>198</sup> Swoon is an example of a street artist who has freed herself from the gendered baggage of graffiti, even though on the streets she is most likely subject to pervasive judgments that come with the territory of being a female street artist, such as those regarding the characterization of her style. Of course, one could look for “signs” of femininity in her work, perhaps focusing on the delicate nature of a paper cut-out and

---

<sup>197</sup> The phrase “Wars on Graffiti” refers to the struggle in New York to rid the MTA or New York City subway trains of graffiti. The war was first waged in 1972 by politician turned mayor John Lindsay who declared graffiti to be a crime, and came to an end in 1989 when the trains were declared graffiti free due to the launch of the “clean cars” and “clean stations” programs in 1984 by New York City Transit Authority president David L. Gunn. James Brooke, “Subways are Cleaner, Transit Authority Says,” *The New York Times* (June 14, 1986), <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/14/nyregion/subways-are-cleaner-transit-authority-says.html>.; Constance L/ Hays, “Transit Agency Says New York Subways are free of Graffiti,” *The New York Times* (May 10, 1989), <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/10/nyregion/transit-agency-says-new-york-subways-are-free-of-graffiti.html>.; Heather MacDonald, “Graffiti is Always Vandalism,” *The New York Times* (December 4, 2014), <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/07/11/when-does-graffiti-become-art/graffiti-is-always-vandalism>.

<sup>198</sup> Ganz, *Graffiti Women*, 9.



conveniently ignore it when discussing the work of male artists who use the same medium.

The anonymity that accompanies street art is potentially freeing in more ways than one. The street art audience on the actual street, unlike those inside the graffiti or street art community, does not usually know the gender of the artist, as the work speaks for itself on the walls outside. Therefore, the street artist is afforded a unique opportunity to exist outside of gender.

As seen above with the *Music Box* and its accompanying *Music Box Fence*, Swoon's trademark style involves the use of elaborate paper cut-outs mixed with woodblock and lino-cut prints often overlaid with colorful paints and washes to effect sketchy portraits (usually of friends or family members) and cityscapes. Often, but not exclusively, we find these portraits and landscapes wheatpasted on the streets. However, they are also included in Swoon's installations. Swoon's installations, like *Os Gêmeos's*, combine found or salvaged materials to effect an immersive aesthetic (in Swoon's case, this is motivated by a concern for sustainability. Her use of cutouts was initially born from her interest in Indonesian shadow puppetry.<sup>199</sup> However, instead of

---

<sup>199</sup> Indonesian shadow puppetry (wayang kulit) is a medium which features two types of puppets: wooden three-dimensional puppets (wayang klitik) and two-dimensional leather shadow puppets (wayang kulit). These puppets have elaborate designs which feature intricate cut-out patterns and are made to enact narratives behind a screen onto which light is shone to effect shadows which aid in enhancing the drama of the narrative as well as highlighting the design of the puppets. Wayang klitik figures also enact narratives in front of the screen. "Culture: Intangible Heritage," United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), [http://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/index.php?s=films\\_details&pg=33&id=3759](http://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/index.php?s=films_details&pg=33&id=3759).

light shining through holes against a screen to create a shadow, Swoon's work on the street allows for the "natural" collage of the city created by the texture of walls, remnants of paint, or advertising posters, to "shine" through her wheat-pasted designs and figures.<sup>200</sup> Possessing a delicate, handmade-feel, her collages contrast with the typical wheat-pasted poster in the vein of Shepard Fairey's *Obey* posters. Indeed, Fairey's work possesses a mass-produced, propaganda poster aesthetic with clean, digital graphics rendered on a larger piece of paper or painted on a wall. Swoon's process is much more intricate. To create a print, she first creates an elaborate drawing on paper and then cuts this design into linoleum or woodblock. It is then inked and pressed onto a surface to create a print. Therefore, unlike Shepard Fairey's work, the lines evident in Swoon's print-work indicate the gesture of her hand. Swoon's style has an intimacy and a personal, subjective element which is intentionally opposed to the typical brand aesthetic of billboards, or even other street art that is meant to be read quickly as is Fairey's work. The fact that Swoon's work invites slow-looking on the often chaotic atmosphere of the street, is yet another paradox contained in her street work.

Beyond handmade qualities, Swoon's work is comprised of several narrative elements working together: a story or relationship which inspired her; the visual narrative within the piece; and the experiential narrative on the part of the viewer/

---

<sup>200</sup> Caledonia Curry, "Swoon" (festival presentation, *The Influencers 2009: Art, Communication Guerrilla, Entretenimiento Radical*, Centro de Cultura Contemporanea de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain, February 5-7, 2009).

participant. In addition, Swoon's titles are often historically referential and she often writes descriptive prose to accompany her projects. Swoon's influences are many, but books are particularly important for her creative process. In my interview with Swoon, she cites Gabor Mate, a Canadian MD who writes about addiction, Derrick Jensen, Angela Carter, and Italo Calvino as major influences on her work. In fact the magical realist style that Carter is known for is a fitting descriptor of Swoon's work.<sup>201</sup> When entering one of Swoon's installations one is transfixed by its absorptive, phantasmagorical nature created by the elaborate display, while simultaneously being aware of any issues that the installation comments on, such as the recent devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in the Bywater piece. Swoon's work often has a critical element to it, in that she explicitly and implicitly critiques social and political issues through her artistic actions, such as pushing the boundaries of what constitutes freedom, as well as exploring themes of reclaiming space, identity, and control in a hyper-mediated world. Swoon's work is criticism swathed in magical fairy tale. The narratives resultant from the experience of Swoon's projects elicit a sense of wonderment that is also experienced when discovering her work on the street.

Though her figures are meant to be relatable in that they invite the viewer to project themselves into real or imagined scenarios, Swoon's subject matter is personal as it focuses on people whom she has known, seen, or met on the street. These figures show up repeatedly within her oeuvre, like recurring characters in a novel or play. For

---

<sup>201</sup> Magical realism is a quality that is also shared by Os Gêmeos's, whom I will discuss in chapter three.

example, Ben Wolf who was featured in the *Music Box Fence*, has recurred in countless other of Swoon's pieces on the street and beyond. Yet, unlike most novels, Swoon's work is experiential and dependent on human interaction in a corporeal sense. The medium of portraiture, through which she represents people, elicits emotion, recognition, and identification in the viewer. Swoon intentionally portrays specific people she has known versus generic prototypes because she believes that somehow these connections are translated through the work and that viewers somehow sense and identify with the intimacy and realness of each specific moment of portraiture that her aesthetic gestures provide. Portraiture as done by Swoon becomes a diary, a souvenir, and an index of an encounter, which is made available to all through the viewer's cumulative life experiences. Through this recognition of a realness in Swoon's images, we identify with the image as an index of a familiar relationship and therefore, its authenticity.

As I earlier noted, Swoon's work is very much geographically rooted. With the piece described above, it becomes part of a street or a neighborhood, as well as the population that lives there. There is a recognition that accompanies encountering a piece repeatedly, and in doing so the work begets a certain familiarity for viewers — a sense of ownership. In Swoon's own words:

Lately I have wanted to give all of my attention to reflecting our humanness, our fragility and strength, back out at us from our city walls in a way that makes all of these fake images screaming at us from billboards seem irrelevant and cruel, which is what they are . . . I want

to make a small moment of refuge in human connection out of paper stuck to a wall.”<sup>202</sup>

Swoon loves the story of the man taking ownership of her piece he called “The Secret” because it is an example of someone connecting with her work emotionally, and of her work making a positive difference in someone’s life.<sup>203</sup> It is about a feeling of ownership over this thing he found, which became his possession. Something in the image resonated with him. It was something special in *his* neighborhood. It is an example of the public space of the city actually belonging to one of its citizens versus the city government or a corporation, as well as the potential space for the construction of alternate universes within everyday experience.

I want to turn now to the first of the three major projects discussed in this chapter, Swoon’s *Swimming Cities* series, a series of interventionist performances, which employ each of her major themes, reclaiming space, collaboration, and escape. They serve as a bridge which links her street work to *Encampment Ersilia* and the Konbit Shelter Project which I will subsequently address.

## **SWIMMING CITIES**

I met Swoon in the summer of 2010 when I was working as a Curatorial Research Assistant at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (MCASD). Our

---

<sup>202</sup> Ganz, *Graffiti Women*, 204.

<sup>203</sup> Swoon’s piece was one of the viewfinder pieces created as part of the exhibition *Wooster on Spring* curated by the Wooster Collective and Elias Cummings in 2006.

initial introduction was through email, as it was my job to gather information for wall texts and to make sure she, as well as the other artists, were prepared for the upcoming exhibition, *Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape*, which was curated by Pedro Alonzo (2010). Swoon was planning an installation that required me to search local nurseries for sweet potato plants which were to be incorporated into her piece, *Swimming Sisters of Switchback Sea* [Figure 2.2]. The central figures represented in the installation at the MCASD were portraits which had appeared in Swoon's earlier pieces; a female couple in an embrace atop a structure made of materials that resembled the mast of a ship; the entire assemblage meant to represent a "swimming city."

This image of two women was a print on salvaged wood and represented — two sisters — again, based upon Swoon's friends, in this instance, poets and street artists Naima and Alixa. Rapt expressions spread across the women's faces. One figure kissed the other and enveloped her in what seemed like a protective, motherly embrace, a sentiment which echoed that of a woman in a dream Swoon had which inspired the image.<sup>204</sup> The other figure gazed out at the viewer: both welcoming and acknowledging the presence of an outsider. As viewers, we were given an invitation to immerse ourselves in the piece. Swoon has said that in each one of her portraits, she attempts to document something essential that she loves about the person represented

---

<sup>204</sup> The origin of the image of the embracing women in *Swimming Sisters of Switchback Sea* was a dream Swoon had in which a woman told Swoon that she and her *Swimming Cities* crew could dock their boats in her skirts. The benevolent woman evolved into the image of two sisters embracing.



Figure 2.2 Swoon, *Swimming Sisters of Switchback Sea*, 2010, *Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, [mcasd.org](http://mcasd.org)

so that viewers can experience that realness for themselves as it is translated through the work.<sup>205</sup> Indeed, the contrasting emotions of the two women, one nurtured and one nurturing, are compelling images that invite the viewer to circumambulate this swimming city with the excited eyes of an explorer investigating a mystery versus

---

<sup>205</sup> Walrus TV, “Walrus TV Artist Feature: Swoon.”

looking upon salvaged junk. This image of the couple appeared twice more; the three images assembled together at the top of the piece to create a triangular formation about eighteen feet in the air supported by a cacophony of wooden ladders painted black, ropes, potato plants, old bottles, dirt piles, an empty chest opened and toppling on its side, and various other pieces of salvaged materials, everything touched by Swoon's paper cut-outs. The delicacy of the cut-outs was mirrored by the emotion in the couple's embrace, which also served to unite the composition. The MCASD piece was grandiose in stature; it incorporated life (the plants standing in for people) and the experience of the viewer to connote potential narratives of survival (plants growing in an unnatural situation of an art piece), protection (imaged by the embrace), and freedom (the notion of a swimming city). This installation is another index of encounter – though this time, not only a memento of a relationship the artist had, as with her wheatpastes of people she has met, but to a series of actions or performative processions: the *Swimming Cities* performances, which I will discuss below.

*Swimming Sisters of Switchback Sea* is an homage to the *Swimming Cities* series — in which Swoon, along with a diverse group of between thirty and forty friends, musicians, and artists in their twenties and thirties, made three different voyages on makeshift sea-crafts assembled out of junk and fueled by salvaged Mercedes and Volkswagen car engines which ran on biodiesel as well as solar



power.<sup>206</sup> There were three voyages that comprised the *Swimming Cities* series. On each voyage, there were multiple sea crafts, and in true nautical fashion, each sea craft was given a name. The first voyage, the *Miss Rockaway Armada* set sail in 2006-7 down the Mississippi River. The second voyage was called *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*, and sailed down the Hudson River in 2008. *Swimming Cities of Serenissima* was the final voyage which took place in 2009 and sailed through the Adriatic Sea from the Karst region of Slovenia culminating in the crashing of the Venice Biennale.<sup>207</sup> [Figures 2.3 - 2.5] For each of these voyages, there was a crew comprised of a varying number of artists and musicians who collaborated in the construction of the vessels, and who subsequently inhabited these sea crafts as they made their way to their destinations. There was no curator or gallery who commissioned these voyages (though Swoon's former gallery Deitch Projects, helped fund the second voyage which culminated in an exhibition). Each participant had their own personal reasons for participating, though all were hoping to have an experience which proved that there are alternative ways to live outside of the everyday struggle for the pursuit of something like an American Dream. As indicated in the pseudo-documentary film *Flood Tide* based on the *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*, some

---

<sup>206</sup> La *Serenissima* Repubblica is the historical name for Venice which is translated as "the most serene Republic of Venice." David Rosand, *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>207</sup> The final installment of this series could be seen as the *Submerged Motherlands* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 2014 which included three of these sea crafts installed as part of a larger installation which explored issues of climate change and the artists relationship to her own mother.



Figure 2.3 Swoon, *Miss Rockaway Armada*, 2006-7, Mississippi River, [caledoniacurry.com](http://caledoniacurry.com)



Figure 2.4 Swoon, *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*, 2008, Hudson River, [caledoniacurry.com](http://caledoniacurry.com)



Figure 2.5 Swoon, *Swimming Cities of Serenissima*, 2009, Venice, Italy, [caledoniacurry.com](http://caledoniacurry.com)

of the reasons for participation were simply: because they didn't have jobs, because they got fired, because they hoped to find themselves. Swoon says that everyone had something to contribute and ideas to share during the conception and building of the vessels, as well as reasons for partaking in an adventure such as this. Swoon's personal motivation was, in her words, that:

I wanted to build a floating microcosm of all that I held dear about the creative culture that I call home. I wanted to navigate that microcosm to places where arriving in such a form would appear as shocking as a miracle. I wanted to live on a honey-comb of junk rafts, grow food, compost our waste, build our own motors that ran on grease, and learn how to live in a different way than the system we now know, which gobbles up species at the rate of 100 per day, and wages wars of aggression over resources. I wanted there to be performances, and workshops and a zine library and sewing circles, and guided tours, and

more than anything I wanted to find myself, at 16, waiting, in a small town, for something like us to appear.<sup>208</sup>

Swoon's writings and explanations of her works, as demonstrated above, project a certain optimism and idealist spirit which is genuine and which also serves as an effective tool to mobilize many people for her projects. Swoon admits that the actual on-board experience was punctuated with moments of despair as well as elation, and that the crafts were not as sustainable in practice as the crews had desired, for example, while the crafts ran on biodiesel, the crew still created waste.<sup>209</sup> In the end, however, the voyages themselves still embodied the themes of collaboration, the reclamation of space, as well as a form of personal, symbolic escape from dominant modes of art production and everyday life.

---

<sup>208</sup> Swoon, "The Miss Rockaway Armada," *Caledonia Curry*, [caledoniacurry.com/rockaway.php](http://caledoniacurry.com/rockaway.php).

<sup>209</sup> Swoon: "Well...we did a lot better at singing and dancing and telling bad jokes than at forming anything sustainable. Most days, through the tears of stress and bliss, I thought it would be better for the river if we got this hunk of junk a million miles away from it. Especially the days when the motors broke down incessantly, stranding us terrifyingly in the path of oncoming barges, everyone screaming at everyone else -- everything broken, dirty, trampled underfoot, and fallen overboard, and no one could get along, and nothing that we tried to do seemed to matter, at all, in, any way. Yeah, those days I longed for simplicity, and reprieve, and to have had different dreams than these. But, there were mornings when Ellery would come back with wild amaranth greens collected from the forests by the side of the river for breakfast, and when 30 people would produce no more than one tiny bag of garbage for the week, and when we seemed to survive on sunshine and the glow of Midwestern hospitality, which is in itself a force of nature. People would flock to the boats in a state of awe, searching for words, and finding only, "What are you?" I could feel on these days that we were changing lives in some modest but stubbornly glimmering way. I know only because I have never seen light in faces like this light when people would say, 'I've always dreamed of doing something like this, and now here you are.'" Ibid.

The construction of the vessels in the *Swimming Cities* series was inspired by Swoon's discovery of Poppa Neutrino, an American man known for his risky adventures undertaken on homemade sea crafts built from salvaged materials on which he sailed with his family of self-taught Dixieland musicians; together they were called the Floating Neutrinos [Figure 2.6].<sup>210</sup> Swoon enlisted several members of the



Figure 2.6 Sean Kelly Neutrino shares the Neutrino's ideas for the design of the boats, caledoniacurry.com

---

<sup>210</sup> They were technically homeless, and made their living from their music. Poppa Neutrino was born in Fresno, CA and died in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Neutrino family to help supervise the design of these boats. Gary Kamiya of *The New York Times* characterized Poppa Neutrino as “a modern primitive, a nomad, a permanent dropout who relentlessly rejects anything that smacks of the normal.”<sup>211</sup> For twenty years Poppa Neutrino recorded his own and his family’s lives with an old HI-8 camera. The Floating Neutrinos gained notoriety for successfully sailing across the Atlantic Ocean on one of their junk rafts. Poppa Neutrino, said of his rafts that they “were merely foils for our inner work: an ongoing experiment in human psychology, searching for answers to what makes us function and malfunction, and how to increase our own and others’ abilities to create meaningful and fulfilling lives.”<sup>212</sup> This search for meaning and fulfillment are shared goals of the Neutrinos and Swoon.

The term ‘junk raft’ aptly describes the aesthetic of the *Swimming Cities* vessels, as they were comprised of varied repurposed and salvaged materials including sheets, doors, wood carvings, fences, stairways, wheels, and styrofoam for flotation purposes, all of which were either found or gathered by Swoon and her crew from people whom they could persuade to part with them or that they were retrieved detritus that otherwise would have been thrown out. As with most of her projects, her recognizable aesthetic marked the piece: her aesthetic of salvaged wood and Swoon’s

---

<sup>211</sup> Gary Kamiya, “The Nomad: The Happiest Man in the World,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 2007, [www.nytimes.com/2007/03/18/books/review/Kamiya2.t.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/18/books/review/Kamiya2.t.html?_r=0).

<sup>212</sup> William Grimes, “Poppa Neutrino, Trans-Atlantic Adventurer, Dies at 77,” *The New York Times*, January 27, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/28/us/28neutrino.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/28/us/28neutrino.html?_r=0).

signature wheatpastings. Each craft could hold around ten people on board and each ship had a crew member, a captain, an engineer, a helmsman, first mate, and a crew of deckhands.<sup>213</sup> If a boat broke down it could sometimes take days to repair. Some of the boats had purposes beyond simply that of sea crafts. For example, one of the boats served as the kitchen with functioning stove and french fry maker and one was more whimsical and held a bicycle powered raft and swing.

Though very different in form, as these were sea crafts and not sculptural installations that could be situated within an institutional space, nor were they street work, the *Swimming Cities* voyages were still governed by Swoon's socially-minded ethos and themes of repetition and emotional connection, which were also evident in the MCASD and the *Music Box Fence* pieces.<sup>214</sup> Swoon has stated that "The connection between the boats and the street work is in the impulse to create art that interacts with the world in ways that do not depend upon a protected institutional setting."<sup>215</sup> With these floating cities, Swoon performs an act of nomadic deterritorialization, in that these boats exist as autonomous self-contained and self-governed entities. In creating these swimming cities, she is creating her own

---

<sup>213</sup> Julie Bloom, "Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea: A Floating City with Junkyard Roots," *The New York Times*, August 18, 2008. Accessed May 1, 2014, [www.nytimes.com/2008/08/18/arts/design/18flot.html?](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/18/arts/design/18flot.html?)

<sup>214</sup> *The Swimming Cities* projects are more than street pieces, but they build upon elements born in the street setting such as publicness, temporality, and intimacy.

<sup>215</sup> Swoon as quoted in Lawrence, "Interviews: Swoon – The Swimming Cities of Serenissima," *Arrested Motion*, March 30, 2009, <http://arrestedmotion.com/2009/03/interview-swoon-the-swimming-cities-of-serenissima>.

community and sometimes is literally breaking laws and cultural rules (e.g. living on a boat, not working, pulling into a harbor that is owned by someone else, unannounced).<sup>216</sup> These boats are symbolic of her method of working by collaboration and through fostering a sense of connection and community.

*Miss Rockaway Armada*, Swoon's first *Swimming Cities* project, involved a collaboration of thirty people who worked together as a collective known by the same name. Led by Swoon, who came up with the concept, the group built the vessels, and organized various happenings on the shores of the Mississippi River where the vessels docked at night. The journey began in Minneapolis and planned to end in New Orleans, although it never made it that far. All funds were raised independently through crowd sourcing websites and friends. The happenings included anything from silk-screening workshops, song making, stencil making, to musical and theatrical performances, which occurred spontaneously. The goal according to the website made for the project was:

[...] to invent a new sustainable way to travel, to demonstrate different ways of living and moving that are friendlier to the environment and to each other, to indulge in that essential urge to make something out of nothing [...] to meet people: to learn from new folks along the way, to teach what we know, to share our art, our music and our performance, and to make new friends. Finally, for adventure: to reclaim and reinvent the old American urge to strike out and discover the vast, mysterious land we inhabit and see it for ourselves.<sup>217</sup>

---

<sup>216</sup> However, it was impossible to live entirely outside of the system, as the crew had to have certain legal permissions for docking purposes and such.

<sup>217</sup> Swoon, "The Miss Rockaway Armada."



This project represented the impossible in many ways: artists living on structures of their own creation and braving the mighty Mississippi. Swoon's motivations for such a project were inspired by the political atmosphere at the time. She elaborates:

At the time we were going into all these wars and I was like, 'Who is supporting this presidency? Who are Americans? What the fuck is going on here?' I felt totally disconnected to the point that I wanted to leave the country [...] I was like, 'I either can't be an American in this situation, or I can do what I know, mobilise an art collective, channel the entirety of our culture, and travel with it into the interior. You can't wage a war for resources by withdrawing from the centre, and only communicating with people in your own city is stifling to the point that it loses all meaning. It was very much about, 'How do we communicate and learn from America?' There were these amazing moments when people spotted the boats and were like, 'What are you?' It sparked a conversation like, 'This is who we are, this is what we're doing – who are you?'<sup>218</sup>

These questions epitomize Swoon's optimistic belief in the power of the De Certeauian "swarming mass." Going to such great lengths to create these moments of wonder, Swoon creates portals to an alternate way of thinking or being. Viewers are left in awe or surprised because of the realization of this impossible spectacle—detritus resurrected—it represents a new life. Through interactions between the crews, as well as with people on the shores where they performed and interacted, Swoon

---

<sup>218</sup>Andrea Kurland, "Swoon: The Lattice Effect," *Huck Magazine*, April 26, 2012, <http://www.huckmagazine.com/art-and-culture/art-2/swoon>.

effectually created a city governed by its own laws; an escape through collaborative efforts, on a floating utopia of their own making.<sup>219</sup>

The second of Swoon's *Swimming Cities* projects was *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*, which referred to the Hudson River's Mohican name, Muhhekunnetuk, which means "river that flows both ways" referring to its identification as a tidal estuary which switches the direction of its flow twice a day. This second voyage was different from the *Miss Rockaway Armada* in that, it was monetarily supported by Swoon's former gallery: Deitch Projects, in New York. Swoon has described her involvement with the commercial or more mainstream artworld as a space where she is forced to make compromises, but also, especially when she is presented as a solo artist in this arena, as a space which presents a welcome opportunity for her to work quietly and to see specific ideas come to fruition in a way that is difficult with the more collaborative approach, which has become her mainstay in the last decade.<sup>220</sup> When working in galleries and museums, questions of

---

<sup>219</sup> In addition to the micro-narratives contained within each of her projects there is a narrative development that links Swoon's practice as a whole beginning with her work on the streets to her larger collaborative projects that involve thirty people as with *Miss Rockaway Armada*. In the same way that a homeless man's discovery of Swoon's piece created a magical space for the neighborhood, on a much larger scale, *Miss Rockaway Armada*, creates a magical space for those who experienced it when the flotilla docked at various cities along the Mississippi and put on performances at night as well as for those who participated in it from its conception to its demise. The flotilla began in Minneapolis, and made it to St. Louis "by the end a galumphing mass of rafts half a city block wide, a private world and a public spectacle at the same time," where the rafts were either cut from shore or burned. Swoon, "The Miss Rockaway Armada."

<sup>220</sup> Caledonia Curry, "Swoon."

corporate sponsorship for example, inevitably arise, and while Swoon prefers to operate independently from corporate sponsorship, she accepts that it is often impossible to remain untouched by it, especially in the artworld which is entangled with commerce. This is markedly different than JR's view which rejects the idea of any type of corporate sponsorship. Secondly, Swoon differentiates this project from *Miss Rockaway Armada*, as she saw the former more as a collective living experiment amongst collaborators, whereas with *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*, she felt she was better able to foreground aesthetics instead of focusing primarily on collective living.<sup>221</sup> As she says in *The New York Times*:

I just thought I wanted a chance to take some of the same kinds of language of the 'Rockaway' and make it more of a guided artistic experience rather than a collective living experiment. I wanted to make something which really had the freedom of artistic expression, sculptural and aesthetic and all that stuff.<sup>222</sup>

For this second project, the orchestration and operation was effectually her own. This is demonstrative of the De Certeauian logic of subversion by consuming a "dominant economic order" of the art gallery in order to realize her grandiose project; there is a symbiosis involved.<sup>223</sup> Swoon's second project, unlike the *Miss Rockaway Armada* which took two years, sailed for three weeks down the Hudson River from August 15, 2008 through September 07, 2008. The project began in Troy, NY and culminated at

---

<sup>221</sup> John Del Signore, "Swoon, Artist," *Gothamist*, Arts & Entertainment (September 3, 2008), [gothamist.com/2008/09/03/swoon\\_artist.php](http://gothamist.com/2008/09/03/swoon_artist.php).

<sup>222</sup> Bloom, "*Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*."

<sup>223</sup> De Certeau, xii.

the Long Island satellite location of Deitch projects, Deitch Studio, on the East River in Long Island City where the boats and an installation remained on display after the culmination of the journey through October 19, 2008. The vessels were about two stories tall from base to mast and about fifteen feet long; each possessing bases that resembled rafts constructed from reclaimed wood. Hulls ascended into massive and whimsical junk piles or floating shanty towns, as Swoon envisioned:

Swimming cities of *Switchback Sea* is a flotilla of seven intricately hand crafted vessels that will navigate the stretch of the Hudson River between Troy and the New York harbor [...] Imagined as a hybrid between boats and bits of land mass broken off and headed out to sea, the Switchback vessels will make stops in towns along the river bringing performances and music. Over the course of three weeks they will make their way toward their home port – an invented landscape tucked into a niche along the East River in Long Island City, Queens.<sup>224</sup>

As mentioned above, Swoon has a strong interest in work that draws heavily on narrative strategies. In fact, for this second voyage in the series, the *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*,<sup>225</sup> Swoon enlisted Lisa D'Amour, an award winning playwright to direct and provide a script to help tell “the story” of the journey of the *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*. At the majority of stops along the journey, the crew members performed plays about the mythical origins of the boats, which became

---

<sup>224</sup> Chicken John, one of Swoon’s collaborators, quoted in Scott Beale, “Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea Travel Down the Hudson River,” *Laughing Squid*, August 11, 2008: <http://laughingsquid.com/swimming-cities-of-switchback-sea-travel-down-the-hudson-river>.

<sup>225</sup> For *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*, each boat was named after the crew members’ grandmothers.

part of D'Amour's overall concept.<sup>226</sup> There were no hired actors, but instead, the crew members acted out D'Amour's plays.<sup>227</sup> The use of ritual and manufactured history imbued the journey with an epic quality. Swoon used recurring characters and made allusions to literature through her long titles. The employment of literary tropes of recurring characters and myth created a shared environment for all participants. Swoon's is never a closed narrative with a finite beginning and end, but instead one that is open-ended. Her pieces allow others take the reins, even if she is the primary orchestrator. Freedom and spontaneity are what Swoon hopes will be experienced akin to the Neutrinos' adventures. One of the *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea* crew members, Spy Emerson, described the adventure as the creation of a magical, parallel universe:

The "Swimming Cities of the Switchback Sea" was so dreamy I barely touched ground. . . . Life along the Hudson River was incredibly light and playful, and most unreal. Every day of the float was an adventure. We climbed the turreted castle walls of an old armory; we jumped from the rooftops of buildings flooded in a quarry. Moses and I took acid and had sex on a trampoline, laughing and bouncing for hours. The story climaxed when we reached Manhattan after three weeks on the water,

---

<sup>226</sup> The performance schedule as published on Deitch Projects website: "RIVER PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE: Troy, 8/15/08, 8 PM, In front of the Korean War Memorial; Albany, 8/16/08, 8 PM, In the Riverfront Park of Corning Preserve; Saugerties, 8/20/08, 8 PM, At the Saugerties Lighthouse; Kingston, 8/21/08, 8 PM, At the Hudson River Maritime Museum; Croton-on-Hudson, 8/27/08, 8 PM, At Senasqua Park; Nyack (Memorial Park), 8/28/08, 8 PM; Riverside Park, 9/2/08, 8 PM, At Pier 1 at 70th Street; Deitch Studios Long Island City, 9/11/08, 9/12/08, 9/13/08, All performances at 8 PM." "Swoon - Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea," Deitch Projects, [www.deitch.com/projects/sub.php?projId=248](http://www.deitch.com/projects/sub.php?projId=248).

<sup>227</sup> Swoon, "Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea," *Caledonia Curry*, [caledoniacurry.com/switchback.php](http://caledoniacurry.com/switchback.php).

and in one day, Ben went to jail for graffiti, Chicken went in the hospital with a near amputation, Mandy was admitted into a sanitarium, and as KSW partied in our boat docked around the corner from the final destination, the Deitch Projects, a gun was pointed at my head.<sup>228</sup>

The unusual sight of these boats aroused suspicion. Swoon's unidentified crew was perceived as potentially dangerous as they pulled into the New York harbor. As such, they were not warmly greeted by Lady Liberty but, instead, by a female police officer with her gun pulled. The officer inquired as to whether they were "a bunch of fuckin' pirates."<sup>229</sup> Though, admittedly Deitch Projects was known for its over-the-top shows, even within the domain of the art institution, Swoon's practice remains somewhat unorthodox and subversive. A police response makes the ever-present securitization of space in America, especially in post-9/11 New York, apparent. The concept of a swimming city is a feral and piratical gesture that disregards and balks at the idea that a city could ever be "locked down."

The last voyage, *Swimming Cities of Serenissima*, sailed the Adriatic Sea from Koper, Slovenia to Venice, Italy and crashed the Venice Biennale via the Grand Canal. The third member crew docked off of Certosa Island where they performed puppetry, music, and told stories, one of which they called "The Clutchess of

---

<sup>228</sup> Spy Emerson, "Swimming Cities From Spy's Perspective," *Juxtapoze*, December 21, 2009, [www.juxtapoz.com/current/swimming-cities-from-spys-perspective](http://www.juxtapoz.com/current/swimming-cities-from-spys-perspective).

<sup>229</sup>Emerson, "Swimming Cities From Spy's Perspective."

Cuckoo.”<sup>230</sup> The crew members raised \$150,000 through various fundraisers and silent auctions in order to facilitate the project. The vessels were assembled in Slovenia from materials that were housed in shipping containers that had arrived in Slovenia from New York.<sup>231</sup> During the construction of the vessels, one of which had to be constructed from salvaged materials found in Slovenia, the artists slept in a house which they rented. However, because they did not have any financial support outside of the money they had raised, they intended to sleep in the shipping containers while they finished constructing the boats when their funds diminished.<sup>232</sup> The vessels were 28 feet tall and wide and had masts that could easily be flipped down to clear bridges along their route. Once the vessels embarked, the crew either slept onboard or camped on shore at night. There was also a rule that in order to take part in the journey, crew members had to meet the “potato sack rule” and provide an amount of sustenance that was equivalent to that provided by a sack of potatoes.<sup>233</sup> The sight of these renegade sea crafts approaching the port during the popular art fair, created mixed responses. As with the *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*, rumors circulated

---

<sup>230</sup> Jacquelyn Lewis, “Swoon’s ‘Swimming Cities’ Crashes the Venice Biennale,” *Art in America* (June 3, 2009), [www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/swoons-swimming-cities-crashes-the-venice-biennale/](http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/swoons-swimming-cities-crashes-the-venice-biennale/).

<sup>231</sup> The materials for the boats arrived in forty foot shipping containers that were sent on a tax-free artists visa. Because they were essentially filled with trash, they were held at customs because they were suspicious. Grigoriadis, “Barging into Venice.”

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

that they were crazy pirates. Jerry Saltz, who was at the Biennale, responded positively to the vessels in a review in *New York Magazine*:

The most moving moment I had at the Biennale, however, came in the last minutes of my last day at the show. Just before closing time, as guards herded stragglers toward the entrance from the far end of the Arsenal where I was, three marvelous-looking vessels cobbled together from urban detritus motored [...] into the small lagoon. A band played a haunting song, a woman sang, a girl swung on a swing. The boats are the work of the artist Swoon [...] I'm told that Swoon wasn't even invited to the show. She and her gypsy friends simply entered of their own accord and did what they wanted to do. Like the best work here, Swoon's work doesn't come out of academic critique; it comes from necessity and vision. These are the perfect tools for making things as old as time new again—including an artworld turned dangerously into itself.<sup>234</sup>

Saltz's sentiment is the type of excitement that Swoon hopes her projects will elicit.

Swoon had realized the impossible through the literal realization of her dreams. She takes her dreams out of the realm of the symbolic and fantasy - out of a fictional space à la De Certeau. In this sense, they are revolutionary. They represent a real "leap into the void" instead of a fictional, choreographed one. We are not simply analyzing a symbolic gesture or statement, but confronted with the choice to participate in something subversive or, to use De Certeau's logic, to participate in an attempt to shift the method of consumption. Swoon describes the motivation behind such gestures as being about "living off of a bad culture that we wish didn't exist and making the resources that contribute to that situation no longer available to you."<sup>235</sup> Swoon is not

---

<sup>234</sup> Jerry Saltz, "Entropy in Venice," *New York Magazine* (June 19, 2009), <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/57466/index1.html>.

<sup>235</sup> Grigoriadis, "Barging into Venice."



trying to change the world with a fascist proclamation— she is interested in creating micro-revolutions or “pocket revolutions” to use Grant Kester’s phrase. Instead of orchestrating a mass revolution, she believes in the value of personal, intimate revolutions that occur on an individual scale.<sup>236</sup>

Inspiration for the rafts was the beauty of Venice itself, as well as, in Swoon’s words, “. . . climate change, floods, dislocation, and a constant, hungry search for home port.”<sup>237</sup> At the end of this adventure, these boats were put into storage where they remained until three were resurrected in 2014 for a show at the Brooklyn Museum. Swoon’s show at the Brooklyn Museum, entitled *Submerged Motherlands* (2014), marks the end of the *Swimming Cities* voyages and memorializes these adventures by presenting three of the surviving ships as sculpture. Here they serve as a monument to the past, but in this iteration, take on different themes surrounding the recent death of the artist’s mother as well as climate change in relation to Hurricane Sandy which affected New York in 2012 and to Doggerland, a landmass that once connected Great Britain and Europe which was destroyed by a tsunami eight-thousand years ago.<sup>238</sup> For Swoon, this exhibition was significant because it represented a

---

<sup>236</sup> Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 224.

<sup>237</sup> Swoon, “Swimming Cities of Serenissima,” *Caledonia Curry*, [caledoniacurry.com/Serenissima.php](http://caledoniacurry.com/Serenissima.php). Among the crew members in Venice was the band Dark, Dark, Dark.

<sup>238</sup> Brooklyn Museum: Exhibitions: Swoon: Submerged Motherlands,” Brooklyn Museum, [www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/swoon](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/swoon). The exhibition ran from April 11–August 24, 2014.

return home to New York for the vessels, but also a loss of home as her mother had recently passed. Therefore, although the exhibition incorporated the ships, their appearance in the museum gave them another life. Like the MCASD exhibition, Swoon recycles motifs. She believes that, like people, they still have much to say. In the museum space, the vessels become relics. Displaying these pieces that were initially experiential by nature, like any street art, robs them of the experiential aesthetic that they depend upon for their revolutionary potential — which aroused mixed feelings in past participants, as some viewed the display of the ships as destroying the memory of a very personal experience. The ships, subsequently were ceremonially destroyed after they left the museum, ending in a spectacle that was more befitting of their original life on the water. They will never be for sale.

Re-claiming space and escape are gestures that run throughout all of Swoon's work and are tied to her deeply held desire to effect change by connecting people and giving them a platform from which to speak out both individually and as a community. In the case of *Swimming Cities of Serenissima*, Swoon and her collaborators were breaking many formal rules and injecting some spontaneity into the stolid, institutional Venice Biennale which is organized in part by the government and private donors and to which they were not invited. The sight of a wild mob of young “pirates” on magical boats was surprising and surreal, like something out of a dream. Swoon's work in its aims to show “the beautiful and the real . . . [with] no pressure to be anything or buy anything,” as well as her stylistic choices, speak to a larger project of escape to the

unexpected and the creation of a new space within which to dwell. While street pieces operate through a literal occupation of space, with a project like *Swimming Cities*, the operation becomes more complex. In this series of performances, Swoon has not only reclaimed space, but also made her own space and inserted herself and crew into the infrastructure of the Hudson River as well as New York City, the Mississippi, and Venice. This “occupation” serves to call attention to her art practice, but also fosters a discussion about larger issues that have a global impact such as privatization, commercialization, and community. The rupture in the expected Biennale operations which *Serenissima* caused, created a space which questions notions of authority, taste, wealth, and the art market. Her work connects people through a common sense of community that it fosters through identification and participation.

Swoon has said that the *Swimming Cities* projects have shown her “that there is no place for pessimistic disbelief in the world; it’s just not useful. Once you’ve decided to be on the side of audacious wonder, beauty, and joy, you can’t go back.”<sup>239</sup> We see here Swoon’s underlying ethos: her belief in the potential for artwork to bring about positive outcomes. Rather than outright activism, however, Swoon operates on a more microcosmic level. Fellow street artist, JR, has said of Swoon, “She has always

---

<sup>239</sup> Vanessa Grigoriadis, “Barging into Venice.”

managed to have some social impact with her work and at the same time stay an artist, not an activist . . . That's very rare."<sup>240</sup>

## ENCAMPMENT ERSILIA

*Encampment Ersilia* was a piece created by Swoon for the 2011 exhibition *De Dentro e De Fora (Inside Out, Outside In)* at the Museo Arte São Paulo de Chateaubriand (MASP) which featured the work of international street artists [Figures 2.7 - 2.9].<sup>241</sup> Though created for the exhibition, *Encampment Ersilia* was located outside of the museum on the Trianon Terrace, the plaza that is located at street level underneath MASP. MASP is a building that has an elevated upper portion as well as galleries underground; Trianon Terrace is the expansive space underneath the elevated portion [Figure 2.10]. *Encampment Ersilia* resembled the makeshift architecture of a house in a favela as it was constructed of recycled wood, cardboard, and paper, but it unofficially functioned as a community center, as well as a shelter, and served as a node at which various publics could assemble and venture out into the city of São

---

<sup>240</sup> Melena Ryzik, "Life of Wonderment."; Swoon's work is concerned more with a "connected knowledge" that is rooted in a conversational aesthetics as Grant Kester discusses in relation to dialogic art practices in: Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 114. For more on the concept of connected knowledge see: Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

<sup>241</sup> The *De Dentro e De Fora* exhibition ran from August 17, 2011-December 23, 2011: and featured the work of JR, Invader, Swoon, Point, Remed, Chu, Tec and Defi.



Figure 2.7 Swoon, *Encampment Ersilia*, 2011, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), photo by Lara Bullock



Figure 2.8 Swoon, *Encampment Ersilia*, 2011, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), photo by Lara Bullock



Figure 2.9 Swoon, *Encampment Ersilia*, 2011, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), photo by Lara Bullock



Figure 2.10 Lina Bo Bardi, Preliminary Study for Sculptures-cum-Stage-Props on Trianon Terrace, Museum of Art of São Paulo, 1965, credit Luís Hossaka/Museum of Art of São Paulo Collection, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/may/22/bo-bardi-architecture-perfect-imperfection/>

Paulo for various reasons such as protest, concerts, dinners, and so on. For the most part, these activities were not organized by Swoon herself, but by diverse publics that saw value in her piece for various purposes. From a distance, the piece looked like a wooden shack with impromptu vestibules that were added as a series of afterthoughts. This was perhaps a result of its composition and construction which involved many participants including a collaboration with Cooperglicero, a waste collector/recyclers union.<sup>242</sup> Close up, it looked just as haphazard, but instead of a shack, it resembled a well-loved clubhouse. *Ersilia*, had rooms, like a house, but the potential population of a small village due to the constant influx of visitors, those that sought it out as a pilgrimage site, or those that simply stumbled upon it while strolling or visiting the museum, as it was accessible to anyone from the street.<sup>243</sup> *Encampment Ersilia* contained a kitchen space and on the ‘counter’ there was water in containers and cleared dishes, as well as some in use. There was a living space with a sofa; an outdoor conversational space (a gazebo); a space for sustenance, an edible garden on its side which according to Swoon’s website, was planted by “green arte Jardim,” and there was even a small dog.<sup>244</sup> One exterior wall featured a schedule and calendar that

---

<sup>242</sup> Swoon, “Ersilia,” *Caledonia Curry*, [caledoniacurry.com/ersilia.php](http://caledoniacurry.com/ersilia.php).

<sup>243</sup> Curator Eduardo Saretta says that: “Museum attendance we had 250,000 visitors, and at Ersilia (which happened in the public space) I would guess we received more than 1 million people.” Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> It is not clear what this is, but it is likely that it is a local gardening collective. Swoon mentions their involvement on her website, but I cannot find any references to this group elsewhere. Ibid.

could be filled in with chalk according to the happenings each day. The entire structure of *Ersilia*, was only about twenty feet by forty feet. It was constructed from salvaged materials found throughout the city of Sao Paulo. Rather than new wood from a hardware store these weathered beams were reassembled to make this new structure, much like those used in the *Music Box Fence* and the *Swimming Cities*. While Swoon admits that her practice is not entirely green, her work is often constructed with conservation principles in mind.

*Ersilia* was open to all without judgement as it was on the street and, while inhabited, it belonged to no one. This unplanned and unstructured migration of individuals into the space recalls De Certeau's concept of the swarming mass comprised of individuals which, in their pedestrian movements and experiences, create and remake the city itself. Swoon's familiar characters punctuated the structure, as did her signature cutouts and designs. I visited several times during museum hours, and each time, people filled the site and infused it with a new vibrancy. After hours, homeless people even utilized it as a home. There were never any security guards policing it, which is unusual for any museum space. The mode of operation, or perhaps one could say, its "government," was organic and DIY. Different publics communed here, from the homeless to the wealthiest tier of society. A homeless man named Gaucho elected himself to be a tour guide and, due to his popularity and the reputation he garnered from his "participation" with *Ersilia*, he was invited to sing as part of a choir on a television Christmas program, which made him "very proud and



thankful.”<sup>245</sup> The liveliness of the action surrounding *Ersilia* was mirrored in the vibrancy of the aesthetic. This little structure gestured toward self-sustainability, as it could support life, which serves as a metaphor for the crux of Swoon’s practice: to foster the sustainability of human potential, relationships, and creativity as well as to “mak[e] moments of connection and moments of wonder.”<sup>246</sup>

Despite a continually evolving exterior, *Ersilia* was recognizable as a piece by Swoon. Easily spotted were Swoon’s meticulous paper cutouts and her thick, intentional line drawings printed onto paper were wheatpasted onto the structure. The goal of *Ersilia* was to “create a space of cross pollination for the efforts of people often separated by the sheer scale of the metropolis.”<sup>247</sup> This desire for collectivity, once again echoes De Certeau’s belief in the power that comes from the collective. In Swoon’s *Ersilia*, one enters into the piece and then in a sense creates it through their own interactions with it — this is Swoon’s form of collaboration in which participants take part in its creation. As mentioned above, with Swoon’s work, each new piece hearkens back to previous pieces or people through recycled motifs. In *Ersilia*, one can find Walkie, a boy from Haiti, an old aboriginal woman who was also featured in *Anthropocene Extinction* at the ICA in Boston, and Naima and Alixa, the ‘swimming

---

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Sean Irving, “Interview with NYC artist Swoon,” *Lifelounge*, February 19, 2011, accessed February 10, 2013, [www.lifelounge.com.au/art-anddesign/interview/interview-with-nyc-artist-swoon.aspx](http://www.lifelounge.com.au/art-anddesign/interview/interview-with-nyc-artist-swoon.aspx).

<sup>247</sup> Swoon, “Ersilia.”

sisters' from the *Swimming Sisters of Switchback Sea*. Figures from the past are used to forge new relationships in the present. Each piece is conversant in an ongoing dialogue that links Swoon's entire practice, contributing to a de Certeauian "indiscipline" existing according to her own rules and the unpredictable, organic operations of participants, collaborators, or pedestrians.

The title of *Encampment Ersilia* comes from Italo Calvino's novel, *Invisible Cities*, which featured a chapter about a town called Ersilia in which people attach strings from point to point to create relationships. These strings are color-coded to indicate what kind of relationships they are:

In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or gray or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.<sup>248</sup>

This organic mode of building a city once again recalls De Certeau and the pedestrian movements that in effect create an environment regardless of pre-ordained ways of experiencing a city. Swoon's work serves to salvage these forgotten strings and supports to re-make her own Ersilia. With *Encampment Ersilia*, Swoon had created a temporary city, which harkens back to the *Swimming Cities*, series. It was a metaphorical city or poetic, geographical city (to again use De Certeau) within the very real, cosmopolitan city of São Paulo, which was "organized" in its own

---

<sup>248</sup> Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), 76.

grassroots fashion, much like the *Swimming Cities*. Like the work of most street artists, Swoon's piece is site-specific. But in making an artistic gesture such as this in a big, capitalist, cosmopolitan city, it represents an escape: an alternative to this modern way of life. In the press release for this piece, Swoon states that she intended the site to operate as:

. . . a new city... a delicate quiet song, a temporary freedom, a meeting place where words stitch a new reality and children are born in unexpected ways. [...] Welcome to *Encampment Ersilia*. We invite you to a slice of the present and window into the future. We have come as visitors and have found treasures. We gather them together for you to discover and lead you back to the caverns and clouds from which they emerge. The city eats itself and is reborn as fertile compost.<sup>249</sup>

Instead of a moment of encounter, Swoon's *Ersilia* provided a new way to engage with and experience the art museum as well as the city of São Paulo. Her work is deliberate, both in terms of its aims to show "the beautiful and the real . . . [with] no pressure to be anything or buy anything,"<sup>250</sup> but also in terms of her stylistic choices. For example, Swoon's work bears a stylistic relationship to German Expressionism due to a similar quality in the use of line and inherent emotionality [Figures 2.11 -

---

<sup>249</sup> Swoon, *De Dentro e De Fora*, press release quoted in: "Swoon 'Encampment Ersilia' in São Paulo," *Juxtapoz*, September 23, 2011, [www.juxtapoz.com/current/swoon-qencampment-ersiliaq-in-sao-paulo](http://www.juxtapoz.com/current/swoon-qencampment-ersiliaq-in-sao-paulo).

<sup>250</sup> Ganz, *Graffiti Women*, 204.

2.12].<sup>251</sup> German Expressionist artists were responding in part to the economic situation in pre-WWI Germany, which was very capitalistic, industrialized, and materialistic. This overwhelming wealth and overcrowding in the cities often resulted



Figure 2.11 Erich Heckel, *Jüngling (Youth)*, woodcut, 1917, 14 1/8 x 11 3/4 inches, Syracuse University Art Collection



Figure 2.12 Swoon, *Untitled*, wheatpaste print, date unknown

---

<sup>251</sup> In our conversation on May 1, 2014, Swoon remarked that she had a picture by a female German Expressionist artist on her wall which she looks at while she is working. She has openly admitted that German Expressionist woodblock prints in general have served as inspiration for her work. Press surrounding Swoon's projects usually reference this influence, including her gallery Deitch Projects, for example.

in a feeling of alienation, not unlike major metropolitan cities like São Paulo, today. Therefore, their painting was concerned with the deformation of straightforward representation in order to create a visual reflection of the zeitgeist.<sup>252</sup> Erich Heckel's portrait of a *Young Man* or *Jüngling* from 1917, bears a similarly striking sensibility as that seen in Swoon's prints. The *Jüngling's* face betrays his emotions, which are heightened by the harsh, thick diagonal lines of the composition, and which could be read as a reflection of the political and economic uncertainty at the end of WWI.<sup>253</sup> He seems to be in pain or exhausted, and trapped within the square of the printed paper. Swoon's project, like the German Expressionists,' utilizes this specific emotional and political style to comment on feelings of isolation and to provide an escape from habitual ways of living or even navigating the city as demonstrated through elements in her work such as her focus on raw human connection. One of Swoon's prints that appears in *Ersilia* is the artist's grandmother, nicknamed (for unknown reasons) the *Ice Queen* [Figure 2.9]. Here, she triumphantly emerges out of the structure of *Ersilia*, facing up to the sky. She looks somber and determined. Unlike Heckel's image, which is restricted to the page, Swoon's expressive figures are unrestricted as they are outside and suggest endless possibility. Swoon takes that history which can be read as

---

<sup>252</sup> Swoon's connection to Brazil is manifold as the global nature of street art has allowed her to travel and forge relationships abroad.

<sup>253</sup> "Erich Heckel: Jungling," *MOMA*, accessed July 30, 2015, [www.moma.org/collection/works/67163](http://www.moma.org/collection/works/67163).

an analog of today's society, and attempts to remix it into a token of hope and humanity.

Swoon uses Calvino's *Ersilia* as metaphor for the potential reinvention of human relationships between each other, to nature, and within the city of São Paulo.

She states:

Conversations that begin [at *Ersilia* outside of MASP] will connect *Ersilia* with occupations around the São Paulo city center — occupied spaces under the freeways, homes in empty factories, farms under the electric lines, and temporary sites of culture in the streets. We will also invite [visitors] to join us on a series of walks through the city to view it in its current and everlasting moment of metamorphosis — Expedições para Comer Concreto. Each walk will be a mobile open meeting that tackles the metropolis and its questions, drawing a series of paths of conceptual debate [on a variety of issues] and active intervention [within the city].<sup>254</sup>

These walks, which recall De Certeau's method of exploring the city, were just one of the ways that *Ersilia* functioned. It also functioned as a meeting point for the Occupy Movement, for example. *Encampment Ersilia*'s location at the MASP was also significant because of the building's history and conception as a public space. In order to arrive at Swoon's *Ersilia*, one could walk from the street or sidewalk and under MASP. The building was designed by Brazilian Modernist architect, Lina Bo Bardi, who was interested in "people-centered" architecture.<sup>255</sup> As mentioned above, it features a vacant space at street level that enables people to wander from the sidewalks

---

<sup>254</sup> "Swoon 'Encampment Ersilia' in São Paulo."

<sup>255</sup> Zeuler R.M.A. Lima and Vera M. Pallamin, "An Uncommon Common Space" in *Encountering Urban Places: Visual and Material Performances in the City*, ed. Lars Frers and Lars Meier (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007), 88.

to explore beneath the structure's solid, cool, and colorful legs supporting the glass body of the museum. Bardi conceived of the space as "a permanent and open space to be formally used by the museum and also informally appropriated by the population of São Paulo . . . In one of her watercolours, [Bardi] imagined the terrace being used for activities from art exhibitions to a large, colourful playground."<sup>256</sup> From the 1960s to the 1980s, MASP even became one of the "main stages of dissent and emergence of new political voices and subjects in the public life of the city."<sup>257</sup> Therefore, *Ersilia's* existence at a museum which has a history of supporting the common people, a belief in freedom from corporate sponsorship, and that is interested in bringing diverse publics together is a logical place for Swoon's work.

However, according to Zeuler R.M.A. Lima and Vera M. Pallamin, the history of the museum as a space for such activities has become increasingly restricted, particularly for MASP, due to "Budget problems, the concern with safety, the increasing commodification of art and culture, and the growth of the tourist industry [which] have made the museum less accessible"<sup>258</sup> since the time of its creation. Despite the initial aims of the museum, the museum is no longer free; the body is no longer transparent. To see art at MASP, one is literally and symbolically separated from the street and subsequently elevated or submerged to the hermetically sealed

---

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 95.

floors of art. Because of this, it is significant that *Ersilia* remained outside.<sup>259</sup> Perhaps the most museum-like, or un-street art-like quality about it was that, in addition to being made available to anyone who approached it (as all Street art is), it was on display (street art is often public, but situated within the urban fabric versus isolated on a terrace, and therefore, displayed), which is a central operating tenet of museums.<sup>260</sup> In one sense, the piece serves as a *memento mori* to a lost time. However, it is not only that, for above anything else, *Ersilia* is about action, visibility, and community. Swoon is acknowledging São Paulo and MASP's past as a diverse, public site, and suggesting possible future through the various activities *Ersilia* has supported.

As street art in the past decade has become mainstream. Its presence in art institutions is becoming more common. The effect of the mainstreaming of street art is manifold. The context has changed, which forces the artists to adopt new methods of dissemination and of adapting their work to these uncharted surroundings. Instead of rejecting the institution altogether, however, there has been a resultant turn in street art toward philanthropic actions, something that is central to Swoon's work, as a way to subvert the institution, while at the same time, relying on it. There has been a recent

---

<sup>259</sup> Though Swoon did have a more modest piece inside MASP as part of the exhibition.

<sup>260</sup> Street art is not on display in the sense that works are on display in a museum or gallery. Street art exists in an open public space for a potential encounter with a public. Display implies a forceful notion and a gesture of highlighting works— street art is often in located interstitial spaces, though this is changing with museum commissions and pieces such as this.



turn in contemporary street art from the street itself, to “street” as symbolic for “the people” or different communities. Artists like JR and Swoon work collaboratively with various populations in order to address their particular struggles or stories through the public medium of street art practice.

Swoon’s *Ersilia* was not in the museum, it was also not on the street . . . at least, not in the usual way one would expect to see street art, tucked in an alley or made prominent on a billboard. *Ersilia* is literally *of* the street. Being outdoors, the piece suffered the same effects as any street piece. Its activation was dependent on the street. And, while the intent was to bring people together, a temporal specter was always present, as *Ersilia* would eventually be taken down at the end of the exhibition. De Certeau speaks of temporality with reference to tactics. A tactic, according to De Certeau is a method of operation that “depends on time - it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing.’”<sup>261</sup> Perhaps *Ersilia* can be viewed as tactical, as Swoon seized the opportunity presented to her by the opportunity of exhibiting at MASP and utilized it to create this unprecedented piece, which had a range of functions from the political (the site was used by Occupy Wall Street protests) to making social issues visible, such as homelessness as demonstrated by Gaucho’s television appearance. *Ersilia* was able to benefit by the design of MASP as one was able to access the work from the street, which was essential for *Ersilia* to function. Swoon is interested in creating a lasting experience. Like her pieces on the street,

---

<sup>261</sup> De Certeau, xix.

*Ersilia's* life is site specific and will not be featured in any exhibitions of her work going forward; its existence is experiential and lives on through those who experienced it.

*Encampment Ersilia*, as with many other of Swoon's projects, questions ingrained structures of a capitalist society by its very operation. Swoon expands the museum's definition of art and makes it literally accessible to all classes of people. The museum provides the platform from which to do this, and Swoon beckons a diversified audience. Street art has traditionally subverted the matrix of autonomy and hermeticism of the art object, if only by virtue of its existence outside of the art institution, on the street. *Encampment Ersilia* is conversant with the institutionalized art object, as it exists in a nebulous space both within (as it was part of the exhibition) and outside of (for it, unlike the rest of the museum was both literally outside and accessible to a much more diversified audience than those who were inside the walls of the museum). The exhibition is sponsored and funded and, thus, Swoon's history of illegal activities are implicitly endorsed by the museum. Swoon deploys the museum to critique culture much as her initial street art set out to: she participates within the bounds of the institution and utilizes the platform it provides her to subvert dominant, capitalist modes of art and commodity exchange which are endorsed by institutions such as museums by allowing her piece to be experienced freely.<sup>262</sup>

---

<sup>262</sup> By conforming to an institution's rules, one is by default complicit in its mission, at least on some level.

Swoon creates a micro-city within the city of São Paulo. In so doing, she suggests that there is a need for a new city, or at least the possibility of one free from the dominant neoliberal, capitalist one, suggesting the “macro” city is not working or fulfilling a need. Swoon’s city of *Ersilia* had several effects. *Ersilia* highlighted negative aspects, such as the economic disparity of São Paulo made apparent by the diverse groups that “inhabited” *Ersilia*; when occupying *Ersilia* one was well aware of the mingling of classes.<sup>263</sup> Yet, it also highlighted the potential for community and collaboration. Though there has been a recent mainstreaming of street art globally and as a result it is featured in an increasing number of museum shows, it is through this kind of grass-roots operation that street art retains what could be considered its avant-garde status. Once again, Swoon is creating an in-between space between implicit museum relationships and forms of exhibition and control and the untethered and unpredictability of the public, which is unique to this piece.

Instead of using the tactic of shock, a device unsanctioned graffiti and street artists have historically relied upon in the streets, street art in the museum is forced to

---

<sup>263</sup> The commingling of the wealthy museum donors and homeless people through the appreciation of a work of art is something unique. This is not a behavior that would be tolerated in most major museums, especially in such an organic and unplanned fashion. Eduardo Saretta said that there was no security. It simply was not a problem. Eduardo Saretta in conversation with author, 2011.

take a different approach.<sup>264</sup> It is legal, accessible, and its subject matter is often genial and inviting. As institutionalized street art, especially as I have argued in the case of Swoon, continues to push the definition of street art, there is a learning curve that must be expected as a new type of aesthetic works its way into the artworld. The most remarkable results of this conversion however, are the methods and strategies through which the work operates. The topic of shock is arguably outdated.<sup>265</sup> Audiences expect art to be weird. If anything, Swoon's *Ersilia*, brought people together in a way that is counter to the intended rupture inherent in shock tactics.

Street art is an art form that is often synonymous with two-dimensional painting, stickers, or wheatpastings and the grittiness of being on the streets. Its

---

<sup>264</sup> Graffiti has historically relied on the tactic of shock to have an effect. This shock occurred as a result of encountering the unexpected; the audacity of placement such as when a writer or crew would cover up another's writing; in its shocking messages meant to incite and provoke reactions; and in the daring maneuvers that the application requires. Swoon indicates that with her *Miss Rockaway Armada* project that she wanted it to be as "shocking as a miracle." Swoon, "Miss Rockaway Armada."

<sup>265</sup> Grant Kester, in his book, *The One and The Many*, argues that the tactic of shock is outdated in today's artworld. Art audiences, perhaps a result of the Internet and the continual bombardment of imagery through the media, are hard to shock. Kester argues that the repercussions of this potential shock would most likely be lost on the viewer when they leave, because the art museum is there to give them a certain brand of experience. Kester, *The One and the Many*, " 105. Kester is writing about social practice or dialogic art, not street art, but these movements are ideologically similar in many respects. For more on dialogic, participatory, or alternately collaborative art practice see: Lucy R Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997); Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, Wash: Bay Press, 1995); Nina Felshin, *But Is It Art?: The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995); Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002); Claire Bishop, *Participation* (The MIT Press, 2006).

aesthetic design is often simple and sometimes haphazard as a result of the necessity for haste, due to its illegality. All of these elements are also present in Swoon's structure: dirty and worn, Swoon's signature, delicate spray paints were crinkling towards their fate as pieces of yellowed paper, a result of enduring the rain, soot, and the overall effects of being outside, ultimately betraying their physical ephemerality.

*Ersilia* was temporary, but it is also lasting as a result of an experiences had there and the stories of these experiences. Just as with the *Swimming Cities* projects, *Ersilia* had an end. In this sense, its end was the end of the exhibition and it will (and can) have only one life, as street art usually does — destined for entropic destruction. The word encampment conjures notions of a military structure, a temporary stopping place – *Encampment Ersilia* is this: a temporary city within a city; a home. Eduardo Saretta, one of the curators of *De Dentro e De Fora* realized from witnessing *Ersilia* that “the biggest difference we can make in thinking our city life is by thinking together, to share life experiences and work together.”<sup>266</sup> While *Ersilia* did not create a new world order - it arguably created a poetic, fictional space which allowed people to “escape” dominant, prescribed ways of experiencing the city.

---

<sup>266</sup> Swoon, “Ersilia.”

## KONBIT SHELTER PROJECT

*The definition of Konbit in Creole is a traditional form of cooperative communal labor in Haiti, whereby the able-bodied folk of a locality help each other prepare their fields. It is a time for solidarity and cooperation in the face of adversity. Konbit Shelter is referencing the word with a global interpretation, people coming together to work cooperatively across national boundaries.*

- Konbit Shelter Project website<sup>267</sup>

*And so our interest is to just keep building with this relationship and just to figure out how to have a really positive collaboration whereby both parties are affected. And we always acknowledge every time we're there, this is a learning experience for us, and so it's kind of like a mutual gift.*

- Swoon, interview with author<sup>268</sup>

*We are not an NGO creating a quick fix. We are a long-term community focused effort, bringing our heart and soul into everything we do.*

- Konbit Kickstarter website<sup>269</sup>

The previous two projects discussed in this chapter exemplify pieces in which Swoon worked collectively and the outcome of which was a form of experiential knowledge. Art historian Grant Kester defines this concept of experiential knowledge as “the exchange of gesture and expression, the complex relationship to habitus and habit, and the way in which conflict, reconciliation, and solidarity are registered in and through the body,” which is a concern with each of Swoon’s projects.<sup>270</sup> Swoon is not only interested in the aesthetics of her object and image based practice, but also in the

---

<sup>267</sup> “About,” *Konbit Shelter*, accessed May 1, 2012, [konbitshelter.org](http://konbitshelter.org).

<sup>268</sup> Swoon, interviewed by Lara Bullock.

<sup>269</sup> Konbit Shelter, “Konbit Shelter: Sustainable Building in Rural Haiti,” *Kickstarter*, last updated January 2, 2013, [www.kickstarter.com/projects/328491151/konbit-shelter-sustainable-building-in-rural-haiti/updates](http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/328491151/konbit-shelter-sustainable-building-in-rural-haiti/updates).

<sup>270</sup> Kester, *The One and the Many*, 112.

generative experience of interaction, particularly on a personal, intimate level. The Konbit Shelter Project contains similarities with the previously discussed projects however, it is different from the previously discussed projects in that it involves providing a type of “aid” to a devastated community in Haiti. Because the notion of providing aid is generally the purview of NGOs, certain questions arise with this project that are less relevant to the others, despite their similarities in approach (that approach being one in which Swoon works with others to effect a transformative experience facilitated through her aesthetic). Swoon’s experience working with this Haitian community is complex as her aesthetic act bears a close relationship to the organizations (e.g. NGOs) that she separates herself from. The fact that Swoon separates herself from these organizations distinguishes her from dialogic practices such as that of Ala Plastica which have seen more mainstream success and are an NGO themselves. Just as Swoon has indicated a realistic view in terms of the impossible concept of “pure” economic sponsorship (unlike JR), her stance on working with NGO’s is similarly complex. However, she prefers to work independently and on a smaller, intimate scale amongst a core group of artists; for this reason, she started her own non-profit, the Heliotrope Foundation in 2014. As Kester points out in his book *The One and The Many*, NGOs are not monolithic and range in operation, size, and goals. Admittedly, the quotation above from the Konbit Shelter Kickstarter page indicates a narrow view of NGO’s, however, even considering their breadth, Swoon prefers to work free from the trappings of NGOs, which are typically

funded by governments and require a focus on successfully achieving strictly prescribed goals instead of allowing for more open, organic processes of collaboration to occur. Also, she prefers to work within an organization in which the majority of profits and extra funds go to the projects themselves instead of to the owners and shareholders of the organizations, which sometimes occurs with NGOs. For the Konbit Shelter Project, Swoon has collaborated with various local groups including the Mango Grower's Association, Ayiti Resurrect, Haiti Redux, and an organization called Magepa S.A. which was focused on building houses after the earthquake in Haiti. This indicates that she is willing to work with carefully curated aid groups. It seems likely that Swoon's desire to work independently stems from her desire for full creative-control over her practice, which allows a certain freedom and evolution. The mission statement of the Heliotrope Foundation indicates aims that overlap with that of NGOS in its desire to provide aid: "to help communities respond and heal after natural disasters and other urgent social crises. [In the service of this, they] build spaces of wonder that serve as community resource centers and catalysts for local change."<sup>271</sup> However, it was created by Swoon as a solution to continue to support her three long-term community-based projects, two of which are *The Music Box* and Konbit Shelter

---

<sup>271</sup> Heliotrope means "a natural tendency, especially of plants, to turn or grow towards the sun" which is in line with the meaningful titles that Swoon employs in her work. Heliotrope Foundation, accessed June 1, 2014, [heliotropefoundation.org](http://heliotropefoundation.org).



Project.<sup>272</sup> Instead of a criticism of aid agencies in general, the critique above is lodged at conservative organizations that have ulterior motives or colonizing, missionary mindsets. In addition to diverging from alliances with NGOs, Swoon's desire to work independently on a community-centered project that bares her aesthetic brand, bears an interesting relationship to art historical practices which center on an aesthetic object; Swoon's aesthetic lies in both its "discursive site-specificity"<sup>273</sup> as well as in a more traditional visual brand. Consideration of Swoon's practice necessitates the exploration of the following questions: 1) What role does Swoon's street art background play in relationship to the desire to maintain autonomy as an artist?; 2) What determines the effectiveness or success of each project? I will explore these questions as I discuss the project further.

The Konbit Shelter Project is an ongoing project that began in 2010 by Swoon and a crew of fellow artists: Ben Wolf, KT Tierny, and Tod Seelie. It developed in direct response to the earthquake in Haiti that occurred the same year. Initially, Swoon and artist Ben Wolf, decided they wanted to find a way to be involved in Haiti's recovery from this natural disaster and so assembled a group of artists who were interested in participating in a project that addressed the needs of a community there.

---

<sup>272</sup> The third project is the development of an art and community resource center geared towards the revitalization of Braddock, Pennsylvania, which will open in the Fall of 2015.

<sup>273</sup> This term was developed by Miwon Kwon to refer to a move in contemporary art practice which "develops out of institutionally critical concerns, but moves increasingly toward the outside world and everyday life with aesthetic and art historical terms as secondary." Miwon Kwon, 24.

Swoon states that the project developed out of a simple, “very initial impulse to help” after learning of the extent of the devastation.<sup>274</sup> Swoon saw her ability to build impossible projects, coupled with her success in independently raising money to fund previous projects, as potentially useful offerings that could be applicable in circumstances in which it was determined that these skills would provide a benefit.

Therefore, drawing on her history of erecting structures, Swoon began to research affordable, sustainable, and most of all resilient building techniques and discovered the Superadobe technique of construction. Architect Nadir Khalili developed the Superadobe style for Cal-Earth which is an earthbag system of architecture that creates structures composed of ninety percent earth and ten percent concrete or other stabilizer such as lime or asphalt emulsion. It is meant to withstand disaster and rely on locally available materials. Sandbags are filled with earth found on site, arranged in a coil formation, and reinforced with barbed wire.<sup>275</sup> Khalili’s motivation for developing this technique was to provide a way to construct structures on the moon and Mars, but it has since been used as a solution to address the global housing crisis. Because it was meant to be malleable and conform to materials in villages across the globe, and because it had been earthquake tested, it appeared to be a logical method of construction to use in Haiti. The structures are simplistic in

---

<sup>274</sup> Swoon, interviewed by Lara Bullock.

<sup>275</sup> “What is Superadobe?” Cal-Earth: California Institute of Earth Art and Architecture, accessed February 2013, [calearth.org/building-designs/what-is-superadobe.html](http://calearth.org/building-designs/what-is-superadobe.html).

construction and their erection involves filling bags with concrete and stacking them, using mud and hay for mortar, and then plastering over its entirety to create a smooth surface. Another important feature of Superadobe architecture is that the bags themselves can be filled in place. According to Cal-Earth's website:

[...] there should be no heavy lifting or backaches, no expensive equipment, and a flexible and fast construction. The bags are filled in place on the wall using small pots like coffee cans, or even kitchen utensils. You can build alone or as a group.<sup>276</sup>

This was important to consider because it meant that a broader range of people could participate in the building process. Before traveling to Haiti, Swoon and her crew researched and experimented with this technique for several months. After successfully building a structure in Philadelphia, Swoon and Ben Wolf, accompanied by Dana Vincent, a Haitian lawyer who lived in New York and acted as a translator, traveled to Haiti to determine if their ideas and skills would be useful and desirable.

As would be expected, many NGOs arrived to help restructure and supply homes for the displaced citizens in Haiti following the earthquake, which was the case in Fondwa, the first community that Swoon's crew considered working with. Swoon realized that this community was already receiving a significant amount of aid and so she decided to search for a community that was receiving less help. Unsure of alternate locations in which to work, Swoon was serendipitously introduced to the Barriere Jeudi village in Cormiers by a dentist friend from Haiti who was living in New York. Cormiers is a rural area outside of Léogânes which is known for its

---

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

population of mango growers and which was hit especially hard by the earthquake. It was in desperate need of housing and jobs, as it was less accessible to support efforts because of its rural location.

It is important to note that although Swoon was interested in the development of practical building knowledge to contribute to a collaborative project in which she and her team could draw on their skills and knowledge as artists, she intended this project to be one centered on the idea of artistic exchange or a “skill-share situation,” as she felt that this is where her strengths lied. In her words:

We hoped to create jobs in the aftermath of the earthquake, as well as develop a skill share situation, teaching this highly resilient building style to communities who are vulnerable to many elements. We also hoped to team up with local artists and crafts people to make a beautiful structure, believing there to be a role for beauty and soulfulness in the rebuilding process, and that any new building system would have to be translated into the vernacular of the area in order to become something people could take pride in.<sup>277</sup>

Cormiers was such a community. However, in order to introduce the villagers to a new type of architecture, Swoon was told by local architects in Haiti that it would be best to build a communal building first, so that people could get used to the new style

---

<sup>277</sup> Swoon, “Konbit Shelter.”

before determining if it would be used for additional structures, specifically homes.<sup>278</sup> Instead of imposing a prevailing ideology of construction onto the community, Swoon was interested in finding a group who was interested in the possibilities of its application. Swoon wanted to be prepared with the ability to contribute a practical solution or skill to a devastated community that was tested and learned, in addition to her skills as an artist that she had developed organically through her practice and through her education. In Swoon's words, her "goal was to partner with a community and embark on a collaborative project, sharing [their] knowledge of the highly resilient Super-Adobe [sic] construction method through the building of a permanent community space."<sup>279</sup> The Mango Grower's Association in the Barriere Jeudi village in Cormiers had been wanting a community center to house their adult education classes and for various other meetings, so Swoon accompanied by Wolf, Seelie, and

---

<sup>278</sup> Swoon, interviewed by Lara Bullock. The architectural style of Haiti as a rule is colonial for upper class citizens, but for everyone else, especially in rural areas such as Cormiers, the architectural style is less specific. Historically, immigrants built in their own countries' style. Therefore, architectural style is constantly undergoing a process of evolution. Swoon speaks of Haiti as a place of dislocation and describes the way it was settled as "people displaced from their homes and stuck on this island." This disjointed architecture can be traced as far back as Haiti's history of colonization as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade which resulted in peoples from a variety of backgrounds which included the French and Spanish settling in Haiti and bringing their native architectural sensibilities with them. The village houses in Cormiers approximated shacks made out of any available materials. These Superadobe constructed homes would be much more durable than this makeshift construction and as well as being attractive.

<sup>279</sup> "About," *Konbit Shelter*, accessed May 1, 2012, [konbitshelter.org](http://konbitshelter.org).

locals first built a community center in the village.<sup>280</sup> As the project developed, in addition to the villagers and her team of artists, she collaborated with two local groups in Haiti: Haiti Redux and Ayiti Resurrect, the latter of which describes themselves as “a collaboration of visionary artists, community builders, holistic healers, and sustainable farmers from Komye [Cormiers](Leogane, Haiti) and the Haitian and African Diasporas.”<sup>281</sup> Also involved in the project was Magepa S.A., a local “independent engineering, construction and management”<sup>282</sup> company run by two brothers also interested in rebuilding and providing sustainable, earthquake friendly architectural solutions after the earthquake. Magepa was founded in 2010 and, according to its website:

[...] is working alongside Haiti to restore it to the beautiful Caribbean island it once was. To help the country, the company has set more goals that include post earth quake [sic.] reconstruction but are not limited to that alone. Magepa stands by its mission and seeks to do whatever is necessary so every project it undertakes in the future will enhance the country and maintain its good reputation.<sup>283</sup>

---

<sup>280</sup> Swoon, “Konbit Shelter.” Swoon recalls on her website how: “We called on everything we had, and raised enough money to fly myself, Ben, KT, and photographer and logistics guru Tod Seelie to Cormiers and begin the construction of a three room community center. We didn't have enough money to complete the construction, but we were determined to start, and to continue our fundraising efforts during the build.”

<sup>281</sup> From the website: “In the days following the quake, founding member Naima Penniman prayed that Haiti’s resulting resurrection would outweigh the current catastrophe. Ayiti Resurrect was formed as an effort to help enact that prayer.” “Mission,” *Ayiti Resurrect*, last updated April 20015, [www.ayitiresurrect.org/mission](http://www.ayitiresurrect.org/mission).

<sup>282</sup> “Magepa S.A.,” accessed April 9, 2012, [magepa.com](http://magepa.com).

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

One of Magepa's founders, Fritz Pierre-Louis, who was also the president of the Mango Grower's Association, housed Swoon and her crew while they worked in Haiti and was central to the project's success. Swoon and her team were initially the only people providing aid in the village, which was in need of much more than only structural rebuilding. Economic collapse coincided with the earthquake and through the building of a community center, Swoon's crew was able to provide jobs to the community, which included temporary construction jobs, as well as longer-term jobs such as employing women in the village as teachers to work in the community center. It was Pierre-Louis who had donated his ancestral land for the building of the community center, and advertised the need for participants to help with the construction of the projects. There were 35 positions to be filled, however 75 people of varying ages and genders (a majority of which were mango farmers) showed up. Instead of turning people away, Swoon devised a plan to divide work into shifts, so everyone could benefit from some income. However, an increasing number of people continued to show up to work, which presented a struggle between addressing the community's need for work without overwhelming what was feasible for the small group of artists and other locals. A local named Duckens Sanon, took on the role of navigating questions and talking to people who needed work, but whom the project could not accommodate. Swoon describes Duckens as a:

[...] soft spoken, an understated and yet hugely powerful leader of his community [who] was my most important ally in understanding how to navigate all of these questions. There was a solidity, an honesty and a

fairness to everything he did and said. Having him at the center of this chaotic process gave meaning and sense where we may have felt overwhelmed and lost.<sup>284</sup>

Duckens assumption of a leadership role is a testament to the Konbit Shelter Project's non-hierarchical mode of operation, as well as its truly open and collaborative nature. Locals took pride in the project. When local taxi driver, Michilo Auxsanvile, who participated in the construction of the community center was asked if he could build one of these structures on his own, he emphatically replied, "With people, I could be a foreman!"<sup>285</sup> Although Swoon was the conceptual leader, in practice, participants were equal collaborators.

However, although the artists and locals were proud of their accomplishments after the successful building of the community center, Swoon discovered that the materials, specifically concrete, were not only expensive, but extremely hard to come by in the large quantities required to erect one of these structures in such a rural area. Though they appear simple enough to construct, in order to get voluminous square footage inside the structures, one is required to build upwards, which uses a lot of material and ultimately, was not a practical building style to proceed with for each of the subsequent structures that the group built. While in many places concrete is readily available, and thus is a very economical building method, in Cormiers, it is not.

However, one of the solutions to this problem was to incorporate the rubble from their

---

<sup>284</sup> Swoon, "Konbit Shelter."

<sup>285</sup> Michilo Auxsanvile quoted in; Frederic King, "Swoon on Konbit Shelter," Vimeo, 9:04, 2015, [vimeo.com/108711286](https://vimeo.com/108711286).



destructured houses in the building of the community center. By utilizing readily available materials such as the rubble, the removal of which was a pressing concern in 2010 when Swoon's crew first arrived in Haiti, they were able to aid in Haiti's recovery in multiple ways. However, this ultimately ran out as it was utilized, causing the crew and villagers to come up with new adaptations. This flexibility is one of the virtues of the project, as it allows for a collaborative exchange of ideas and solutions. Villagers make about eight dollars for a day's labor which is approximately equivalent to the price of a bag of cement and therefore this style of construction was ultimately too expensive to be utilized to replace all houses that were destroyed in the Barriere Jeudi village.<sup>286</sup> To date, two additional structures have been built over the period of three years after additional rounds of fundraising efforts and return trips. Ideas for a fourth structure are being developed. Each subsequent structure is adapted based on feedback from the community.

The Konbit Shelter structures are attractive and bear Swoon's signature design aesthetic. These dome-like structures resemble smooth, white, earthen igloos with dirt or rock floors and various outcroppings and flourishes of color. The main dwelling, the community center, is reminiscent of the pantheon in construction. One enters it through a portico made of wood, or through another entrance, into what appear to be two small, white domelike structures, but as one progresses a short distance further into the structure, these smaller domes unite into a third, much larger domelike

---

<sup>286</sup> Swoon, interviewed by Lara Bullock.

structure, which has an oculus framed by a wooden lattice design just below it. The oculus is functional as it lets in light as well as a breeze, which is essential in a hot and humid climate such as Haiti's [Figures 2.13 - 2.14]. The doors are carved with floral and abstract patterns some of which are reminiscent of art deco designs, and they are painted in bright teals, pinks, and yellow. The awnings are also wooden, painted yellow, and trimmed in teal and pink. Each one is embellished by an elaborate cutout fan carving. Each window has a pink wooden shade or shutters with turquoise trim, which is important so that the buildings have a method of closing for privacy. Its colorful style is native to the region and also adheres to Swoon's usual palette of colors. The white dome is punctuated with trefoil designs formed out of found barrels painted brown inside. Some of the windows have stick structures in them which form line drawings such as stars and other more abstract shapes. The construction of the windows was designed by Ben Wolf and Swoon's intricate carvings were evident on entryway porticoes, doors, and on additional details. However, as sixty percent of the population in the Barriere Jeudi village are sculptors and craftspeople, there are native elements incorporated into the design as well.

Due to the success of the community center, in terms of its reception, the project was expanded to include the construction of two, single-dwelling houses for the families of two single mothers in the village, Monique and Adelia. These homes were built with a similar construction, and utilize less expensive materials, as a result of the realization as to their economic feasibility set in. The decision to house these



Figure 2.13 Swoon, *Konbit Shelter Project*, Community Center, caledoniacurry.com



Figure 2.14 Swoon, detail of community center interior, *Konbit Shelter Project*, caledoniacurry.com

women was voted on by the villagers and decided based on necessity.<sup>287</sup> Swoon and her team desired to put in place a system in which an artist, an architect, and a villager collaborated to design their houses. The first house, the second building that was constructed, was Monique's house,<sup>288</sup> which is trimmed with a pink stripe about three feet thick that runs along the base of the singular dome structure. At various points, the outlines of pink stars peek out. The inclusion of Swoon's signature delicate paper cutout drawings adorn an upper register of the building and cascade across the handmade window shades to create a particularly striking effect. Inside there is a painted turquoise band that runs along the lower half of the walls. In the back, there is a 'porch' created from a sheet metal awning.

The third building, Adelia's house, was completed in 2013. The structure is also a singular rounded structure, but with a wrap-around porch. This structure, deviated from the original concept of the domed structures based on communication and suggestions from the villagers. KT, the project manager for Adelia's house, said that for this house, they were concerned with "shav[ing] some of the cost off while still making it a really beautiful house that responds to and is in conversation with

---

<sup>287</sup> Swoon, interviewed by Lara Bullock.

<sup>288</sup> Monique approached the crew asking for a job (as many of the villagers did, and Swoon's crew tried to split the work into shifts to accommodate everyone). She was pregnant and ended up having her baby just one month into the build. Swoon says that it became clear "as I bent over baby Bessie in that heat that if we were able to continue building, a house for [her] and her family would be at the top of the priority list." Swoon, "Konbit Shelter," *Caledonia Curry*, [caledoniacurry.com/Konbit.php](http://caledoniacurry.com/Konbit.php).

some of the local building styles.”<sup>289</sup> Instead of a plaster, dome roof, it has a metal one that sits atop ten foot high walls and was constructed with “sacred geometry” in mind. Like the other two structures the plaster was made from local available sand, dirt, and vetiver. Swoon’s team had to leave Haiti before the construction of this structure was complete for financial reasons and because her team needed to return to their lives. However, since by this time, Swoon had been working in the village for a few years, they had “cultivated such a strong team of earthbag builders, lime plasterers and roofing experts that [they] were able to complete the final phase of construction on their own.”<sup>290</sup>

Although, Swoon and her team had to leave before this last structure’s completion, they maintain a relationship with the villagers and a continual involvement with the programming in the community center. After the construction of the two homes, the focus of the project shifted to the development and implementation of programming in the community center which many of the locals are taking over. As there are plans to build a fourth structure, Swoon and her team have not abandoned the building of structures, but shifted their focus to the development of programming within the community center. Swoon explains the reason for this shift toward programming was because she felt that it was time “to listen and relationship build”

---

<sup>289</sup> KT Tierney quoted in: Frederic King, “Konbit Shelter - 2013 Concept Build,” Vimeo, 4:27, 2013, [vimeo.com/56039242](https://vimeo.com/56039242).

<sup>290</sup> “Konbit Shelter: Blog,” *Konbit Shelter*, last updated April 17, 2014, [konbitshelter.tumblr.com](http://konbitshelter.tumblr.com).

rather than to move forward at the quick pace that they set for the building of the first structures.<sup>291</sup>

For programming in the community center, Swoon continues to work with Ayiti Resurrect as well as Guilds<sup>292</sup> in the development of programming which is partly focused on children's creative workshops with the curriculum making use of the structure of the community center itself, as well as on classes intended to develop skills so that villagers are employable experts in earthbag architecture. I attended a fundraising event in New York in 2012 to raise money for the Konbit Shelter Project. During this event, Swoon and the villagers in Cormiers, Skyped with each other which was projected onto a large screen before the audience. It was apparent that the relationship formed was a close one, as the community members affectionately referred to "Callie" with the comfort and familiarity of close friends; Swoon was even asked to be the godmother to one of the children in the village. They expressed excitement about the workshops which included exploring optics through the use of

---

<sup>291</sup> KT Tierney quoted in: Frederic King, "Konbit Shelter - 2013 Concept Build."

<sup>292</sup> Guilds is "a learning center design group that creates "children's workshops that induce wonder and spark curiosity for the world around us." "Mission," Guilds, accessed May 1, 2015, [guilds.co/mission](http://guilds.co/mission).

the camera obscura made out of the community center's windows, shadow puppet theatre, and optics.<sup>293</sup>

The fact that Swoon entered Haiti and provided temporary construction jobs, makes this part of her project identical to the operation of some NGOs which have been criticized for bolstering the economy and then leaving communities worse off in many ways than when they entered due to the creation of a dependency. However, although the money was welcome, this is not the case with the Konbit Shelter Project. The small scale of the project was such that the exchange was based on the exchange of ideas and solving problems collaboratively. Due to the limited finances, a dependency was not created and Swoon continues to raise funds for the project through the Heliotrope Foundation. Though many of the materials were found locally and for free, because Swoon and her team were paying for everything in addition to employing anyone they possibly could, this endeavor was not inexpensive to orchestrate. The villagers were not making small fortunes, although one-third of the budget went to the employment of local laborers, cooks, skilled masons, and craftspeople.<sup>294</sup>

---

<sup>293</sup> I attended a benefit in at the Tribeca Grand Hotel in New York on April 30, 2014, held to raise funds for the Konbit Shelter Project. A portion of the fundraiser was devoted to holding a Skype conversation between Swoon and the villagers in Cormiers, who expressed great satisfaction with the project. Several teachers who worked in the community center were women in the community who did not have jobs before Swoon came in. It was clear that the community center provided many benefits to the community creatively, socially, as well as financially. Swoon was even asked to be the godmother to Gracie, one of the children living there.

<sup>294</sup> KT Tierney quoted in: Frederic King, "Konbit Shelter - 2013 Concept Build."

In addition to some financial benefits, the Konbit Shelter Project increased the visibility of the village, which instilled the villagers with a feeling of pride. Francoise Cetoulouse, one of the residents reflects upon the effects of the building of the community center when she relates that “People came from all over Léogâne and Port-au-Prince to see the work and congratulate us”<sup>295</sup> and the community center is jokingly referred to as the “Castle of Cormiers.”<sup>296</sup> Monique also commented that “I was happy when construction started because I had so much economic problem [sic.]. At first when they were digging dirt, I didn't expect it would be so beautiful.”<sup>297</sup> In addition to the structures and programming that resulted from the project, lasting relationships were formed. Swoon recalls the difference between what she thought was a warm reception the first time her and her crew came to the village and the reception she received on the second visit, which was exponentially warmer. This was because the villagers did not expect for Swoon’s crew to return as they promised, which is a criticism of many NGOs. On the topic of NGOs Swoon states:

People wondered why we didn't leave this sort of work to NGOs and to the sprawling humanitarian aid structures pouring into the country. Our instincts told us that it was precisely our smallness, and our independence that would make us most effective in this moment. We were one small group of people who cared, connecting with one small village of people in a difficult situation. This kind of human scale relationship building work is the stuff that all of the community actions

---

<sup>295</sup> Francoise Cetoulouse quoted in: Frederic King, “Swoon on Konbit Shelter.”

<sup>296</sup> “Konbit Shelter: Blog.”

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.



I have been a part of are made from, and I believed that it could translate across international boundaries, and into times of crisis.<sup>298</sup>

The fact that Swoon's crew honors their commitment to the villagers in Cormiers is consistent with Swoon's overall practice with its focus on human connection.

As stated earlier, Konbit means "working together" or "shared labor" in Kreyol, the native language of Haiti. Swoon felt that she and her friends' positions as artists meant they had something unique to offer. Konbit Shelter Project was "created with the idea that a group of artists, engineers, architects, and builders could pool their individual knowledge, resources, and time to make a lasting difference in post-earthquake Haiti."<sup>299</sup> Swoon did not get paid or commissioned to do this work, but instead she relied on her own fundraising efforts. The money raised for this project was gathered through the selling of Swoon's work, Kickstarter campaigns, and fundraising benefits, in addition to a Rockefeller Grant through Creative Time. Unlike *Ersilia*, this "piece" was produced by Swoon entirely independent of museum sponsorship.<sup>300</sup>

Instead of focusing on solving one specific problem by assuming a top-down approach (such as providing a certain number of houses and replacing a certain number of buildings according to a fixed plan), Swoon addresses the needs of a

---

<sup>298</sup> Swoon, "Konbit Shelter."

<sup>299</sup> "Konbit Shelter: Blog."

<sup>300</sup> This project was also independent of direct corporate sponsorship, though the Rockefeller and Creative Time grants are themselves reliant on corporate sponsorship.

community in a more organic, grassroots manner that involves her training as an artist and is consistent with her methodology which is evident through the collaborative effort with the villagers to determine the shape of the project according to their needs. The women who were fortunate enough to receive houses were involved in the creative process and participated in the designs that were incorporated into the architecture of their homes.

While on the surface, the Konbit Shelter Project might appear identical to the operation of many NGOs which typically impose *a priori* solutions to problems in a posture of “neocolonial domination” based on an idea that an Other could benefit from a more-knowledgable first world experience,<sup>301</sup> Swoon’s approach is more complex and collaborative. Also, Swoon’s work bears a relationship to the autonomous stance of “traditional” object-based art via her titling of the project, which would indicate that it is not just a project for Swoon, but it is also a “piece” - and like a street piece, it is not meant to be displayed, but experienced. This is something inherent to street art practices. Street artists in general are concerned with self-representation, which is a concern of all artists to an extent. Street art, however by its nature is concerned with the visual as a unifying marker of this identity; street artists have a brand. Certain elements included in the project are recognizable as elements by Swoon. These elements, while admittedly one part of a much larger conceptual project, are also evident in the work of both JR and Os Gêmeos’s projects.

---

<sup>301</sup> Kester, *The One and the Many*, 133.

If Swoon's practice is not identical to that of an NGO, on one hand, and not identical to dialogic practices, on the other, where does Swoon's practice fall? I would argue that her practice is located somewhere between these two approaches. Though Swoon and her crew entered Cormiers having educated themselves in the Superadobe technique, they were interested from the beginning in a "skill-share" situation. Another important factor is that Swoon did not simply apply for funding from organizations, but participated in crowd-sourcing which involved the gifting of her work, and arranged fundraisers to raise money. She also made work to sell in order to provide funds directly to the community of Cormiers. Third, this work, like the *Swimming Cities* projects, will not appear in galleries as artwork.<sup>302</sup> Swoon is not exhibiting images of these projects that would circulate in galleries. Instead, the project lives on through her website as well as the Heliotrope Foundation's website, through which donations to the project can be made.

It is clear that Swoon is motivated by a moral impetus that sometimes means that her projects fail (*Swimming Cities* did not make it to New Orleans; Superadobe was not as economical as she hoped). These factors are distinct from community-based projects where one-time experiences live on mostly through images circulated in galleries. Though, Swoon bears the marks of coming out of a street art tradition, which means that she insists on a recognizable image and object-based aesthetic in her

---

<sup>302</sup> As pointed out above, though three of the boats from the *Swimming Cities* projects were repurposed for the *Submerged Motherlands* exhibition, the latter was a different project entirely.

projects through the consistent utilization of salvaged materials and the employment of her specific color schemes and designs which bear a visual relationship to her work, overall. The fact that she does not collaborate with NGOs is related to this logic of a consistent moral or ethical aesthetic.

Kester points out that instead of a clearcut opposition between NGOs and authentic social movements, it “seems more accurate to describe the emerging global civil society as a site of conflict and contestation in which local and international activist groups, social justice movements, and union organizations, both challenge and collaborate with an equally disparate network of non-profits, aid organizations, public agencies, and private foundations.”<sup>303</sup> This astute assertion is relevant and inclusive of Swoon’s position as an artist operating as a non-profit organization while being critical of NGOs. Swoon’s distinguishing factors are the intimacy and small-scale nature of her projects as well as, in terms of The Konbit Shelter Project, the fact that it was intended to be an artist’s response to a situation.

## CONCLUSION

Swoon’s artistic practice is socially-minded, cosmopolitan, and bears a continual thread that stems from her first works in the street and continues through her latest projects. Swoon’s model of working with local groups in various communities lends her work a unique authenticity in terms of including the individual, human

---

<sup>303</sup> Kester, *The One and the Many*, 124-5.

aspect as well as the geographical aspects of the public. In creating relationships outside of government sponsorship, Swoon is operating from an in-between space created by the reclaiming of space that occurs through collaboration. Swoon's practice is reminiscent of movements throughout history that have sought change from a grassroots level. She does not try to fix things beyond her means like poverty in Haiti, but rather works with members of a community in Haiti to develop something that would benefit them. Swoon operates from the idea that an artist-driven philanthropic or socially-minded model of interacting with various communities, as opposed to larger, economic models, such as NGOs that address the same issues and have the similar desired outcomes, allows more freedom. Because artist groups like Swoon's operate independently and on a small scale, more intimate relationships are likely to form. Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture*, "the economic 'solutions' to national and international inequality and poverty as practiced by IMF and the World Bank . . . have 'the feel of the colonial ruler.'"<sup>304</sup> Swoon on the other hand acts on an equal level with her collaborators. As indicated above, *Ersilia* allowed locals from various organizations and backgrounds to participate in and utilize the space, even after Swoon left São Paulo. *Konbit Shelter Project* allowed an exchange of ideas between Swoon, her fellow artists, and the villagers in Cormiers and resulted in housing and a community center which will continue to evolve with and without Swoon's involvement.

---

<sup>304</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), xv.

Swoon fights against a pseudo-individuality defined by accumulation of things or the formation of an artistic persona in favor of genuine experiences. Much like the work Grant Kester discusses in his book, *Conversation Pieces*, Swoon begins her “work not with the desire to express or articulate an already formed creative vision but rather . . . to listen.”<sup>305</sup> This is rather avant-garde in an artworld that has become “hegemonic with an insistence on corporate sponsorship and reliance on the elite.”<sup>306</sup> Swoon’s independence from hegemonic institutions and modes of being means that she operates from a point of freedom through collaboration and that she is therefore, often putting herself at risk for failure. Like Gordon Matta Clark who created site-specific interventions which he referred to as “Anarchitecture” Swoon’s work is meant to “redefine spatial situations and structural components.”<sup>307</sup> Just as “Anarchitecture” was an anarchistic approach to architecture, Swoon’s practice is an anarchistic response to political and social relationships in everyday life. Clark worked on abandoned and neglected structures, while Swoon works with refuse and the forgotten. Swoon, who credits Clark as a formational influence on her practice has said: “He’d carve abandoned houses in half, turning the city into a sculpture, then leave them to be

---

Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Conversation in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 118. Unlike them however, Swoon does not “define [herself] as [an artist] through [her] ability to catalyze understanding, to mediate exchange [she doesn’t mediate], and to sustain an ongoing process of empathetic identification and critical analysis.”<sup>305</sup> (118).

<sup>306</sup> Kurland, “Swoon: The Lattice Effect.”

<sup>307</sup> “*Bingo*: Gordon Matta-Clark,” MoMA, accessed April 7, 2015, [www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/gordon-matta-clark-bingo-1974](http://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/gordon-matta-clark-bingo-1974).

destroyed. . . I felt an emotional connection and knew I had to make something that embodied those principles.”<sup>308</sup> Though Swoon’s actual work on the street will inevitably disintegrate or decompose, as street art is meant to, unlike Clark, she facilitates an aesthetic space of magic, or an in-between space that emerges in the act of collaboration, conversation, and interaction between participants that works in conjunction with her immersive aesthetic.

---

<sup>308</sup> Kurland, “Swoon: The Lattice Effect.”

## CHAPTER FOUR: Os Gêmeos and the Cosmopolitan Imaginary

*We tried to search for more Brazilian roots, not just folklore or popular Brazilian culture, but something that myself and my brother always believed in, the world that we created.*

- Os Gêmeos, Tate Modern website<sup>309</sup>

*People need time machines, they need to fly, to feel love, and we love to make that and give that to everyone for free.*

- Os Gêmeos, *Juxtapoze*<sup>310</sup>

*Over time the world of the twins began to make more and more sense to me. In a city where hell is directly on the surface of the concrete, there must be something, somewhere, that can take you away from the moment by moment assaults on your very will to live. For Os Gêmeos it has been a world of fantasy, a world built from the best things in life. It is a world which emerges through the twins' art into the world of reality. Their characters and iconography all come from this fantasy world, and the more they paint, the more their world emerges to us as well.*

- Caleb Neelon, *12oz Prophet*<sup>311</sup>

From August 2012 through September 2013 in Dewey Square Park in the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston, one encountered on the 70 x 70 foot side of the Air Intake Structure, a colossal burst of polychromatism in the form of a colorful, yellow-skinned personage [Figure 3.1]. At first, he appeared to depict a vandal of some sort, which was deduced by the neon red, makeshift, shirt balaclava tied over his face, so that his eyes and part of his nose were peeking out. The association of a vandal with this space was significant for the Greenway was the site of the then recent Occupy Boston protests. He was seated, in a demure position, hunched up with his knees

---

<sup>309</sup> "Street Art, Artists," Tate Modern, accessed May 1, 2013, [www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/street-art/street-art-artists](http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/street-art/street-art-artists).

<sup>310</sup> Caleb Neelon, "Os Gêmeos," *Juxtapoze*, No. 114 (July 2010): 59.

<sup>311</sup> Caleb Neelon and Allen Benedikt, "Brazil," *12OzProphet Magazine*, No. 6 (1998), [www.12ozprophet.com/news/throwback\\_thursday-12ozprophet-issue-6-feat-os\\_gemeos/](http://www.12ozprophet.com/news/throwback_thursday-12ozprophet-issue-6-feat-os_gemeos/).





Figure 3.1 Os Gêmeos, "The Giant of Boston," Rose Kennedy Greenway at Dewey Square, Boston, MA, photo © Geoff Hargadon

against his chest, while his right arm idled loosely on the ground. On further study, the rest of the figure's clothing did not connote vandal, so much as child or maybe even clown, as his pants and long sleeved button-down shirt were printed with vibrant all-over patterns in teal, blue, dark green, red, yellow, and purple; it seemed more playful than violent. In fact, the yellow buttons on his shirt, which assumed the form of expressive, yellow faces suggested that this figure was part of a fantastic world. He seemed misplaced and vulnerable as he filled the confines of the side of the structure, confusing the stereotype associated with masked male figures and violence, perhaps suggesting the good intentions of the protesters that once occupied this space. There was no doubt that this was a piece by Os Gêmeos: the colorful outfit referenced the colorful autochthonous culture of Brazil; the shirt balaclava referenced street culture; it was predominantly characterized by their signature use of yellow and red spray

paint; it possessed the usual yellow-skin and horizontal, almond-shaped eyes.<sup>312</sup> Os Gêmeos's characters populate colorful settings or consist of elaborate throw-ups, pieces, or murals like this one.<sup>313</sup> The following chapter is dedicated to Os Gêmeos's practice and its straddling between a fictional realm of their own creation and actual real-life concerns in the service of what I see as their overall brand of moral cosmopolitanism.

Os Gêmeos (Portuguese for “The Twins”) is the name for the Brazilian identical twin artist duo Gustavo and Otavio Pandolfo who were born in 1974 in Cambuci, a working class neighborhood of São Paulo, Brazil. Cambuci is one of the oldest neighborhoods in São Paulo. In the early twentieth century, it was a home for Italian immigrants and known as an active site of protest for workers' rights.<sup>314</sup> Caleb Neelon, a friend of Os Gêmeos and fellow street artist described Cambuci in the late 1990s as “a place where people spent their days outdoors, a neighborhood where

---

<sup>312</sup> In *Art in the Streets*, Os Gêmeos explain: “because we were born in the year of the color orange, 1974, we decided to focus on the colors yellow and dark red. Combined, they have a special energy.” Jeffrey Deitch and KET, “Os Gêmeos Talk About How They Became Artists,” in *Art in the Streets*, ed. Jeffrey Deitch, Roger Gastman, and Aaron Rose (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2011), 237.

<sup>313</sup> A throw-up is: “A quickly executed piece consisting of an outline with or without thin layer of spray paint for fill-in.” Os Gêmeos usually write their tag with a red outline, filled in with yellow. “Piece” is short for “masterpiece.” “Writer’s Vocabulary,” @149ST, accessed June 1, 2015, [www.at149st.com/glossary.html](http://www.at149st.com/glossary.html).

<sup>314</sup> John W. F. Dulles, *Anarchists and Communists in Brazil, 1900-1935* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973).

everyone knew one another, but also a place to head inside after nightfall.”<sup>315</sup> For these reasons, Cambuci is referred to as the cradle of anarchism in São Paulo. Os Gêmeos began painting in Cambuci when they were small children; their talent nurtured by supportive parents who even allowed them to paint the walls of their house. As teenagers in the mid nineteen-eighties Gustavo and Otavio became interested in the hip-hop movement and through that, eventually graffiti.<sup>316</sup> Writing for the *Wall Street Journal*, Alastair Stewart quotes Os Gêmeos as stating that they “turned to graffiti to escape the chaos of life in São Paulo” because they felt that “The city [was] a beast that [was] growing out of control.”<sup>317</sup>

The São Paulo that Os Gêmeos grew up in, was one that was undergoing vast economic and political change. In 1982, the first open elections were held in Brazil as it underwent a transition in government from military rule to a “democratic era” which began with the national reform legislation of 1979 which allowed for the formation of

---

<sup>315</sup> Neelon, “Os Gêmeos,” 53.

<sup>316</sup> The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston catalogue for Os Gêmeos’s exhibition says hip-hop invaded Brazil in 1987 and that that is when they got involved in graffiti. Also, Os Gêmeos refer to their current street art practice as graffiti versus street art. In Brazil, the distinction is not made to the extent that it is elsewhere. While Os Gêmeos’s work is what would be referred to as street art other places, Os Gêmeos continue to refer to their work as graffiti. Pedro Alonzo, *Os Gêmeos* (New York: Gingko Press Inc., 2012).

<sup>317</sup> Alastair Stewart, “The View From the Street: The Murals of Otavio and Gustavo Pandolfo are Part Urban Chaos — and Part Other Worldly. And Very Brazilian,” *The Wall Street Journal* (March 29, 2010), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703909804575123662556132070>.

political parties outside of Brazil's previous military-mandated two party system.<sup>318</sup> Military rule was terminated with the election of a civilian president in 1985, Tancredo Neves. However, Neves fell ill and died right before the election and was replaced by vice-president José Sarney who had ties to the military. Sarney's election resulted in renewed protests and political unrest which was often reflected in the public sphere by the appearance of campaign posters and occasional graffiti both of which featured the slogan "Sarney Out," though this was found primarily in Rio de Janeiro instead of São Paulo.<sup>319</sup> While Os Gêmeos almost certainly were not aware of the intricacies of the political climate of Brazil as young eight-year-old boys, this tumultuous political climate perhaps affected the growing hip-hop and graffiti culture in São Paulo. Graffiti as a territorial act as well as an autonomous artistic act is political; it asserts the voice and thus the importance of the individual. It would seem logical for São Paulo youth to embrace a movement such as graffiti in the contemporaneous culture, especially one that had a recent history of public protest and oppressive military rule.

Os Gêmeos immersed themselves in the local hip-hop scene at the age of nine. Initially, they were b-boys, otherwise known as breakdancers. However, when they were introduced to graffiti a year later via the Cambuci crew called PORTAL, a group who had several members who also b-boyed, they were drawn to the medium. Os

---

<sup>318</sup> Chaffee, Lyman G., *Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries* (Wesport, CT; Greenwood Press, 1993), 134-136.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

Gêmeos's parents continued to nurture this talent, purchasing their first spray cans for them in 1985, of which they recall, "one was burgundy and the other was baby green."<sup>320</sup> Every Saturday their father would drop them off at the San Bento subway station in the center of São Paulo, where they would meet up with others at a bench they characterize as "the most important bench" because everyone in the hip-hop scene would go there to exchange information and ideas about graffiti techniques and hip-hop culture.<sup>321</sup> This is where they were exposed to rap, DJ-ing, and graffiti, which along with b-boying represent the four tenets of hip hop.<sup>322</sup> Despite receiving these first spray cans, Os Gêmeos began painting in the streets with latex as a base for their figures and tags and began to outline these images in spray paint in 1987.<sup>323</sup> Because spray paint was expensive and of inferior quality in São Paulo compared to that in the United States, latex was a much more practical and economical choice, especially for the composition of larger pieces.<sup>324</sup> Painting on the streets of São Paulo compared to

---

<sup>320</sup> Neelon, "Os Gêmeos," *Juxtapoze*, No. 114 (July 2010), 53.

<sup>321</sup> Jeffrey Deitch and KET, "Os Gêmeos Talk About How They Became Artists," 235.

<sup>322</sup> "Os Gêmeos," *Stylefile Magazine*, #33: *Sunrisefile* (July 2010), [www.stylefile-magazine.com/179-0-Os+Gêmeos.html](http://www.stylefile-magazine.com/179-0-Os+Gêmeos.html).

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.* The use of latex and spray paint together became a trademark of São Paulo graffiti, as many artists adopted this style for economic reasons and the scarcity of quality spray paint.

<sup>324</sup> Spray paint continues to be expensive in Brazil. According to curator Eduardo Saretta, it is about 20 Reais per can: Sophie Wall, "São Paulo Street Art: in conversation with Eduardo Saretta," *Bristolatino*, April 27, 2015, <https://bristolatino.wordpress.com/2015/04/27/sao-paulo-street-art-in-conversation-with-eduardo-saretta/>.

large cities in the United States was relatively easy as, according to the twins, São Paulo's police force had larger crimes to contend with than graffiti, and while it was illegal, it was and is generally allowed.<sup>325</sup> When they began painting in the street, Os Gêmeos painted figures, but had yet to perfect the signature style that they are known for today. Due to the relatively apathetic attitude of the police, growing up in São Paulo allowed Os Gêmeos to perfect a technique which they now apply to the creation of elaborate murals, installations, and figures which are markedly original and distinct from street art anywhere else in the world. In developing a recognizable style marked by the use of signature colors and imagery evolving from Brazilian culture and their personal mythology, a land they refer to as Tritrez was born. For Os Gêmeos,

---

<sup>325</sup> Graffiti is now legal in São Paulo if the owner of the building on which it is rendered gives the graffiti writer permission.; São Paulo has a unique relationship to graffiti, unlike anywhere else in the world. Neil Schlecht points out that at various times in its history, graffiti has been “incorporated and institutionalized by the controlling culture and its political and social institutions” even though it is graffiti’s intention to “question elite dominance of arts and culture” (Schlecht, 1-2). He attributes its assimilation into various aspects of dominant culture to its portrayal in the media, especially during the 1980s (though this type of graffiti, as done by artists such as Mauricio Villaca, are generally more innocuous than the work of Os Gêmeos, for example). The mid-1980s saw the first attempt by the city of São Paulo to support graffiti as a way to beautify the city (4) and because of its significant embrace, it was “semi-legal” (5). São Paulo even celebrates National Graffiti Day on March 27th which was inaugurated in memory of a beloved street artist Alex Valluri who died on March 26th, 1987. However, despite these examples of graffiti’s acceptance, it continues to be a controversial topic in São Paulo as styles have evolved, as well as public and government opinions.; Neil E. Schlecht, “Resistance and Appropriation in Brazil: How the Media and ‘Official Culture’ Institutionalized São Paulo’s Grafite,” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, Vol. 14 (1995) , 1-20.

everything they produce is part of Tritrez, or a larger whole that will eventually come together in the end.<sup>326</sup>

The practice of painting regularly in the streets allowed Os Gêmeos's to connect with the city in a new way through encounters with people which reverberate throughout their art.<sup>327</sup> Through small gestures and interactions, sometimes as simple as a smile of appreciation or acknowledgment, Os Gêmeos realized that they could make a positive impact on the lives of myriad people from various backgrounds whom they encountered on the streets. These interactions became motivation for Os Gêmeos to try to address a variety of struggles Paulistanos face politically and socially in their work such as homelessness, lack of natural resources, and the corruption of the government, among a plethora of others. Through the experience of working on the streets and conversing with local residents as well as others who might happen to pass by, Os Gêmeos began a process of communion with the street. Along with their background growing up in São Paulo, strangers began to shape the twins' view of the city and to inform their aesthetic values.

Like Swoon, Os Gêmeos gather artistic inspiration both phenomenologically from the street in addition to through personal experiences and sources off of the street. In the 1980s, São Paulo was exposed to the hip-hop culture and graffiti writing styles of New York to a great extent through the documentary *Style Wars* (1983) and

---

<sup>326</sup> "Os Gêmeos," *Stylefile Magazine*.

<sup>327</sup> Os Gêmeos, "Os Gêmeos at the Vancouver Biennale" (artist talk, Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Vancouver, British Columbia, September 5th, 2014).



Figure 3.2 Os Gêmeos, Wild Style letters, collaboration with Rime and Retna in Los Angeles, 1998, photo by Soulroach, [blog.vandalog.com/2012/10/wild-style-wednesday-34/](http://blog.vandalog.com/2012/10/wild-style-wednesday-34/)

the books *Subway Art* (1984) and *Spraycan Art* (1987), which featured New York and its graffiti scene. Os Gêmeos were particularly influenced by these sources, and they incorporated elements of New York graffiti in their style, such as Wild Style characters [Figure 3.2]. They had a black and white photocopy of *Spraycan Art* in which they labeled the colors by hand. They elaborate:

Before we saw *Spray Can Art* [sic] and *Subway Art* we saw the book *Munichgraffiti*, but only some pages. Our friend ZELAO (RIP) only had some pages and he showed us what he got. . . We didn't have video cassettes, so everything we saw was on TV or in magazines, we had stolen from stores.<sup>328</sup>

---

<sup>328</sup> “Os Gêmeos,” *Stylefile Magazine*.



Often procured in bootlegged form, each of these books had a major impact on graffiti artists around the world. One reason was the democratic nature of graffiti art expounded within: almost anyone could do it and thus have a voice, which is especially appealing in a big city. As long as they had paint, a roller, a brush, or a spray can, street artists' voices would be heard. São Paulo was no different. Os Gêmeos lived with their mother and worked in a restaurant and a bank to earn a living until their fateful meeting in 1993 with Barry McGee, a popular San Francisco street artist known by his graffiti name TWIST and his more-expansive low-brow style.<sup>329</sup> Before meeting McGee, Os Gêmeos would often paint their phone numbers on walls beside their paintings in hopes of attracting employment; which could be anything from illustration work to painting buildings.<sup>330</sup> McGee was visiting São Paulo on an independent study and artist's residency fellowship.<sup>331</sup> He took an interest in one of Os Gêmeos's paintings and called the number beside it. Os Gêmeos's mother answered. McGee explained to her in broken Portuguese who he was, to which she

---

<sup>329</sup> Lowbrow art is an underground art style characterized by colorful cartoonish figures. It arose in Los Angeles in the 1970s and is usually non-critical and influenced by things like comics and tattoo design. It is also sometimes referred to as Pop Surrealism.

<sup>330</sup> Jeffrey Deitch, "Art in the Streets," in *Art in the Streets*, ed. Jeffrey Deitch, Roger Gastman, and Aaron Rose (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2011), 13.

<sup>331</sup> Tristan Manco, Lost Art, and Caleb Neelon, *Graffiti Brasil* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 17.

replied by giving McGee directions to their home.<sup>332</sup> Of this meeting Os Gêmeos recall:

It was very important for us. He showed us beautiful throw-ups, tags, and characters, and it was very impressive to see that you don't need a lot of colors to do nice pieces, just black and white and good hand style. After that we started to find good spots, which was really important as we tried to find our own style. We traded flicks via the postal service—there was no Internet then—and we remember the packet that Barry sent us, full of things like flicks, stickers, and lots of other good shit.<sup>333</sup>

McGee was also the first person to introduce Os Gêmeos to modern spray can caps<sup>334</sup> and the PBS documentary *Style Wars*.<sup>335</sup> McGee demonstrated to Os Gêmeos that one could support oneself by making art. Os Gêmeos decided henceforth to dedicate themselves emphatically to procuring any occupation which would allow them to draw and benefit financially, which included magazine, newspaper, and comic strip

---

<sup>332</sup> Jeffrey Deitch, “Art in the Streets,” 13.

<sup>333</sup> Neelon, “Os Gêmeos,” 55. Flicks are photographs of graffiti works.

<sup>334</sup> Street artists are very particular about which caps they use, as well as the brand of spray paint they use. For example, Os Gêmeos prefer Montana spray paint that is produced in Spain, as they think it is the best quality.; Caps “(also know as: nozzles, tips, actuators, etc.) are like a brushes to an artist. They come in many sizes shapes and colors and can produce a variety of desired line widths, spray effects and overall output volume. Although most spray paints include a spray nozzle or “cap” it is typical for painter to remove the “stock cap” and replace it with a more task appropriate one. Using the wrong cap can be like writing with a dull pencil, resulting in shaky and undesired strokes. It can also be like trying to paint a house with a q-tip. Using the right caps can give you the sharp, crisp and accurate lines you are looking for as well as speed up larger tasks.” “Art Primo Caps 101: An Introduction to Spray Paint Nozzles,” ArtPrimo, [http://artprimo.com/catalog/art\\_primo\\_caps-101](http://artprimo.com/catalog/art_primo_caps-101).

<sup>335</sup> “Os Gêmeos,” *Stylefile Magazine*.

illustration. They even produced their own graffiti magazine, called *Fiz* (which translates to “make” or “create”) for a few years.<sup>336</sup> For four years Os Gêmeos worked fervently developing the unique style for which they have become known, which is characterized by their signature use of yellow and red.<sup>337</sup> A deep commitment to painting earned them recognition within São Paulo and soon galleries were interested in representing them and exhibiting their work.<sup>338</sup>

Unlike many street artists, Os Gêmeos see no conflict between working in the gallery space and the streets. They do not struggle with the idea of selling-out like other artists, as they continue to think of street or graffiti work and gallery work as completely separate endeavors. Another reason may be because as long as they have produced gallery work, they have remained prolific on the streets. Often the charge of selling-out, as I discussed in the introduction, implies that an artist has abandoned the element of their practice which garnered them an underground following or subversive

---

<sup>336</sup> In the 1990s, there was a period when it was popular for graffiti artists to self-publish their own magazines featuring their own and others’ graffiti. Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon, *The History of American Graffiti* (New York: Harper Design, 2011), 376.

<sup>337</sup> In *Art in the Streets*, Os Gêmeos explain that “because we were born in the year of the color orange, 1974, we decided to focus on the colors yellow and dark red. Combined, they have a special energy.” Jeffrey Deitch and KET, “Os Gêmeos Talk About How They Became Artists,” 237.

<sup>338</sup> Os Gêmeos, “Os Gêmeos at the Vancouver Biennale.” Also they currently belong to Galeria Fortes Vilaça and Lehmann Maupin Gallery.

status, however Os Gêmeos are constantly producing work on the streets.<sup>339</sup>

According to Os Gêmeos, the gallery is simply a space for experimentation with the sculptural side of their practice and other techniques that are more difficult to employ on the street.<sup>340</sup> While it is true that the space of the gallery is a contractual commitment centered on financial obligation and is an arena far removed from the street in that its clients are often wealthy donors from a variety of backgrounds who amass private art collections, Os Gêmeos view their authenticity as tied to their greater project of production as a whole. They do not subscribe to the idea that their authenticity is tied to whether they work on the streets or not, though they continue to do so. Os Gêmeos often gift paintings to famous people such as WILL.I.AM and are also commissioned by them; Giselle Bündchen's husband, Tom Brady, commissioned a painting for her for her birthday. Instead, Os Gêmeos's authenticity is situated in their dedication to their practice. Os Gêmeos have come a long way since their early graffiti days in the 1980s, yet, they still work in a studio next to their mother's house, the same house they grew up in, and they possess an otherworldly work ethic.

Within the gallery space, Os Gêmeos discovered that they could recreate Tritrez in a more complete way than was possible on the streets, as the gallery allows

---

<sup>339</sup> Tristan Manco points out that the idea of legal versus illegal painting, which is often a marker of selling-out in many parts of the world, has generally not been an issue for Brazilian graffiti artists whose concerns are more about painting so that a wide variety of people can see it versus simply "getting-up." In fact, because paint is so expensive in Brazil, it is common for graffiti artists to seek out sponsorship for elaborate pieces. Manco, 46.

<sup>340</sup> Os Gêmeos in conversation with Lara Bullock, November 2011.

for immersive, encapsulating environments using a variety of media. However, the streets remain their direct method of connecting with people. The streets feed extroverted aesthetic ideas, ideas born from the vast range of people from different backgrounds and economic circumstances, and enable Os Gêmeos to reach a greater range of people than would be possible within a gallery setting. On the streets, Os Gêmeos have taken on political issues such as the Brazilian government's exploitive use of natural resources as well as addressed social issues such as homelessness. Being that the importance of these issues in part, arose from experiences on the street, Os Gêmeos lends a megaphone through art to the voices and lived experiences of Paulistanos. Galleries are not the natural home of social issues, as galleries are settings which cater to a specific societal strata. Galleries are non-democratic spaces. To be sure, Os Gêmeos is inspired by the gallery and its enclosure but there is a divide between bringing their mythological world to life indoors and extending it to the streets to advocate for themselves and others. When the social barricades fall, then the gallery too can be a democratic site that, like a time capsule, holds and preserves Tritrez. Thus, we would see Os Gêmeos's project coming together, as they have said, in a new cosmopolitan world which escapes, like Swoon, and educates, like JR.

In 1997 writer Caleb Neelon (aka SONIK) and Allen Benedikt (aka RAVEN), the founder of the graffiti magazine, *12ozProphet*, visited São Paulo in order to investigate its graffiti scene.<sup>341</sup> The legendary article that resulted from this visit was

---

<sup>341</sup> *12ozProphet* began in 1993 by RAVEN who was a student at the Rhode Island School of Design and only had six issues.

featured in *12ozProphet Magazine* Issue #6, which introduced the twins to the United States and, as the magazine circulated, the world.<sup>342</sup> A few years later, Os Gêmeos had their first show in the United States in 2003 at the Luggage Store in San Francisco and had their first solo show at Deitch Projects in New York in 2008, which would become their gallery in the United States. Since then, Os Gêmeos have continued to travel around the world and their style has become synonymous with Brazilian street art.<sup>343</sup>

Os Gêmeos began by spray painting walls, but as they started to show in galleries, expanded their practice to create immersive installations which include sculptural works in addition to painted works. Os Gêmeos explain: “In galleries we have found the direction to build things. That's what we have done since we [were] five years old. We love to build things and let the people escape from this world for [a few] minutes.”<sup>344</sup> Elaborating on this idea, Os Gêmeos continue, “The galleries are a totally different world from the streets; that work isn't graffiti, and we're careful about

---

<sup>342</sup> Caleb Neelon and Allen Benedikt, “Brazil.” This was the last edition that appeared in print. Since, *12OzProphet* has existed exclusively online.

<sup>343</sup> Os Gêmeos are the most prolific Brazilian street artists within São Paulo, as well as around the world. This is because of their use of Brazilian cultural elements in their work, but mostly it is a result of the vast amount of work they put up in the streets of São Paulo and internationally. Their ability to travel is a direct result of their proliferation on the streets of São Paulo and their resultant success both locally, and abroad. A recent example of their international popularity is that from August 1-31 2015, their animated characters were featured on the electronic billboards of Time Square at 11:57pm at 42nd-47th Streets between Broadway and 7th Avenue as part of Times Square New York: Midnight Moment. It was organized by their gallery Lehmann Maupin. “Parallel Connection,” Times Square Arts, accessed August 1, 2015, [TimesSquareNYC.org/MidnightMoment](http://TimesSquareNYC.org/MidnightMoment).

<sup>344</sup> “Os Gêmeos,” *Stylefile Magazine*.

the distinction. But exhibitions are another way for us to show our ideas, building them in a three-dimensional way that allows another kind of interaction.”<sup>345</sup> Because of the malleability of their practice, Os Gêmeos have a high-profile presence in São Paulo which permeates both the artworld and the world outside, on the streets. Os Gêmeos are the most ubiquitous artists in São Paulo. Their work ranges in scale from hundreds of feet to about one foot in height. Outdoors, they do both commissioned work and illegal work. The majority of their work in the streets is illegal, though it is common for galleries to commission an outdoor piece to go along with their installations in the gallery space.

\*\*\*

As stated above, this chapter demonstrates the methods by which Os Gêmeos’s work suggests they are operating with an underlying aim of moral cosmopolitanism, which is defined by Alissa R. Bernstein as a conception “that all human beings are morally important and must be properly taken into account in practical deliberations about any actions (especially lawmaking and policymaking) that may significantly affect anyone’s vital, fundamental, or otherwise important interests.”<sup>346</sup> In other words, moral cosmopolitanism operates on the fundamental belief that all humans are governed by a universal moral consciousness and therefore are equal, and should be treated as such. Morality comes into play as under this concept it is understood that all

---

<sup>345</sup> Jeffrey Deitch and KET, “Os Gêmeos Talk About How They Became Artists,” 237.

<sup>346</sup> Alyssa R. Bernstein, “Moral Cosmopolitanism,” *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*, edited by Deen Chatterjee, et al (Spring, 2012), 711.

humans are innately concerned with the well-being of each other and the group. The term “moral” is used to describe this form of cosmopolitanism instead of “ethical” because ethics, at least in the Aristotelian sense, are concerned with the idea of proper behavior for the good of the individual, which is therefore, also good for the group. Ethics is based on an underlying assumption of morality.<sup>347</sup> While these are very closely related, ethics allows for a certain self-determination and judgement that could result in actions of self-interest that may be ethical, but not moral, as morality does not allow for the determination of one’s actions as more important than another’s.<sup>348</sup>

Pauline Kleingeld outlines six types of cosmopolitanism that developed in late eighteenth-century Germany: moral, political, cultural, romantic, market, and

---

<sup>347</sup> Bernard Gert, "The Definition of Morality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/morality-definition/>.

<sup>348</sup> Bernard Gert, uses Sidgwick’s concept of “ethical egoism” in which a person’s self-interests are put before the group’s, in the following illustrative example: “Because all moralities in the descriptive sense include a prohibition on harming others, ethical egoism is not a morality in the descriptive sense. Because all moralities in the normative sense not only include prohibitions on harming others but also are such that all rational persons would endorse that morality, ethical egoism is not a morality in the normative sense. . . In descriptive sense of “morality,” morality cannot be a guide to behavior that a person does not want others, even those in his own society, to adopt. However, there is a sense of “morality” such that it does refer to a code of conduct adopted by an individual for his own use, but which he does not require to be adopted by anyone else. This can occur when an individual adopts for himself a very demanding guide that he thinks may be too difficult for most to follow. However, this guide is correctly referred to as a morality only when the individual would be willing for others to adopt that code of conduct, but does not require that they do so. He may judge people who do not adopt his code of conduct as not being as morally good as he is, but does not judge them to be immoral if they do not adopt it.” Bernard Gert, "The Definition of Morality.”



cosmopolitan law. Kleingeld examines the relevance of these six types of cosmopolitanism in light of what she describes as a contemporary “resurgence of nationalist sentiment” around the world.<sup>349</sup> It is logical there is a contemporary interest in cosmopolitanism as it emerges at a time of increasing globalization. In general, the two dominant modes of cosmopolitanism most discussed today are political cosmopolitanism which is concerned with an actual implementation of a “world-wide legal and political order,” and moral cosmopolitanism, which already assumes all humans are part of a moral world-wide community. Moral cosmopolitanism is characterized by the Kantian idea that all humans are part of a moral community as “citizen[s] of a super sensible world.”<sup>350</sup> In the contemporary culture of globalization, concerns surrounding the jeopardization of national identity are prevalent. However, moral cosmopolitanism supports a pluralism, which allows for national identities to stay in tact. The moral cosmopolitanism in Os Gêmeos’s work (and the overall philanthropy or morality evident in Swoon and JR’s work) acts as a way to reconcile the local and the global through the platform of contemporary art which addresses a global population. Susan Buck-Morss in her 2009 essay, “Radical Cosmopolitanism” asks: “What if, in short, we produced for those of our contemporaries who share our time, but not our traditions, in order to create a social field that defies the boundaries, real and imagined, that divide us, widening that field in the process and making it

---

<sup>349</sup> Pauline Kleingeld, “Six Varieties of Cosmopolitanism in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (July, 1999), 505.

<sup>350</sup> Kleingeld citing Immanuel Kant, 509.

visible globally as a space that belongs to all of humanity [versus the artworld]?” All of these ideas are of our time, and I see movements such as social practice as well as this brand of street art discussed here, as operating in the service of some approximation of this concept.

Os Gêmeos strive for this sense of equality through the provocation of conscientização or conscious-raising in the imagery of their art on the streets. The characters that they represent in their art, as well as their overtly written textual messages on the street, speak to causes that directly respond to various political and social inequities. Os Gêmeos are participating in a critical dialogue which touches on what Marsha Meskimmon has termed, the ‘cosmopolitan imagination,’ which involves attention to an ethical responsibility as well as locational identity.<sup>351</sup> Meskimmon uses this concept to discuss contemporary art and questions such as the role art plays in reimagining the contemporary ethical, political, and social landscape. She sees art’s role as an active one in that instead of simply representing or showing inequities, that art has agency and the potential ability to enable people to change the parameters within which we negotiate the world. At the heart of this exploratory study is the question of what it means to be an artist in a society that is hyperconnected or, in her words “how we might connect, through dialogue rather than monologue, [and] our

---

<sup>351</sup> Marsha Meskimmon, *Cosmopolitan imagination and Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 5.; Meskimmon’s work was particularly interesting to read in relation to my project, as hers is similarly aimed on a form of cosmopolitanism in contemporary art. This project of cosmopolitanism could be extended to a lesser degree to Swoon and JR’s work – as can most concepts discussed in this dissertation.

response-ability to our responsibilities within a world community.”<sup>352</sup> These ideas are applicable to both JR and Swoon’s work, however, I am discussing this concept in relationship to Os Gêmeos’s practice specifically, as they are the most at peace with their identities as artists operating within a world of economic excess and disparity, while at the same time working in art museums and the streets. Meskimmon primarily discusses contemporary artworks that are situated within the institutional art space. In expanding this concept to the street and street artists, especially Os Gêmeos, I am taking her concept one step further, as working on the street has a more immediate relationship to a much wider public audience by virtue of its location which is not limited or separated from the public by the art institution.

The dialogue that emerges locally from the production of Os Gêmeos’s work, and the effect that the work has outside of its localized origin, potentially expands the reach of their work beyond the local to a global stage. My aim in this chapter is to consider how Os Gêmeos’s work operates: its effect on the viewer locally and its potential for impact through international exchange. This involves an ethical dimension which aligns with the philanthropic or socially-minded turn in street art or perhaps the “affective turn” in contemporary art, as it is called elsewhere from street art and graffiti projects that were more centered on the individual’s claiming of

---

<sup>352</sup> Meskimmon, 7.

space.<sup>353</sup> In this chapter, I will look primarily at three forms that Os Gêmeos's practice assumes: figures that speak out to the public through the use of text in their work, elaborate, and sometimes collaborative public murals, and their gallery work, namely their installations.<sup>354</sup> Despite the breadth of their practice, Os Gêmeos's work is united through underlying themes that emerge from the concept of a fantastical world which they created called Tritrez and their critique and comments regarding the social and political atmosphere of São Paulo,<sup>355</sup> which speaks to their larger project of moral cosmopolitanism through the use of elements such as color, an awareness of history, and cultural evolution both within São Paulo and globally. Os Gêmeos explain:

Using public space was our way of dialoguing, directly or indirectly, with other people. The mere act of interfering in public space already entailed a critique, changing something. No one had to tell us what to make or when and where to make it. It's that old story, if you don't use the street it will end up using you. In Brazil there are a lot of things that need to be said and exposed: there's violence, corruption, lack of security. Very little is done to change things. It seems as if people in Brazil either accommodate themselves to reality, flee, or pretend not to see it. To intervene in public space was our way of speaking out.<sup>356</sup>

---

<sup>353</sup> Of course, the act of putting paint on a wall is a territorial act in itself. The philanthropic turn represents art that is still on the streets, but that is more socially oriented and focused in its message.

<sup>354</sup> Though, Os Gêmeos has also designed logos for corporations, non-profits, and other arenas outside of those discussed here.

<sup>355</sup> I will explain this in more detail below.

<sup>356</sup> Vik Muniz and BOMB, "Os Gêmeos," *BOMB Magazine*, 102 (Winter 2008), [bombmagazine.org/article/3045/os-g-meos](http://bombmagazine.org/article/3045/os-g-meos).

Os Gêmeos's desire to speak out uninhibited by any rules or regulations stipulated by the government or corporate logic of selling a product is motivated by a sense of desperation to make a mark in the public sphere in the hopes of reaching people. This is the same logic that has governed protest movements' use of the mediums of postering and protest graffiti for decades.<sup>357</sup> As Lyman R. Chaffee lays out in his book *Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries*, Brazil, and São Paulo in particular has a long history of public protest using images that corresponded to the shifting regimes in Brazil since the 1930s.<sup>358</sup> Therefore, Os Gêmeos is participating a long history of using images to protest. However, Os Gêmeos are street artists first and foremost. They make images and sometimes these images speak to causes, however their work is not solely created in the service of a specific political cause, overall. It would not be accurate to classify Os Gêmeos as protesters, as their form is more subtle and operates according to the logic of modern day street art which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, which generally speaking, is not meant to incite as much as celebrate and draw attention to certain designs at its most mundane, or to causes at its most rousing.

---

<sup>357</sup> Chaffee, 131.

<sup>358</sup> These consist mainly of posters, but sometimes were composed using spray paint, though in a very different way than the graffiti artists discussed in this dissertation, as the ones Lyman discusses are predominately commissioned by the government or various political parties, or are operating in direct response to changes in leadership; I am discussing an art form that is part of a lifestyle and which is continually produced versus made only in direct response to politics.

Os Gêmeos's intention to speak out is commonplace in street art. Most art forms in the public sphere are meant to communicate to those who view the work, whether through a personal statement by the artist or, in the case of a publicly commissioned mural, something about the state apparatus for which it was commissioned. However, the fact that in São Paulo, Os Gêmeos is allowed to speak out is significant. Their work can be spotted all around the city from inconspicuous areas where homeless citizens sleep, to highly public areas, such as on the sides of major highways. What is unique to Os Gêmeos in terms of the work described above, is their mode of speaking out through the use of allegory and the specific locations in which they choose to place their work. Painting throughout São Paulo has exposed them to many different people and circumstances. Os Gêmeos have explained:

São Paulo [...] is so crazy and so huge, anything that you would ever want to see can be seen in the streets [...] if you wish to see someone starving, walk around the block. If you wish to see a millionaire, walk around the same block again [...] The things that we paint are often a result of seeing that type of thing in the street. We often paint simply for the people in the street and if it makes their life a little easier knowing that we paint just for them, and bring a little color to the streets just for them, it is a means of escaping the reality of the harsh world. These people are able to see these big murals and know that they are not excluded from the rest of the world. We want them to know that they are thought about.<sup>359</sup>

São Paulo is a sprawling, vibrant urban metropolis. As of 2014, it was the tenth largest city in the world. Moreover, São Paulo is the busiest metropolis in Brazil with a population of over twenty million people: a city encompassing many official

---

<sup>359</sup> Caleb Neelon and Allen Benedikt, "Brazil."



Figure 3.3 Paraisópolis favela next to the wealthy area of Morumbi, Tuca Vieira

neighborhoods and many more unofficial ones. The divide in São Paulo between rich and poor, is great; there is tremendous wealth disparity. São Paulo is home to some of the poorest areas, called favelas, that border the wealthiest neighborhoods and which are separated by walls [Figure 3.3].<sup>360</sup> Teresa Caldeira characterizes São Paulo as a city of “high walls, homicide, and unemployment statistics, gated parks and streets,

---

<sup>360</sup> Though, as Teresa Caldeira points out, the media and even São Paulo locals tend to gloss over specificities of the urban poor — some of the areas that are referred to as favelas are actually not, which creates prejudice and a skewed view of São Paulo’s population. “Favelas are not the type of housing in which the majority of São Paulo’s poor live, and the heterogeneous peripheries cannot be described by the term favela. What distinguishes them is home ownership. Although there are many conditions of illegality and irregularity, the majority have bought the land on which they built their houses and have claims to ownership. Favela residents also own their homes, but not the land, which has typically been invaded.” Teresa Caldeira, “Worlds Set Apart,” *LSE Cities*, Newspaper Essay, South America, (December 2008), [lsecities.net/media/objects/articles/worlds-set-apart/en-gb/](http://lsecities.net/media/objects/articles/worlds-set-apart/en-gb/).

private guards at building entrances, a local branch of postmodern architecture, and a new generation of streets without sidewalks or with empty ones.”<sup>361</sup> She elaborates:

Fear and talk of crime also help organize the urban landscape and public space, generating new forms of spatial segregation and social discrimination [. . .] central among the instruments creating a new pattern of urban segregation are the fortified enclaves, which are privatized, enclosed, monitored spaces for residence, consumption, leisure, and work. [. . .] Fortified enclaves require large spaces and are located in what primarily used to be peripheral areas either of a city or of the metropolitan region. [. . .] As the new islands of distinction are placed in sites where only the poor used to live, walls, suspicion, and displays of wealth generate a landscape of social inequality that can easily be described as outrageous.<sup>362</sup>

The government of São Paulo has undergone many changes in organization and leadership from military regime, to the 1960s President Juscelino Kubitschek’s plan to develop São Paulo as much as “50 [year’s worth] in 5 years,” during which “privatization became the order of the day, the dominant value of the new logic of government that replaced the modernization project,”<sup>363</sup> to the latest neoliberal push to involve popular participation as set out in the so-called City Statute which was added in 2001, to the 1988 Constitution on urban policy which stated that local urban policies should be conceived and put into place with popular participation.<sup>364</sup> Despite

---

<sup>361</sup> Teresa Caldeira, “From Modernism to Neoliberalism in São Paulo: Reconfiguring the City and its Citizens,” *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age*, ed. Andreas Huyssen (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 52.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.



various attempts by the government to create a more democratic system, the population remains distrustful of the institutions of order because even under democratic rule, these institutions often act outside of the law.<sup>365</sup> This feeling of unease contributes to São Paulo's characterization as "one of the most violent cities in the world."<sup>366</sup>

Therefore, an overworked, underpaid police force has a plethora of alternative crimes to attend to which result in their comparably less vigilant attitude towards street art. Os Gêmeos always paint during daylight hours, especially on Sundays which are rest days in São Paulo. In fact, going out to paint on the streets on Sunday is so common, that street artists have given it a name: rolê.<sup>367</sup> Os Gêmeos do not want what they do to be seen as a crime, as they strongly believe that by painting in the streets, they are doing something positive and representing the voice of the citizens, as they are citizens themselves. Therefore, they paint during the day and sometimes right in

---

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid, 64. "As a result of this distrust . . . an increasing number of residents of São Paulo opt for private security and private justice . . . These privatized services frequently contest, if not violate, the rights of citizens" in favor of an "aesthetics of security." Ibid., 65-66.

<sup>367</sup> Graffiti Brazil, 126. Rolê translates, literally to "roll" - as in to roll out to take a day to paint in the streets.

front of police, which they can usually get away with by persuasion, reasoning, or telling white lies about why and for whom they are painting.<sup>368</sup>

São Paulo has a unique relationship to graffiti. In fact, the term “graffiti” as it is used in São Paulo, refers to what would be called street art in general most everywhere else. Typically, graffiti refers to the scrawl of names and letters applied without regard to context or appeal of its message to a global audience. Instead of a concern for its aesthetic reception to a public audience, graffiti is concerned with marking territory and expressing individual concerns. In São Paulo, graffiti is sometimes referred to as ‘Brazilian graffiti’ or ‘mainstream graffiti.’<sup>369</sup> The comparable style to US graffiti, which is associated with vandalism, disregard for contextual composition, and marking territory is known as pixação, which has replaced the earlier style referred to as pichacao. Therefore, instead of a war against graffiti, in São Paulo, there is a war on pixação. In her study of pixação, Paula Gil Larruscahim describes the differences succinctly:

‘Pichacao’ (with ‘ch’) started in the 1960s and currently refers to general urban calligraphies, whose content can be poetic and playful, but also explicitly political. ‘Pixação’ (with ‘x’) is the typical style of São Paulo. Currently, it is spread across the whole country. It looks quite similar to pichacao with ‘ch’, with hieroglyphics, also known as

---

<sup>368</sup> Possibly the aesthetic nature of the work itself if a factor as well in the fact that they are able to paint in the streets so freely. I was not able to interview an expansive sample of artists in São Paulo, such as would be required to determine comprehensive data on street artists in São Paulo’s experiences with police in order to speak to the extent to which this is unique to Os Gêmeos.

<sup>369</sup> Paula Gil Larruscahim. “From Graffiti to Pixação,” *Tijdschrift over Cultuur & Criminaliteit* (4) 2 (2014), 69.

‘straight tags’, painted with black latex ink. The goal of pixação’ writers is to spread their tags throughout the city, as much as possible, and particularly on the difficult to reach and highly visible places such as the tops of buildings. There is no explicit political content. ‘Brazilian graffiti’ (or mainstream graffiti) was predominantly influenced by the American graffiti and hip-hop movement. It was decriminalized and even sponsored by the state and is currently seen as a new muralist movement.<sup>370</sup>

Each of these forms differ in “style, purpose, class and legal status.”<sup>371</sup>

Pichacao<sup>372</sup> emerged in Brazil in the late sixties when it was ruled by military regime from 1964-1985, as an act of resistance against the government. A form of indigenous graffiti, and as a cultural movement, pichacao was part of the zeitgeist and its messages were reminiscent of other sixties protest movements such as May ’68 graffiti at Nanterre in France. Like at Nanterre, pichacao was characterized by simple yet, poignant messages directed against dominant political and ideological controls. Late sixties pichacao slogans such as “e proibido proibir” (“it is prohibited to prohibit”) and “abaixo a ditadura” (“down with dictatorship”) <sup>373</sup> were common. In the 1970s, the term was used at a catchall for any writing on walls of any style. It was during the 1980s, because of its association with property damage, and money spent on repairing those damages, that the effectiveness of the social-critical messages were somewhat

---

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>372</sup> Pixação comes from “piche,” which means pitch or tar, which was the material used to write these slogans with a paintbrush before spray paint came into fashion. Larruscahim, 79.

<sup>373</sup> Larruscahim, 74.

questioned and delegitimized.<sup>374</sup> This was mostly a result of a struggle between the dominant and marginal cultures' attempts to define cultural space during the transition from military rule to democracy in Brazil.<sup>375</sup>

However, simultaneously, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, whispers of New York graffiti were beginning to influence pichacao in São Paulo. Institutionalization in the form of gallery exhibitions came next, and commodification would follow in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Peak expression was achieved in the early 2000s.<sup>376</sup> It was in the 1990s that the line between “the cooptation of an artistic expression on the street that was essentially transgressive in Brazil was also promoted by the state and the media who clearly divided writers between pichadores and grafiteiros.”<sup>377</sup> As a result of this cooptation by the government, a new form emerged known as pixação in the 1980s. Its letterforms are long, straight black lines that were inspired by heavy metal,

---

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 74

<sup>375</sup> Neil E. Schlecht, 1.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 74. São Paulo has an interesting history with regards to the institutionalization of graffiti, which was used by certain parties, especially the PT party— it is unlike graffiti in the US, which was purely seen as vandalism and continues to this day. While the mayor in NYC was protesting graffiti, the mayor in SP was supporting it. This in turn led to its delegitimization as a subversive and critical medium - however, pixação remained subversive. Pixo has no regard for message, etc. The graffiti artists of this time were very different from Os G.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 75. It was during this time, as Schlecht point out that because of this support of graffiti, both graffiti artists and pichadores complained because of the shortage of available space to make their marks on the city. An occurrence like this is unfathomable in New York City! Schlecht, 13.

punk hardcore logos, as well as Runic and Etruscan lettering.<sup>378</sup> This form of graffiti is largely associated with São Paulo, specifically, as well as crime, and it “openly defies the authorities, scales walls, sometimes draws attention to the anesthetized glances of the city, delimits territory, and opposes traditional ideas of fine art, by dirtying, drawing, writing, scratching, tagging, marking and defacing the urban space.”<sup>379</sup> The practice of *pixação* is not viewed the same way as Brazilian graffiti in Brazil. There was a tremendous amount of crime in the 1980s as people were growing increasingly fed-up during the transition from military regime to democracy. In response, walls were built to separate communities, especially areas of poverty from areas of wealth, as one of many strategies of protection. Caldeira states that it was perhaps the most emblematic gesture in indicating that “both symbolically and materially, these strategies operate by marking differences, imposing partitions and distances, building walls, multiplying rules of avoidance and exclusion, and restricting movement.”<sup>380</sup> The result of this is that populations were separated in terms of wealth – and the disparity has become increasingly extreme. The *pixadores* were often young kids affected by these changes. By the time the regime ended, *pixação* had become a fixture in the city. Caleb Neelon, who visited São Paulo in 2006, reported that:

---

<sup>378</sup> Francois Chastanet, *Pixação: São Paulo Signature* (XGpress, 2007), 237.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>380</sup> Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 2.

Cops either like or don't care about hip-hop graffiti, but they will shoot picheadores [sic] on sight and dump their bodies in a sewer. Pichecao [sic] is a vehicle for the poor youth of the city to assert their existence and self-worth, and to do it loudly. The public perceives street children as worthless. The police often will gun down street kids for lack of a better solution. These same kids laugh through the gunfire as they confront this perception with their names – huge, everywhere, and at the expense of those fortunate enough to own property. Despite the power of money and guns, the police are not winning the war. The kids have numbers and heart on their side. The streets are a wonderful state of anarchy.<sup>381</sup>

The pixadores quest for visibility above all speaks to their need for recognition and the desire to be heard, above consideration of property ownership. Visibility is similarly important for Os Gêmeos, yet they are generally much more discerning than pixadores in terms of the spatial contexts of their works. They want their messages to be transparent when they paint outside, as well as desiring visibility on the streets in all areas, but especially in the less wealthy areas and in their own neighborhood of Cambuci. Os Gêmeos cover all territory which involves physically traveling to various spatial territories to paint. Moving across the landscape of a major city is much more involved than simply hanging canvases on a wall, as it involves coordination and the movement of supplies. Os Gêmeos are important in part because they are the most visible street artists in São Paulo and because they speak out against what they view as social and political injustice in São Paulo, through their art.<sup>382</sup> Furthermore, as Os Gêmeos's international recognition continues to grow, and thus, the social issues the

---

<sup>381</sup> Caleb Neelon and Allen Benedikt, "Brazil."

<sup>382</sup> They are also defenders of pixação, even sometimes incorporating elements of this style in their work.

work responds to, we can see an increase of global knowing regarding social unrest, inequality, and political struggles that form the crux of Os Gêmeos's street art practice. Os Gêmeos are citizens of São Paulo who have lived in the same neighborhood their entire lives. Although they have earned an inspirationally high level of recognition both within São Paulo, globally, and to some extent, within the artworld, they have remained connected to their roots. In addition to their pieces that incorporate direct messages protesting local concerns, they have an allegorical style rooted in Tritrez that is applicable to their local culture, but also a larger, global society in that they condone an overall sense of connection and equality through their art, which is tied to what I see as their overall moral cosmopolitan project.

Tritrez is the name of the fictional land that Os Gêmeos have created, from which all of their work stems. The scenes that Os Gêmeos paint are referents to this alternate form of reality. Together, Otavio and Gustavo Pandolfo have constructed this fantastical world populated by a cast of vibrant, predominantly yellow characters<sup>383</sup> often surrounded by a whimsical atmosphere of multi-colored anecdotal activity

[Figure 3.4]. Os Gêmeos describe Tritrez as:

[...] unique to us, a place that we believe in, the place we come from and the place that we go to when we pass away. "Tritrez" means "three lives," our life inside our mom's belly, life here, and the infinite life when we die. There's nothing to worry about in Tritrez; everything's in complete harmony. We can feel the smell of the wind, see many colors in the river; all the fish have particular colors and lights, you can touch whatever you want, and different flowers grow up along your path. Beautiful women dance around the trees, big giant trees with houses

---

<sup>383</sup> Though occasionally, there will be various tones of brown used for people.

inside. Sometimes there's a music box played by a guy with amazingly colored clothing. The sun sometimes takes more time to sleep. It's a place where water, wind, land, and fire are in perfect harmony. Whales fly with a fighting tower atop their backs, whales play different music, and light-ducks light the way by night.<sup>384</sup>



Figure 3.4 Os Gêmeos, Houston and Bowery Mural, 2009, New York, [www.deitch.com](http://www.deitch.com)

Tritrez betrays a metaphysical aspect of Os Gêmeos's art, which represents hope and an escape from the hectic, lived experience of São Paulo resulting from the misplaced priorities of the government and the increasing divide between rich and poor, but also an escape from more general and personal struggles occurring in the lives of viewers regardless of background or location.<sup>385</sup> An example of an installation by Os Gêmeos that represents Tritrez is evidenced in their exhibition, *Fermata*, at the Museo Vale in Espírito Santo. *Fermata* is a musical term that refers to a musical pause on a note or a rest which is held for an unspecified duration, which perhaps is meant to connote the unending connection between the installation and the lives of the viewers. *Fermata* is

<sup>384</sup> Neelon, "Os Gêmeos," 59.

<sup>385</sup> It is worth reiterating that while Os Gêmeos's work is connected through the representation of Tritrez, their street work is typically critical and overtly political, while their work in galleries and museums tends to be more escapist and whimsical.



a fitting title, as the installation entrances viewers like a Siren's song, taking them away, allowing an escape from reality as they immerse themselves in this created one. Walking through the space is at times whimsically disorienting as swirls of rainbows protracted on three-dimensional geometric protrusions along walls and ceilings erupt with a yellow-skinned, balaclava-masked bandit who holds a sling-shot. This figure is accompanied by many others, such as a pair of disembodied colossal animatronic, yellow faces which argue with each other in Portuguese and kiss. The couple foregrounds a musical anthropomorphic, mobile, mystery vehicle of recycled instruments and detritus that sound as a result of the audience's participatory manipulation. [Figures 3.5 - 3.8]. Os Gêmeos intend for the fantastic characters in their work to be universal, not quite everymen, but relatable in that almost everyone can identify with them on some level. Though inhabiting a fantastic, psychedelic realm, these yellow beings have human characteristics: they interact with pets, they express love, they feel sadness. This recognition suggests that there is another space to occupy, one more positive. Though their museum installations are where they can more fully realize a conception of Tritrez, each piece Os Gêmeos creates is conversant with the world of Tritrez and is meant to contain aspects of reality intermingled with their personal fantasy realm of Tritrez.

Os Gêmeos utilize this style and personal language as a method to refer to real world occurrences couched in an escapist narrative. For example, they paid tribute to their friend the late Dash Snow, a controversial artist who was also represented by



Figure 3.5 Os Gêmeos, *Fermata*, 2011, exhibition at Museu Vale, Espírito Santo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock



Figure 3.6 Os Gêmeos, *Fermata*, 2011, exhibition at Museu Vale, Espírito Santo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock

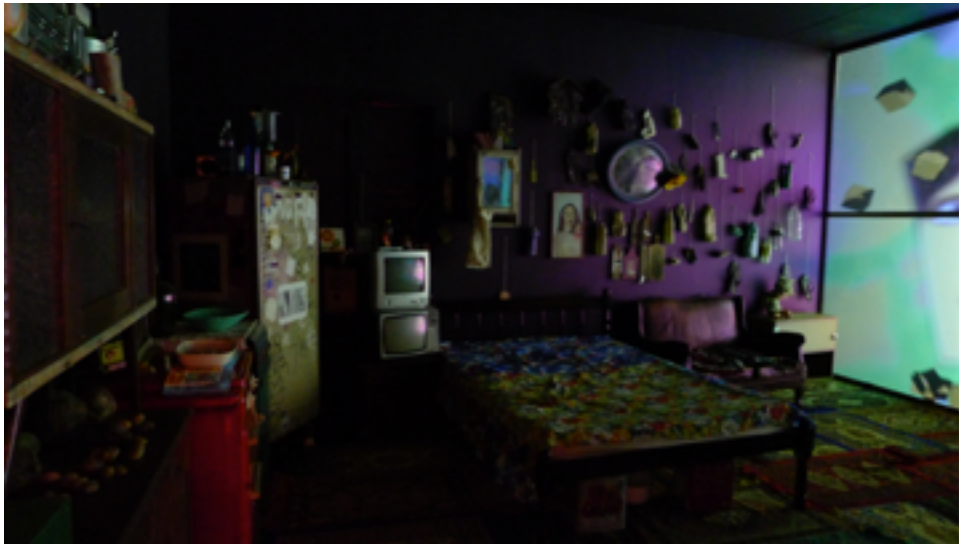


Figure 3.7 Os Gêmeos, *Fermata*, 2011, exhibition at Museu Vale, Espírito Santo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock



Figure 3.8 Os Gêmeos, *Fermata*, 2011, exhibition at Museu Vale, Espírito Santo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock

Deitch Projects gallery, in their Bowery and Houston Street Mural in New York City.<sup>386</sup> Tritrez is a proximate realm between reality and fantasy. Within Tritrez, one can also identify elements of the artists' native Brazilian, tropical landscape and folk art traditions. One can find evidence of the direct influence of one of their folk artist heroes, Arthur Bispo do Rosario, for example, in the musical trailer described above, as it resembles do Rosario's style of unifying a collection of artifacts into one conglomerative installation which changes the function of the objects themselves and allows the viewer to see them in a new way [Figure 3.9]. Os Gêmeos have have also



Figure 3.9 Arthur Bispo do Rosario, installation at the 55th Venice Biennale, 2013, photo by Haupt & Binder, [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/venice\\_biennale/2013/tour/latin\\_america\\_exhibitions/02](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/venice_biennale/2013/tour/latin_america_exhibitions/02)

---

<sup>386</sup> Each were represented by Deitch Projects gallery in New York.

cited “Lithuanian folk culture, mixed with the Maracatu (massive popular theater and performance traditions) from northern Brazil” as influences.<sup>387</sup> However, they see the crux of their work, which includes everything from assemblage to painting, as rooted in or originating from Tritrez. The main purpose of Tritrez, therefore, is an escape, an indicator of possibility, and a site of projection for the viewer. In representing Tritrez characters who are engaged with contemporary concerns, Os Gêmeos hints at a positivity lurking beneath the everyday realm.

Os Gêmeos’s work translates well both in and outside of the gallery space, as it centers around the concept of a fantastical world born out of their dreams rather than a specific medium or adherence to a specific style. Their yellow characters are actors who speak about contemporary concerns and an overall message of equality, an idea I will discuss below. On the streets, Os Gêmeos blurs the boundary between art and life by instating a mythology that is taken out of the realm of fantasy, and introducing it into the urban fabric of the city. Because of this, Os Gêmeos could be described as practitioners of magical realism in the sense Frederic Jameson put forth in 1986, wherein it “is to be grasped as a possible alternative to the narrative logic of contemporary postmodernism” or even in its anthropological definition as “a kind of narrative raw material . . . drawing in sophisticated ways on the world of village or

---

<sup>387</sup> Neelon, “Os Gêmeos,” 60.

even tribal myth.”<sup>388</sup> Jameson’s definition imagines magical realism as an antidote to a fractured, busy society. Although postmodernism has been around a while, this fractured, disconnected state in which people are separated from each other remains, and in São Paulo, is particularly evident.<sup>389</sup> Os Gêmeos’s work provides an escape afforded through their mythical narrative of Tritrez. It operates through the cosmopolitan logic that Kant describes as an entitlement to “our common right of possession on the surface of the earth on which, as it is a globe, we cannot be infinitely scattered, and must in the end reconcile ourselves to existence side by side [...] originally no one individual had more right than another to live in any one particular

---

<sup>388</sup>Frederic Jameson, “On Magic Realism and Film,” *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 12 Issue 2 (Winter 1986). Interestingly, Jameson has a section on color in his essay. Jameson views magic realism as rooted in reality.

<sup>389</sup> Postmodernism was the movement after modernism which favored deconstruction and post-colonial theory, and also favored rupture and fracturing as techniques from which to derive meaning from signification which had reverberations beyond the textual sources to culture at large, resulting in pluralism and support of a variety of viewpoints. It has also created a culture of fragmented populations, as evidenced by privatization and the segmenting of society, which Brazil is evidence of. Although fences, gates, and security forces are primarily used to make an area safer, what they also do is keep the people within those gates separate from the people outside. Ultimately what this does is keep people in their own little social bubble and therefore hinders the interaction or mixture of different social classes in one specific area. For more on postmodernism and the fracturing of society see: Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, “Divided We Fall: Gated and Walled Communities in the United States,” *Architecture of Fear*, Nan Ellin, ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997) and Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space* (New York: MacMillan, 1970).

spot.”<sup>390</sup> It is this peaceful cohabitation and overall sense of equality among individuals, that Os Gêmeos espouse within their art, as well as by the very act of making art as they are doing it for others as much as for themselves.<sup>391</sup> One feels as if one is connected to this world of Tritrez. Viewers are meant to recognize themselves in it. Tritrez was born out of the private, shared childhood dreams of Os Gêmeos, and therefore, suggests a unique, biological twin connection. A biological connection conjures the notion of gnosis and a universal, connected humanity. Through escapism present in Os Gêmeos's fictional realm of magical realism which poses an alternate existence, attention is called to real-life issues including the corruption of politicians to the abuse of natural resources, but on a fundamental level, it is also where Os Gêmeos feature various people on the streets of São Paulo. For example, they have painted a figure who sells shirts, behind the area where a local man sells shirts in São Paulo. It becomes the shirt-seller's own artwork and marks his importance and value as a citizen and person. Everyone has importance in Tritrez. Before discussing Tritrez's function and meaning in further detail, I must pause to elaborate on the use of color as a tool to increase the effectiveness of Tritrez as an artistic trope which excites and invites action as an escape. Coupled with statements protesting politics or the

---

<sup>390</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*, trans, M. Campbell Smith (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Incorporated, 1972), 137-8, quoted in Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001), 21-22.

<sup>391</sup> *Grey City (Cidade Cinza)*, DVD, directed by Marcelo Mesquita and Guilherme Valiengo (2013, Montreal, Canada, Sala 12 Filmes).



degradation of the environment, this movement inclines toward activism. To demonstrate this activist tendency, I will examine one of Os Gêmeos's illegal street pieces, a masked vandal, that puts this into practice.

## COLOR

One of the most noticeable aspects of Os Gêmeos's work is an abundant use of yellow. Used to portray virtually all figures represented in their work — including tags, pieces, and scenes painted on the streets around the world — yellow is combined with their signature red outlines and becomes immediately recognizable as the work of Os Gêmeos. This aesthetic gesture of saturating works with yellow goes beyond a simple branding strategy. Initially, color was employed so that their work would be easily recognizable from afar or amidst other works on the street, as is the concern of most street artists. However, for Os Gêmeos the color yellow also has spiritual qualities that supersede a concern with recognition. When asked if yellow is their favorite color, Os Gêmeos responded:

Yes it is. One day, some light shined inside our studio and this light was very yellow, after that we can't [sic] use other colours for the character skin and the lettering...The outlines we paint with dark red! This is also a specialty from Brazil. Some writers have their own colours, like FINOK. He only paints with green and dark blue and ISE paints more with red and the outline in black, others paint more with blue and black ...<sup>392</sup>

---

<sup>392</sup> "Os Gêmeos," *Stylefile Magazine*.

The alignment with a singular color in art outside of street art, evokes associations with the historical and neo-avant-garde, particularly Malevich, Rodchenko, and Yves Klein and his embrace of his signature International Klein Blue.<sup>393</sup> Color has historically been used to make a statement.<sup>394</sup> Benjamin Buchloh theorizes the avant-garde beginning with Aleksandr Rodchenko, who “invented” the monochrome with a freeing, democratic intention.<sup>395</sup> Buchloh contends Rodchenko was assigning meaning to color in order to “lay the foundations for a new culture of the collective rather than continuing one for a specialized, bourgeois elite.”<sup>396</sup> According to Buchloh, Rodchenko was making art which could appeal to, and be understood by, anyone, instead of art that had some kind of “esoteric” meaning. For

---

<sup>393</sup> International Klein Blue was the color which he has been rumored to have patented, which was not actually the case, though it is so intertwined with his identity as an artist that this is a much purported rumor.

<sup>394</sup> Obviously other art movements and tropes have, too, and the avant-garde in general aimed to contradict and change the world as it was at each particular moment in which it emerged. However, I am focusing on color because of its resonance with Os Gêmeos’s practice. I do not think it is accidental that they utilize it as a tool for mobilization through identification. By using yellow, they are focusing on the issues or atmospheres around them versus divisive concepts like race.

<sup>395</sup> Although, it is generally accepted that Kasmir Malevich created the first monochrome in 1918, Buchloh states that it is not until Rodchenko that a monochrome existed that eliminated all figure-ground and Chromatic relationships. It gets rid of meaning in favor of a pure materiality in order to demystify the painting and thus, make it accessible; Benjamin Buchloh, “The Primary Colors for a Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Avant-Garde,” *October* 37 (Summer 1986), 43.

<sup>396</sup> Buchloh, “The Primary Colors for a Second Time,” 44.

Klein, monochrome painting represented an “open window to freedom.”<sup>397</sup> And although Os Gêmeos create highly elaborate scenes, they utilize the color yellow as the key to their world. Os Gêmeos see “the essence of graffiti [as] being free”<sup>398</sup> and Tritrez is an extension of that sentiment. Just as Klein’s act of claiming the color blue created an escape from modernist notions of embracing the public as opposed to the individual, or as Buchloh expresses it, “the transformation of the bourgeois public sphere into the public sphere of the corporate state, with its appropriate forms of distribution (total commodification) and cultural experience (the spectacle),”<sup>399</sup> Os Gêmeos’s employment of a dominant color in their work is perhaps reflective of a contemporary moment, which simultaneously embraces the public as well as a form of capitalism, as it appears to be unavoidable. A commercial logic is seen in their adherence to signature colors, yet their world of Tritrez, and thus, their practice as a whole embraces public, equality, and democratic ideals.

Os Gêmeos differ from Rodchenko and Klein in that they are not reacting against previous artworld issues or movements, but like them, are utilizing color as a way to spread democratic ideals in service of their desire that their art be approachable and enjoyed by all, including elites. Their use of color is in line with the street artist’s

---

<sup>397</sup> “Yves Klein: Blue Monochrome,” Museum of Modern Art, [www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=80103](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=80103).

<sup>398</sup> “Os Gêmeos: Ultimate Graffiti Artists,” *MTN-World.com*, October 15, 2012, [www.mtn-world.com/blog/2012/10/15/ultimate-graffiti-artists-os-gemeos](http://www.mtn-world.com/blog/2012/10/15/ultimate-graffiti-artists-os-gemeos).

<sup>399</sup> Buchloh, “The Primary Colors for a Second Time,” 52.

need to claim territory and build a reputation, yet Os Gêmeos have more complex interests.<sup>400</sup> The work of Os Gêmeos is the opposite of monochrome; in fact they use every color in the rainbow to create landscapes in two dimensions, or immersive ones in three dimensions, yet they focus on the color yellow as a symbol of hope, happiness, and escape from harsh realities of lived experience. While the monochrome masks the touch of the artist, it also therefore ideally eliminated “the closed, self-contained work,”<sup>401</sup> thereby opening it up to the viewer. This is a similar strategy employed by Os Gêmeos, albeit to different ends. The meaning behind Os Gêmeos's works has an effect akin to Rodchenko's monochromes in that they are meant to bring a public together, but they also align with Klein's feeling that his paintings were a window to liberation. In the work of Os Gêmeos, this liberation initially had a local intention as an escape from the corrupt, political environment in São Paulo. However, as their work has spread globally, it has become an outlet for many. Like the

---

<sup>400</sup> By choosing signature colors, street artists attempt to ensure their recognition from afar and also their ability to stand out from other street art - yellow is synonymous with Os Gêmeos- when one sees a yellow tag with red outline, one immediately thinks of them, and if it is not them, you think someone is ripping them off. Os Gêmeos also states how the use of one color for the outline, and another for the fill color is a technique that is especially common in Brazil.

<sup>401</sup> Buchloh, “The Primary Colors for a Second Time,” 49.

monochromes of both Rodchenko and Klein, each concerned with the socio-political role of art in society, so is the work of street art, particularly Os Gêmeos's.<sup>402</sup>

When one considers the atmosphere and settings in which the twins' work is found on the street, the operating mechanism of this color combination becomes apparent. A vibrant color like yellow stands out against a grey, concrete backdrop, blackened with soot. This vibrancy points to what is not there,<sup>403</sup> and therefore becomes an allusion to the population and its social needs. Os Gêmeos has cited color as a way to engage the community, contending, "works speak for themselves - especially color. When [you] give something real and true, [you] get something back."<sup>404</sup> If the predominately positive reception of Os Gêmeos around the world is an indicator, their estimation would be correct.

---

<sup>402</sup> At Jean Tinguely's exhibition in Dusseldorf in 1959, Klein speaks of collaboration as a way to achieve Franco-German reconciliation after WWII, which resonates with Os Gêmeos's project of moral cosmopolitanism: "I would like to put forth to all those who willingly hear me: COLLABORATION! But pay attention to the etymology of the word. To collaborate means precisely to work together on the same project. The project upon which I propose collaboration is Art itself! The source of inexhaustible LIFE through which as true artists we are liberated from the dreamy and picturesque imagination of the psychological realm, which is the anti-space of the PAST, is found in Art . . . Artists who collaborate work with their hearts and their minds! These art artists who know of the RESPONSIBILITY of being HUMAN vis-a-vis the UNIVERSE!" Yves Klein quoted in: Nuit Banai, *Yves Klein (Reaktion Books - Critical Lives)*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 99.

<sup>403</sup> Such as a lack of people or a lack of voices. When Os Gêmeos came to San Diego they were shocked at the lack of voices (in the form of graffiti) on the streets.

<sup>404</sup> Os Gêmeos, "Os Gêmeos at the Vancouver Biennale." Yellow is true because it comes from another realm, it was almost a portent (an omen) divinely conceived. The sincerity of their practice supports the sincerity of their various messages that they convey in their art.

**ILLEGAL STREET PIECE**  
**(Yellow Graffiti Vandal, Location not specified)**



Figure 3.10 Os Gêmeos, Instagram post of illegal street piece in Sao Paulo, Brazil

Sun radiates through a break in the smoggy sky, shining an accusatory spotlight onto the paved surface below [Figure 3.10]. Cars whir by and read as grey, black, and sometimes vaguely colorful smudges against the firmament of concrete urbanity. Streets, walls, and overpasses look dirty. Dirt on this concrete is a loose, sooty grime; a slight inhale might be enough to detach it and lodge it unnoticed into one's lungs. There are some trees, but the greenery they broadcast does not read as fresh air so much as tamed nature: a scene of control and absence. Beneath one of the

many concrete overpasses, a small, slight, vibrant, two-dimensional figure of a graffiti artist completing his last spray, arrests the flaneur; at least it would if one accidentally wandered into this liminal space. This character occupies the support of an overpass along a busy highway. It is a space that can be seen by cars at a slow speed (though of course they go fast) or by those who must get by on foot, who do not possess another form of transportation. The figure is dressed with an unusual vibrancy; a harlequin hoodlum. He wears a hot pink jacket with a white argyle pattern encircling the chest, brown cotton pants that seem a bit baggy and well-worn, probably as a result of several days without washing. He wears black, simple shoes, and has a concealing red cloth (perhaps a shirt or a balaclava) on his head as he sprays a message on the wall as high as he can reach. He carries a white plastic bag in his left hand and a graffiti can in his right, which was transported in the cross-body satchel he wears that bears a yellow, smiling face; the entire composition, a *mise-en-abîme* referring to the visage of the actual vandal, or referring to the twins themselves. The figure's back is to us, the only hints of skin that can be glimpsed are his slender yellow hands and ankles: an otherworldly cadmium skin. This yellow personage is the trademark of Brazilian street artists, Os Gêmeos. The message he has written reads: " Sr. Prefeito, nessas paredes "cinzo" existiram obras de arte!!! Or "Mr. Mayor, on these grey walls, there used to be works of art!!!" To think that color once dominated this bleak scene that recalls Sinclair's *Jungle* is unimaginable; it is grey, harsh, littered. He is out of place against a background of sooty, virgin pavement untouched by any other graffiti, and more suited

to a Technicolor world. The lone, yellow graffiti figure stands out. He is not at home on these walls. From his statement it is apparent he has been here a while and that he remembers a past. He is representative of the street artist in Brazil, but also, because street art is an economically democratized art form in that it is available to anyone who walks by it, a certain population; here, the peripatetic or those who dwell in these interstitial spaces, those who are silenced by walls and the government.<sup>405</sup> The figure is speaking as a member of the citizenry of São Paulo. The message here is specific in that it refers to recent political changes in São Paulo related to the role of graffiti in public space and its characterization as art or as visual disturbance. He glances off into the distance, his hand still raised in a gesture of action, as if suspended in time immediately after finishing his scrawl. He is like a despondent Friedrichsian *Rückenfigur*, gazing out into an unpopulated landscape except for cars which contain people. This is not the sublime, but its opposite. There are supposed to be people here. Like the sublime, the scene the vandal beholds appears enormous and uncontrollable; he gazes into a world without other images on the walls, by which the figure is alluding to the silenced voices of the people who used to be there.

The lone yellow-skinned graffiti artist accompanied by a political message is one of several recurring motifs in Os Gêmeos oeuvre. These particular figures are

---

<sup>405</sup> This is very different from JR's TED Prize project, for which he was awarded \$100,000 which he used to enable people around the world to create their own projects which spoke to their individual causes. Os Gêmeos, as citizens of São Paulo are actually going out into the streets themselves, and addressing concerns that affect them and others as citizens.



generally always yellow-skinned, and located in São Paulo. One can also discover these figures around the world, however usually with less politically charged messages, such as writing the name “Os Gêmeos” or the name of one of their crews [Figure 3.11]. In São Paulo, these figures spray paint messages that are specific to the city of São Paulo and comment on topical issues as they relate to politics or social issues usually targeting the mayor, but also commenting on environmental or financial concerns addressed to the government more broadly.<sup>406</sup> Figures of graffiti vandals are most often found in areas that are not immediately visible to the casual passersby, as they are tucked away in interstitial spaces, on side streets, or neighborhoods, unlike their larger pieces. Location implicates an audience that lives in these spaces. Art here is for locals.

In São Paulo, I travelled away from the touristy areas. Here I really saw Os Gêmeos’s work all around, especially around their neighborhood of Cambuci. However, this same work is exposed to a global population through Os Gêmeos’s social media accounts, specifically Facebook, Instagram, and an official website, as well as a result of their vigorous travel schedule during which, they occasionally place these masked graffiti artists abroad accompanied by less politically charged messages, as well as throw-ups, larger murals, and collaborative works.<sup>407</sup> These platforms

---

<sup>406</sup> These works are most often found in areas that are not immediately visible to casual passersby, and instead are meant to be seen by people who pass by in their daily lives, or to speak to those who live near the images.

<sup>407</sup> Though in these instances, these figures are most often tagging “Os Gêmeos” or someone else’s name as a “shout-out.”



Figure 3.11 Os Gêmeos, *Untitled* (graffiti on the streets), Grottaglie, Italy, photo by Lara Bullock

enable the yellow vandals in São Paulo to broadcast the city’s issues globally as well as the artists’ concerns and dedication to drawing attention to these important issues. These works are particularly important because they continue to speak to local concerns and give a voice to those who may not have a means to speak out. Os Gêmeos’s concerns represent a percentage of the citizenry, as they are citizens themselves, who are concerned with and skeptical of the supposed “ordem e progresso” or slogan of “order and progress” that is emblazoned on the Brazilian flag, which they often critique in their images. In both making art that is rooted in the fantastic while commenting on real issues, Os Gêmeos create a dialectic between both

art and life. They take up the language of magical realism similar to Latin American authors which acts as a technique to both critique as well as escape reality.<sup>408</sup>

Modern art has long been characterized by a desire to bridge the gap between art and life. As an avant-garde tactic it is no longer novel, however it remains effective as a tool to reach people through engagement through the visual. In the gallery, this attempt to blur between art and life is blatant as Os Gêmeos tend to create entire environments in which viewers are enveloped and in which they interact with the characters on a one-on-one level. In the gallery, viewers are immersed in Os Gêmeos's world, whereas on the streets, interaction is left to chance. Regardless, their figures on the street speak out into the landscape and through their recognition, merge with a daily experience of the city. Due to the placement of figures that are in somewhat inaccessible areas on the street, in these cases, the implicit audiences are those who get around by foot. The question of whether or not those inhabiting or frequenting liminal spaces such as these can read the messages is relevant. The recognition of these figures as vandals suggests revolt, but also cheerfulness and a moment of hope and happiness for the viewer.

Having discussed the locational and situational aspects of Os Gêmeos's practice, I will now turn to a study conducted by Ana Christina DaSilva Iddings, Steven G. McCafferty and Maria Lucia Teixeira daSilva, researchers interested in

---

<sup>408</sup> Marita Wenzel, "Zakes Mda's Representation of South African Reality," in *Word and Image in Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures*, ed. Michael Meyer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 131.

collecting empirical data on the impact and reception of street art in São Paulo. The study which was conducted in São Paulo in 2011 surveyed people who were illiterate, or who “never learned to read or write (as traditionally defined)” in the neighborhood of Vila Madelena, which is known for its street art [Figures 3.12 - 3.13].<sup>409</sup> More specifically, the survey measured the conscientização or critical awareness of the local population in relation to the graffiti found there.<sup>410</sup> The concept of conscientização is associated with Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who understood that high rates of illiteracy and lack of quality education for the poor would result in power imbalances, and that pedagogy should be related to the learner’s life experiences and empirical knowledge instead of imposed upon them through a transference of knowledge.<sup>411</sup>

Freire also subscribed to the notion that the goal of pedagogy is to “stimulate the

---

<sup>409</sup> “It is this form of graffiti, with its attention to social and political concerns and its potential to foster critical awareness (or conscientizacao), that we concentrate on in this study . . . we note that in this article, graffiti is considered a literacy practice (in a broad sense), as it entails different ways of socially organizing communicative events involving written language and semiotic signs that can provide opportunities for access to social and cultural understanding. In this way, we are interested in the way people, “text,” and context act on and interact with one another to produce meaning.” Ana Christina DaSilva Iddings, Steven G. McCafferty, and Maria Lucia Teixeira da Silva, “Conscientização Through Graffiti Literacies in the Streets of a São Paulo Neighborhood: An Ecosocial Semiotic Perspective,” *Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (January/February/March 2011), 6.

<sup>410</sup> DaSilva Iddings, “Conscientização Through Graffiti Literacies,” 6.; The authors point out that Freire came up with the concept which is rooted in the “realities of troubled sociopolitical times in the late 1960s and the 1970s.” “Freire(1976) recognized that the widespread lack of education in the rural areas of the country in particular fostered the exploitation of many poor people. . .” DaSilva Iddings, “Conscientização Through Graffiti Literacies,” 7.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid*, 7.



Figures 3.12 Graffiti on the streets of Vila Madelena, Sao Paulo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock



Figures 3.13 Graffiti on the streets of Vila Madelena, Sao Paulo, Brazil, photo by Lara Bullock

learner's epistemological curiosity (i.e., the willingness to know and think about one's own reality), disrupt taken-for-granted common sense with new viewpoints, and help learners take as strange that which has become naturalized."<sup>412</sup> The term also indicates "the movement toward 'critical' consciousness from a state of either 'magical' consciousness or 'naive' consciousness."<sup>413</sup> The researchers felt that conscientização must be occurring both via a relationship with the work of the street artists through familiarity derived from its encounter in the street, as well as through its acknowledgement as a result of conversations with other people in the neighborhood. Indeed, they found that this was the case. Graffiti artists' work on the walls of the Vila Madelena impacted viewers on various levels which included the creation of awareness of specific issues, to their gaining a general sense that the the street artists' painting here was a political gesture by virtue of the act of claiming space.<sup>414</sup> One of the people interviewed, Sergio, said that "even just the idea of graffiti — to have color in the midst of the gray, of the monochromatic — it shows that the artist is creating a new space of perception there, breaking with the neutrality of the space, adding a new element."<sup>415</sup> Another participant, Vinicius, notes how graffiti "interacts with the space,

---

<sup>412</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>414</sup> They interviewed Zezao, but the Vila Madelena is filled with vast, constantly changing graffiti which often obscures the identification of each piece. The participants did not indicate that they knew who the artists were specifically that they were referring to.

<sup>415</sup> DaSilva Iddings, "Conscientização Through Graffiti Literacies," 8.

taking away [the gray] to create a more positive space.”<sup>416</sup> In fact, both Vinicius and Sergio were so impacted by the messages which called attention to the problem of sanitary conditions in the city, that they began cleaning up trash in the neighborhood as a direct result of some of the paintings.<sup>417</sup> Gallerist Baixo Ribeira said that “its impossible not to read it.”<sup>418</sup> In order to collect data, this study asked a uniform series of questions of five residents and from their responses, the researchers determined that these people “deliberately use street art not only as a form of protestation but also as a vehicle to inform and foster critical awareness.”<sup>419</sup> Though Os Gêmeos were not the focus of this study, it is apparent that their work aims for, and most likely fosters, the spread of conscientização. Those who cannot afford newspapers or television might get information from these images, not unlike stained glass windows provided information to the public in the middle ages. The image of the lone graffiti vandal discussed above, for example, is faceless and could be any citizen in Brazil who feels negatively affected by the erasure of street art or the silencing or ignoring of the population, and thus the graffiti becomes an object for projection and identification through his human qualities. His only voice is on the walls of the city. Like its implicit viewers, it could be ignored, but this is less likely as the vibrant colors make him

---

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 19. The study does not cite specific examples.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 18.

obvious. He is not defined by a uniform, but could be anyone: he represents the people.

**SANCTIONED STREET PIECE  
(Avenida 23 de Maio Mural)**

From the window of my taxi which was traversing the city from the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, northeast to Cambuci, I was struck by Os Gêmeos's prolificacy. In my short trip, I had already seen at least three throw-ups by Os Gêmeos rendered in various writing styles, but identifiable by their unique combination of yellow outlined in red. Then, suddenly on six-hundred-and-eighty meter walls along each side of the Avenida 23 de Maio, a busy expressway in São Paulo in the Italian neighborhood of Bela Vista, I was in the midst of a masterpiece by Os Gêmeos and several other artists. Cars speed past this colorful scene continuously. The mural is expansive, vibrant, and seen by many. On each side of the expressway, there are several yellow figures by Os Gêmeos. On the first side they were accompanied by Nina Pandolfo, Herbert Baglione and Vitché [Figure 3.14] and on the second side, they were accompanied by Nina Pandolfo, Nunca, Finok, Os Gêmeos, and Zefix [Figures 3.15 - 3.16]. The first side, is older, and features five circular shapes that resemble the porthole windows of a ship with heads peeking out. The "ship" is dark teal covered with an abstract pattern that recalls the 1980s in a lighter blue color. Some of the heads look toward a comical, colorfully polka-dotted, horned dragon who breathes flames that culminate in a series of Wild Style tags. Looking out





Figure 3.14 Avenida 23 de Maio Mural, Os Gêmeos, Nina Pandolfo, Herbert Baglione and Vitché, 2002, osgemeos.com.br



Figure 3.15 Avenida 23 de Maio Mural, Os Gêmeos, Nina Pandolfo, Nunca, Finok, and Zefix, 2008, osgemeos.com.br

from the portholes, one can see a sweet girl's face, two yellow-faced figures sharing a porthole, and a sinister figure who looks as if either his skin is coming off of his face, or he is wearing a mask. Though these figures' faces are restricted by the portholes, their hands are able to move through the wall at random. There are even a few additional, mysterious hands emerging from behind the wall. Above this scene is a painted night sky filled with stars. This mural visualizes and flaunts the visual unification of three disparate fantasy realms: outer space, the deep sea, and a world with dragons, as cars commute to their jobs, participating in the lived reality. on a blue abstract pattern on a darker blue background. Perhaps this is an allusion to another realm (of the artist, the street artist, the populace) or the duality of the street. This first side was painted in 2002 without permission from the city, and in time gained popular appreciation, becoming a familiar landmark in the city this side of the expressway.



Figure 3.16 Avenida 23 de Maio Mural (detail), Os Gêmeos, Nina Pandolfo, Nunca, Finok, and Zefix, 2008,

When the artists created this side, they also did the other side as well, however it was “accidentally erased” in 2008.

On the other side of the Avenida 23 de Maio, is now a newer mural with some recognizable stylistic and figurative elements by Os Gêmeos, but which does not quite synchronize stylistically with the other half, as it was painted later and by a different group of artists. This side is even more vibrant than the side painted in 2002; it is even more vibrant and encompasses many micro-narratives within it. On the far-left, one sees a young girl asleep dreaming on a patch of white daisies. Yet, instead of peaceful, her innocent dreams collect in the form of a colorful, maniacal clownish, demon. As one gazes to her right, we can see a gigantic, cigar-smoking business man in a suit. He is in the process of single-handedly uprooting a mature tree, which is aflame. It is clear

that his carelessness is the cause of the trees incineration, and in fact, his cigar also appears to have set a tree in real life bonfire as it appears to be alight by painted flames as well. The following figure, which occupies the central space of the mural is a yellow giant, a signature Os Gêmeos figure. This benevolent and joyfully dressed figure is trapped on an island. In an act of desperation, he appears to have pulled off his face, revealing all the people who are on his mind; first a maternal image, and then a crowd of people. He is trapped and therefore, helpless as well as silenced, worried about the people, possible the citizens of São Paulo or maybe all people. Or maybe, these people are graffiti artists, and by de-facing himself, he is making room, encouraging them to spread out from their graffiti father. All is not lost however, for the yellow-giant grips a smallish, levitating boat between his feet, signifying that there is hope of escaping the present situation. The next image to the right appears to be a mother-earth figure. She looks weary, as she is covered in cut-down trees, but she is also teeming with regeneration, signified by the regrowth and the little fairy figure who is sprouting new leaves and who reaches out to some of mother-earth's branches.

The work evokes Hieronymus Bosch conflated with a surrealist landscape.<sup>420</sup>

In addition to these central figures, there are a panoply of additional figures. This giant mural seems to be a comment on a panoply of issues that are relevant to São Paulo such as the corruption of corporate culture and its relationship to the government and the disregard for the destruction of nature. There is even a sly little donkey figure who paints in grey over graffiti to allude to the mural's specific past and "accidental" erasure by the city. Os Gêmeos, here, is critiquing the entity which destroyed the

---

<sup>420</sup> It is not unusual for graffiti artists to adopt styles from other art historical movements such as surrealism without any specific historical significance aside from a stylistic reference as part of Brazil's Anthropophagy movement. While European avant-garde movements tended to rebel against dominant cultural forms and identities, the Brazilian avant-garde, instead absorbed historical forms and local conditions (hence the term Anthropophagy) and turn them into something better. [Michael Korfman and Marcelo Nogueira, "Avant-Garde in Brazil," *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2004), 127.] The tradition of Anthropophagy came about as a result of two cultural moments in Brazil: 1) its attempt to form a national identity through cultural production after its independence from Portugal in 1822 and the proclamation of the republic in 1889 and 2) the "Week of Modern Art" in São Paulo in 1922, which commemorated the 100 year anniversary of independence (127). The coining of the term was a result of writer Oswald de Andrade's writing of the *Manifesto Antropofago* that "proposed the absorption of different influences incorporating their strengths and resulting in an artistic mixture, which would correspond to a Brazilian hybrid culture" (129).; It is also important to note that the concept of "cannibalism" as a metaphor for power, had a moment in surrealism as demonstrated by examples such as Andre Breton's "Manifeste cannibale" from 1920 and the French magazine, *Cannibale* for which Francis Picabia was the editor (Andrade was influenced by this) (129).; Aside from this connection to Brazilian history, there are also similarities with European Surrealism as it explored fantasy as a reaction to a negative atmosphere after WWI, bear obvious similarities to Os Gêmeos's employment of a hybrid real/fantasy world to escape contemporary society. However, the surrealists were focused to a greater extent on self-exploration than Os Gêmeos who are concerned with the public.

previous mural (an ass) and incidentally the same one who ended up commissioning the mural to be repainted.

While Os Gêmeos were in London in 2008 creating a façade for the Tate Modern, facilitated by Cedar Lewisohn, the side with the five heads, painted in 2002 by Nina Pandolfo, Herbert Baglione, Vitché, and Os Gêmeos<sup>421</sup> was erased as a result of the Clean City Law. The implementation of Clean City Law or *Lei Cidade Limpa* put in place by then populist mayor Gilberto Kassab in 2006 largely had a positive impact on the city of Brazil in that it prevented “irregular advertising” from covering the city, and detracting from the historic architecture.<sup>422</sup> Due to the vague wording of the law, “irregular” elements were at the interpretive discretion of whomever was in charge of eradicating on any given day. The line of legality was ambiguous, which resulted in many murals such as this one, as well as other street pieces to be destroyed regardless of whether they were legal or originally commissioned by the government.

Due to the popularity of these murals on the Avenida 23 de Maio, the governmental erasure of half of this mural generated public outcry which led Os

---

<sup>421</sup> In my interview with Cedar Lewisohn, he revealed that the Tate Modern Museum, for their *street art* exhibition that Lewisohn arranged, was reluctant to have these artists represented inside the Tate Modern, but instead they were only allowed to be on the façade. Cedar Lewisohn in conversation with Lara Bullock, London, 2010.

<sup>422</sup> As soon as one travels outside of the city, one is confronted with advertising. For example, when I visited, just outside of São Paulo at Guarulhos Airport, there was an enormous billboard featuring Giselle Bündchen. Advertising such as this becomes glaring once you have spent time in São Paulo without such advertising techniques.

Gêmeos to fight for the rights of people to have public art with the Mayor and the Minister of Culture.<sup>423</sup> On this incident Os Gêmeos explain:

They used our money from taxes, which was supposed to use for helping people in the streets, to "clean" the city from graffiti and things like that! One day, "THE MAYOR" called us on our personal phone. That was crazy! How did he find out that number? You can believe it or not! He asked us to visit him in his office because we should have a conversation with him. They wanted to make us hush and we should stop talking against them. So we went there and they told us: "Sorry we made a mistake, we buffed the wrong wall...bla bla." We were supposed to paint the wall again, but we wanted to see in what direction this conversation would go. We told them, that we will repaint this wall and that the government has to stop buffing graffiti and pixação in the city! Furthermore we said them that this part of the São Paulo culture has a very good exposition to the rest of the world but the government of São Paulo does not respect that! So we told them, that we need money to do that wall again, because it's very big! We remember that one of the ideas was not to use any public money from the government. At first point is that this money has to be used for something more important and not for painting walls. The second point is that the government doesn't have any money. Our friend ISE and us tried to find a sponsor for that project and we found a company called "Associação do Comercio de SP". They helped us with money for the paint and the scaffold. After that, we started a very long discussion to stop the buff, we think this last for about two years and the graffiti writers have won! During all these years, they buffed fewer and fewer and therefore the city is more beautiful now, full of graff! <sup>424</sup>

There is some disagreement among other graffiti artists that contradicts the twins' story as to whether or not the city paid the artists to have the mural repainted.

---

<sup>423</sup> Os Gêmeos in conversation with Lara Bullock.

<sup>424</sup> "Os Gêmeos," *Stylefile Magazine*.; It is also important to point out how Os Gêmeos has no problem reaching out to a company (the ASPC is an organization that helps entrepreneurs) to sponsor them to help them afford to paint their mural- as JR is adamantly against this. This speaks to the different relationship culturally and ideologically the two artists have.

However, by December of 2008 (after one-hundred-and-fifty hours of work), the artists Nina Pandolfo, Nunca, Finok, Os Gêmeos, and Zefix, painted a new mural. Because of protests by citizens and other street artists, the law 706/07 was put in place in March 2009.<sup>425</sup> This law decriminalized street art and graffiti.<sup>426</sup> And law 9605/98 was also passed which makes graffiti legal if the property owner gives permission. São Paulo now integrates street art into urban policies to revitalize neighborhoods, and is cataloguing works of art that have been approved by the owners of buildings. Of course, there is potential danger that these projects could lead to gentrification in São Paulo, such as is occurring in the Vila Madelena (though it is not clear this is a resultant from the graffiti). However, the spaces in which Os Gêmeos's work appears are mostly interstitial spaces within the urban fabric of the city or highly conspicuous public spaces, which, because São Paulo is not really a pedestrian city, mean that Os Gêmeos's work alone would not likely drive a movement toward gentrification the way painting in a fixed location like the Vila Madelena or even the Mission District in

---

<sup>425</sup> The number of hours worked is reported on Os Gêmeos's website: [www.osgemeos.br.com](http://www.osgemeos.br.com).

<sup>426</sup> Author of the draft law 706/07, which decriminalizes graffiti, Mr. Geraldo Magela (Workers' Party, Federal District) said: "'Graffiti is one of the elements of great importance for the Hip-Hop movement, whose actions raise the consciousness of many young people today.'" "'Graffiti' to be Legalized in Brazil?," *Graffiti Archaeology News* (blog), August 27, 2008 (11:17p.m.), <http://grafarc.org/news/2008/08/graffiti-to-be-legalized-in-brazil/>.

San Francisco have caused.<sup>427</sup> Additionally, given the government in São Paulo's history of supporting various forms of street art, means that the city has a very different relationship to graffiti than that in New York where graffiti has always been viewed in a negative light, as a symbol of blight. Also, while there are obvious critics in São Paulo who associate graffiti with gangs, there were a surprising number of residents who were supportive and even defensive of graffiti. When I spoke with local Paulistanos, I found people were very proud and protective of their street art. The owner of my accommodations excitedly took me to his favorite wall in the neighborhood and proceeded to tell stories of the different artists, some of whom he knew and some of whom he knew from the streets. Conceptual artist, Daniela Calandra who was born and raised in São Paulo said that she respects the street artists because they devote their lives to addressing tough issues in the public sphere. Videographer Lecuk Ishida took me all around various alleys and neighborhoods with his two daughters. It seemed like everyone in São Paulo knows someone who is a street artist and at the very least has a relationship of some kind with street art. Os

---

<sup>427</sup> Os Gêmeos are not on the walls in the Vila Madelena. Os Gêmeos were not represented in the MASP show *De Dentro e De Fora* which featured street artists (Swoon and JR were represented). Also, São Paulo has a history of artists attempting to install work in interstitial spaces where homeless live, which have all been temporary. Though graffiti is also temporary by nature, ironically, it is the most lasting, especially when local artists keep spraying in the same areas. For example, Vito Acconci installed a collective space to be run by the homeless under an overpass in São Paulo, but, the City Hall wanted to run it, so Acconci let it disappear because he didn't want to compromise his ideas. Acconci's piece only lasted two months and was never meant to be permanent. Graffiti represents a constant free from this kind of bureaucracy. Nelson Brissac, "Urban Art in Megacities| São Paulo (seminar, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, June 18, 2014).



Gêmeos are household names, as are several other Brazilian graffiti writers. People in São Paulo know their “neighbours.” The result of this appreciation for street art and graffiti is that the streets of Brazil are like an incredibly expansive outdoor museum, disconnected from any institution.

In 2013, Pixadores vandalized the Avenue 23 de Maio mural with the message: “R\$ 200,000 in makeup, and the city is in calamity.”<sup>428</sup> [Figure 3.17] This was a comment on the fact that the mayor allegedly had misused public funds to pay for this mural to be repainted, while there are much more critical issues in the city of São Paulo toward which these funds could have been allocated. Had this been correct, the hypocrisy here would be blatant. Since the government did offer to pay for the mural, the pixadores' comment is relevant, if not accurate. Os Gêmeos support equal rights, and share in the message that these pixadores are pointing out the fact that the state has misplaced funds in supporting their art when they could be spending funds on more important things like providing shelter for the homeless and education for the

---

<sup>428</sup> Sleepboy, “Streets: Pixadores Attack Mural by Os Gêmeos, NUNCA, NINA, Finok, and Zefix,” *Arrested Motion* (blog), March 23, 2010, [arrestedmotion.com/2010/03/streets-pixadores-attack-mural-by-os-gemeos-nunca-nina-finok-and-zefix/](http://arrestedmotion.com/2010/03/streets-pixadores-attack-mural-by-os-gemeos-nunca-nina-finok-and-zefix/); Reais is the currency in Brazil.

poor.<sup>429</sup> It would appear that in this instance, the mayor had answered the yellow graffiti vandal's call for more art by commissioning the repainting of this mural. However, this selective favoritism with regard to their art is not what Os Gêmeos were fighting for. They have in fact, painted their yellow vandals spraying the same message as the pixadores, criticizing the government for misplaced funds while people starve. While Os Gêmeos work in a style that is much more universally appealing than that of the pixadores' and, therefore, institutionally embraced to a greater extent than pixação, they remain dedicated to advocating for rights of Paulistanos and exposing what they see as governmental corruption, often expressing views that align with the pixadores. The critique is much more complex than simply pointing out a surface contradiction.

---

<sup>429</sup> While the pixadore, Autopsia's, charges are not correct in terms of the government paying for this mural (at least, not in its entirety), it does bring up a differential of privilege and access between Os Gêmeos and pixadores. It is because the public had protested the mural's erasure that it was replaced. The subject matter and imagery are such that they are appealing to a large audience, and it was because it had become a fixture in the city that the government asked Os Gêmeos to repaint the mural. However, as Os Gêmeos point out, it does take a lot of money to paint such a large wall and it is likely that Os Gêmeos's and the other street artists who collaborated on the mural were able to fund the original mural because of a combination of recognition, public reverence, passion, and artworld success. In this sense, the pixadores, most likely would not have access to the finances to support such a large project. Yet, it is important to point out that the functions of graffiti and street art versus pixação in São Paulo are very different. Unlike pixação, graffiti considers the public in its creation. Therefore, a pixador would not typically attempt such a project, or require the same amount of paint to cover such a large expanse.; An interview conducted with the pixação artist, Autopsia can be found here: "ENTREVISTA - AUTOPSIA - ANDRÉ," *Megacaos* (blog), <http://www.megacaos.com/2013/03/entrevista-autopsia-andre.html>.



Figure 3.17 Avenida 23 de Maio Mural, Os Gêmeos, Nina Pandolfo, Nunca, Finok, and Zefix, 2008, vandalized by pixadores, [arrestedmotion.com/2010/03/streets-pixadores-attack-mural-by-os-gemeos-nunca-nina-finok-and-zefix/](http://arrestedmotion.com/2010/03/streets-pixadores-attack-mural-by-os-gemeos-nunca-nina-finok-and-zefix/)

Though they are fighting for a similar message, art addressed to and for the public serves a much more democratic function and allows for a much more open space for dialogue than a pixadore's legibly cryptic scrawl. Os Gêmeos work in a style that is easily legible and accessible, and it is a combination of these factors which makes it successful in its communicative function and also able to straddle the line between an art that is commissioned and also sometimes illegal. Unlike a corporation such as Nike, that might also straddle this line by commissioning illegal work in the service of profit and branding, Os Gêmeos might do some design work for a corporation because they need money to keep making work. However, they work in

the service of a much larger project motivated by a drive to create and to intervene in public space, in the service of a form of moral cosmopolitanism, and thereby cosmopolitan issues inherent in the street which are at the heart of the city. Having demonstrated the relationship of the state apparatus in the control of the street as well as the changing political dynamics of São Paulo in relation to Os Gêmeos's practice, in the remaining pages, I will consider how Os Gêmeos are working in the service of a moral cosmopolitanism through an attempt to reinstate a contemporary, site-specific form of rational-critical debate.

## **PUBLIC SPACE**

Jurgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere as a space for rational-critical debate is relevant here. The notion of refeudalization which Habermas puts forth, is essentially what Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos are criticizing within their work, which is complicated by the fact that they sometimes participate in it. The idea of refeudalization is the idea that when compromises between private interests and corporations occur, to a great extent, the public sphere is excluded. Meanwhile, Habermas argues that, "at the same time the large organizations must assure themselves of at least plebiscitary support from the mass of the population through an apparent display of openness (demonstrative *Publizitat*)."<sup>430</sup> Due to the advertising laws in São Paulo, this is especially complicated, particularly when a form of protest

---

<sup>430</sup> Jurgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox. *The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article* (1964),” *New German Critique* NO. 3 (Autumn, 1974), 54.

or dissent such as graffiti, is commercialized. However, corporations are savvy, as evidenced by the marketing campaign by General Electric and Almap BBDO (a Brazilian advertising agency) which features local artists: Estúdio Colletivo, Rui Amaral and Mulheres Barbadas, some of whom are street artists and some of whom have never produced art outside of the studio.<sup>431</sup> There is no mention of a commodity or service that they are selling to indicate that this is a sponsored work instead of authentic street art, save for a logo at the bottom of the compositions. Marcello Serpa, partner and creative director at São Paulo agency Almap BBDO said: ". . . São Paulo is a gray city. It's not like Rio de Janeiro, the most beautiful city in the world. So we tried to use buildings as billboards on a huge scale, to give the city some color and bring art to the people, and to use it as a tool to subtly talk about GE products. . . It's a very new approach to bring content to the city with an art gallery in the public space."<sup>432</sup> This introduces an interesting conflict regarding the relationship of street art and the public. Os Gêmeos have worked with corporations such as Hennessy to design a label, but as graffiti artists, the street is the realm in which they actuate more activist or advocational roles, especially in their home city of São Paulo rather than to make money, as demonstrated with the 23 de Maio mural above.

---

<sup>431</sup> Teresa Iezzi, "Advertising Comes Back to São Paulo Streets — Via Graffiti," *Co.Create*. (blog), August 2, 2012 (8:00 a.m.), [www.fastcocrete.com/1681353/advertising-comes-back-to-São-paulo-streets-via-graffiti](http://www.fastcocrete.com/1681353/advertising-comes-back-to-São-paulo-streets-via-graffiti).

<sup>432</sup> Laurel Went and Claudia Penteado, "GE Gallery Launches in Billboard-Free São Paulo: Almap BBDO, GE Take Advantage of Loophole in Ban of Visual Pollution With Artful Panels That Beautify the City," *AdAge* (July 30, 2012), [adage.com/article/global-news/ge-gallery-launches-billboard-free-São-paulo/236376](http://adage.com/article/global-news/ge-gallery-launches-billboard-free-São-paulo/236376).

Os Gêmeos is operating on a different plane when they work on the streets compared to when they work in other arenas, such as designing labels. They are addressing what they believe is the heart of corruption as is the case when they critique the government, and they do this through an allegorical, yet direct dialogue with the citizens of the city through their work in the public: allegorical in the sense that their characters are meant to stand for citizens, and direct in that these characters are often explicit in their messages, as seen with the illegal street piece discussed above. Os Gêmeos was angered by the erasure of their mural by the Lei Cidade Limpa, but they understand the voice of the pixadores. The General Electric campaign, however is not representative of the voice of the people. Especially in a city like São Paulo with its history of military, dictatorial rule, this is something of which the public, and it would have seemed the government, as it seemingly violates Cidade Limpa, would be cautious. The question of the validity of sincerity as a gesture arises here. Os Gêmeos and even the pixadores are operating from a certain morality in their speaking out in order that they be heard, which indicates a belief in the value of their personhood. The Cidade Limpa was created to prevent offensive advertising (even if it was mostly aesthetic versus containing an overt corporate symbol), and the masking of advertising as street art is corrupt. Although Os Gêmeos designed a label for a Hennessey bottle, which is also for a corporate entity, it was just that, and not pretending to be anything else.

Os Gêmeos's work touches on these concepts that Habermas puts forth in two ways. One, through their relentless and consistent commitment to the street and also education<sup>433</sup> as a way to fight refeudalization and, two, through their colorful world, which is a psychic one available to everyone through an identification with characters or through its general inviting and playful spirit (something the pixadores' tags lack). Habermas defined the public sphere as "first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is granted to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body."<sup>434</sup> Os Gêmeos's work on the streets, particularly the figures of vandals that have finished spraying politically charged

---

<sup>433</sup> Os Gêmeos have participated in a campaign by The Instituto Ayrton Senna to "inspire Brazilians to transform the reality of students from all over Brazil!" They say of the project: "We have no doubt that education is the most powerful tool to change the future of the people, and of an entire country. Through this campaign, the Instituto Ayrton Senna made it possible for us to do our part and take this contribution to various places in Brazil. We have much affection for being part of this project." They designed an image for this project in response to the theme: "Knowledge doesn't grow itself. Cultivate it." According to its website, The Ayrton Senna Institute is a not-for-profit organization that was founded in 1994 in order to help students succeed in school, by providing training for 64 thousand educators. As a result, their programs directly benefit around two million students in more than 1,200 towns across Brazil. Os Gêmeos quoted in "Os Gêmeos and Instituto Ayrton Senna Form Partnership for Education," (November 25, 2014), [www.osgemeos.com.br/en/tag/instituto-ayrton-senna](http://www.osgemeos.com.br/en/tag/instituto-ayrton-senna). They have also demonstrated their commitment to education through talks, such as the one given during the Vancouver Biennale at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. [Figure 3.18]

<sup>434</sup> Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," 49.

messages, is a form of rational-critical debate.<sup>435</sup> The “private individuals” debating in this instance however are not just Os Gêmeos and various publics at the moment or event of encounter. The artwork itself, on the street is also implicated, as are the individuals who encounter it. On the street, the work has its own voice and at some point becomes detached from the artist’s intention and is instead reliant on context. Here it is necessary to refer to W.J.T. Mitchell’s concept of the animacy of pictures or images.

In his book *What Do Pictures Want?*, W.J.T. Mitchell theorizes the animacy or potential of images to function as actors separate from their creators. In other words, Mitchell’s argument is that the picture is as active a participant as the viewer. This is an important aspect to street art to a greater extent than other images denoted as art that hang on gallery or museum walls because the image on the street is already operating with heuristic properties bound up in its publicness and its “out-of-place-ness,” because it visually speaks to the viewer as an obvious addition to a surface on which it was not originally conceived. In other words, because of the exclamatory nature of street art (it makes itself known as it is usually unexpected and confrontational) it challenges the viewer to think critically about the image itself or if not, at the very least, its context. However, specific to Os Gêmeos’s images is an

---

<sup>435</sup> It is also important to note that Habermas was speaking about a bourgeois public sphere. This is relevant to Os Gêmeos for two reasons: they work with the internet, which is ultimately a bourgeois realm, but also on the ground level which plays outside of the bourgeois realm in that, depending on location, the work has potential reach and is accessible to all publics.





Figure 3.18 Os Gêmeos, design for Instituto Ayrton Senna

interest in equality, acknowledgement of various populations, as well as pointing out government corruption, each of which is in the service of a larger notion of moral cosmopolitanism, as I defined it above.

One way this cosmopolitanism is possible is through the action of the work itself. Os Gêmeos's intend for their images to be animate; they speak of their images as living on and as part of a fantastical realm. Through their fantasy realm of Tritrez, they abolish issues of class, culture, race, and corruption. These become non-issues in

Tritrez. It is through their popularity with and connection to specific, diverse populations that they spread their message. They attract an enormous amount of praise and/or attention from the public and they therefore expose people to causes who may never have been exposed to or aware of them through other outlets at their disposal, otherwise. Os Gêmeos's art work reaches an extremely diverse audience that includes inhabitants of favelas as well as Hollywood's "elite." Os Gêmeos have no problem being sponsored by big corporations such as, Nike, unlike JR. Their main concern is to spread a positive message over concerns with monetary compensation. They see their practice as centered on communication. In their words: "We love everything what we do and for everything we give 100% of us. It's like every simple project is a small piece of something big that will be completed in the 'end.'"<sup>436</sup> In their overall project of cosmopolitanism and brightening the globe, they also aim for an equality through education and exposure.

Os Gêmeos's insistence on working in public space exposes an underlying ethos of a moral cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism as discussed by both Jacques Derrida and Hannah Arendt, concerns an idea of equality which transcends ideas of nationhood and sovereign states, which inevitably end up making rules to the detriment of "other or stateless" people and cities. I see Os Gêmeos's unique brand of graffiti with its focus on making people happy and the creation of a fantasy world that all can take part in and project themselves into as participant in a moral

---

<sup>436</sup> "Os Gêmeos," *Stylefile Magazine*.

cosmopolitanist philosophy. Os Gêmeos want their characters to have universal meaning and they want people to come up with this meaning on their own because they do not want to control or restrict people. When speaking about their 2010 piece for a wall on New York public school P.S.11, a yellow giant figure adorned in clothing featuring national flags that do not correspond to any real countries, they vocalized this notion when they said "We are using different flags painted with non-traditional colors. The idea is 'one world one voice', no borders, no separation, just everything and everyone working together for a single cause that is a better world."<sup>437</sup> While Os Gêmeos are artists and by no means state agencies that can move legislation, their work has similar aims toward a universal, connected, cosmopolitan dream. It is through their outspoken, public, visual protest coupled with the presentation of an alternative in the form of Tritrez that forms the basis of their activism.

Choque Cultural gallery founder Baixo Ribeira has been an important proponent of graffiti in São Paulo, Brazil for several decades and as a gallerist is an important supporter of the art form. He characterizes the importance of graffiti by pointing out that:

São Paulo is one of the most uncomfortable urban areas in the world. It's geared for cars, for impersonal spaces, and caters to privacy. So, if you notice the small width of the sidewalk, the tall brick walls separating the houses from the public, the aggressive fences that create a distance . . . between businesses and the community, you can tell that these are not public spaces, these are not places where people can stop

---

<sup>437</sup> Trippe, "Os Gêmeos Mural with Futura in NYC," *Fecal Face*, August 12, 2010 (5:20 p.m.), [www.fecalface.com/SF/good-stuff/2092-os-Gêmeos-mural-w-futura-in-nyc](http://www.fecalface.com/SF/good-stuff/2092-os-Gêmeos-mural-w-futura-in-nyc).

to gather or talk. So, . . . the people in the community are wanting, desiring, to reclaim this space and graffiti provides some of the conditions for these conversations and for possible change to a more inclusive community to happen.”<sup>438</sup>

Os Gêmeos’s work assumes many forms, the street, gallery/museum space, and in various media outlets, all of which are meant to engage in a form of rational critical debate. The potential for their work’s encounter in the street as well as the whimsical, yet suggestive ambiguity of some of their installations, creates a space which encourages intellectual exploration.

## CONCLUSION

*This right to present themselves to society belongs to all mankind in virtue of our common right of possession on the surface of the earth on which, as it is a globe, we cannot be indefinitely scattered, and must in the end reconcile ourselves to existence side by side: at the same time, originally no one individual had more right than another to live in any one particular spot.*

- Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*<sup>439</sup>

*As Os Gêmeos continue their ascent as the greatest artists that the graffiti and street art movement has ever produced, the simple qualities of joy, caring, rage, and empathy ring through their work, rooted as ever in love that began at conception.*

- Caleb Neelon, *Juxtapoze*<sup>440</sup>

Os Gêmeos’s socially-oriented form of street art exists within the fantasy realm of Tritrez, which speaks to a larger overall notion of moral cosmopolitanism, and through this overall project, takes an activist position through their overt messages

---

<sup>438</sup> DaSilva Iddings, “Conscientização Through Graffiti Literacies,” 15.

<sup>439</sup> Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 137-138.

<sup>440</sup> Neelon, “Os Gêmeos,” 50.

penned by the hands of their painted, yellow vandals. This activist aspect of their practice is mostly directed toward a local audience in São Paulo, Brazil, as it critiques concerns including political and social justice. However, through their website and social media platforms, these works gain exposure globally in addition to the entirety of their expansive practice which involves murals, sculptural works, and commissioned work for galleries, museums, and select businesses. Because of their expansive presence on the streets, Os Gêmeos have earned their reputation as the father's of Brazilian graffiti, yet it is their relevance that has earned them their global reputation. Recognition both at home and globally propelled Os Gêmeos's messages beyond circulation through social media and word of mouth to various other media platforms. Perhaps one could say that because of Os Gêmeos's publicness, and debates with the mayor and minister of culture, they have become symbols of activism in São Paulo.

In this chapter, I have outlined three potentially conflicting hermeneutic models for Os Gêmeos practice as a whole: first, is that the work overall is open to interpretation and sets up allegorical fodder regarding the projection of personal narratives; second, because of this openness, the work has a universal meaning; and third, when working on the streets of São Paulo, Os Gêmeos represent one authentic voice of the streets. Tritrez is a magical realist universe created by Os Gêmeos that employs fictional or otherworldly scenarios which operate as fertile sites for projection and identification through the human qualities their figures portray. Because the work

has no fixed meaning, it allows for a universal meaning. Os Gêmeos's practice has three main approaches: museum installations, the depiction of graffiti vandals with overt political messages, and public muralism. As Os Gêmeos maintain, each aspect of their practice, particularly that on the streets versus that indoors, as in the case of museum or gallery exhibitions, are very different projects. Os Gêmeos's street works in which they participate in a dialogue with the public through the placement of their figures in inconspicuous and unostentatious spaces, which address local concerns, speaks to the authenticity of their intention and their dedication to their city of São Paulo, where they continue to live. Os Gêmeos explain:

There are lots of people who see graffiti as a way of making money or obtaining easy fame over another person. But for us, the essence of graffiti is being free, changing the city's routine, and having fun! Respecting the other tags already on the wall, being with friends, and creating smiles. Being alone and with an objective, nothing will change your mind until you paint what you want to paint. To do graffiti, all you need is the desire and motivation to do what you want to do, and put your name where you want to put it. But nowadays, things are changing, and we still believe in real graffiti; throw-ups, trains, tags, anti-government slogans! (illegal things). You know when you can really tell that you love graffiti? When you see yourself in a situation and you ask yourself, "I could be in my house with my family, relaxing, and here I am, running around endlessly with serious security chasing after me, just so I can paint? Just so I can do what I love? Fuck! And we're going to do it again and again and again and again, because it keeps us alive!"<sup>441</sup>

Of course, as Os Gêmeos have earned a certain amount of artworld cachet and recognition, every aspect of their practice is exposed to critical judgement from this point of view. The yellow graffiti vandals inevitably have a different impact when

---

<sup>441</sup> "Os Gêmeos: Ultimate Graffiti Artists."

viewed from the vantage point of the artworld compared to a person who lives on the streets of Cambuci. And as de facto representatives of Brazilian graffiti, as their work is globalized, their images are subject to fetishization. Of course this would be an unavoidable effect for any artist in Os Gêmeos's position. However, the breadth of their practice locationally and aesthetically allows their work to reach a diverse public regardless of socio-economic background, as citizens of a larger culture.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion

*...Any advertisement in public space that gives you no choice whether you see it or not is yours. It belongs to you. It's yours to take, rearrange and re-use. Asking for permission is like asking to keep a rock someone just threw at your head.*

- Banksy, *Wall and Piece*<sup>442</sup>

*From the outset there are problems with any movie about graffiti because all the good artists refuse to show their face on camera.*

- Banksy<sup>443</sup>

*I've always thought he was great. The streets are boring...anyone like Banksy who makes it entertaining and treats people like people instead of consumers is brilliant.*

- Damien Hirst<sup>444</sup>

In this dissertation, I have utilized extended case studies with which to explore potential methods by which JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos employ socially-minded or philanthropic strategies in the service of change. Specifically, I have demonstrated that this particular brand of street art is an ideal medium through which to critique effects of neoliberalism, globalization, and the privatization of public space through the employment of a democratic approach in which the populace is given direct access to these projects through the street and in some cases the use of technology. These critiques are often inherent in the action taken by the street artist, such as Swoon's creation of her own floating cities, but they also sometimes take indirect approaches,

---

<sup>442</sup> Banksy, *Wall and Piece* (London: Random House, 2007).

<sup>443</sup> AJ Schnack, "Banksy (Yes, Banksy) on Thierry, EXIT Skepticism & Documentary Filmmaking as Punk," All These Wonderful Things, December 21, 2010, [edendale.typepad.com/weblog/2010/12/banksy-yes-banksy-on-thierry-exit-skepticism-documentary-filmmaking-as-punk.html](http://edendale.typepad.com/weblog/2010/12/banksy-yes-banksy-on-thierry-exit-skepticism-documentary-filmmaking-as-punk.html).

<sup>444</sup> Lizzie Crocker, "Is Damien Hirst Behind the Banksy Machine?" *The Daily Beast*, November 7, 2013, [www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/11/07/is-damien-hirst-behind-the-banksy-machine.html](http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/11/07/is-damien-hirst-behind-the-banksy-machine.html).



as in the case of JR's *Inside/Out Project*, by which he is most often involved by proxy. Street art is a medium marked by inherent paradoxes, which include its connection to commodification in the art market, including at auction which often means that it is dissociated from the physical space of the street; street artists' participation both within and outside of the traditional space of the museum; the fact that to align oneself with the definition of street artist, one must not necessarily be working on the street; street art's increasingly frequent alignment with certain elements of the same culture which it critiques; as well as its commodification by the very artists who reject advanced capitalism, but cannot avoid it as they ouroborosly sell their prints to make the work that critiques it. This is not to mention the potential issues of exploitation whilst trying to help various populations from their own, different, or less-fortunate backgrounds.

Another important element of this study is to emphasize that these artists are not representative of street art in general, which could be expanded to include graffiti, but instead a specific niche of street art in which the artists have a philanthropic concern. Therefore, Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos are not representative examples of street art, which could be defined as: "a brand culture that is mobilized by the ethos and morality of anti-branding"<sup>445</sup> or as it is grandiosely defined in the street artist Banksy's movie *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, as "a hybrid form of graffiti...driven by a new generation, using stickers, stencils, posters and sculptures to make their mark by

---

<sup>445</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, 96.

any means necessary... the biggest countercultural movement since punk.”<sup>446</sup> There are many other artists that share Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos’s concern with helping others, but whom take a different approach, so why focus on only these three? As I pointed out in the Introduction, Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos are of a certain generation, have a tripartite practice, and are each at a similar stage in their careers in which they are gaining acceptance in the mainstream artworld. In addition, they have similar, though not identical, concerns in embarking on work that speaks to causes that will help others and effect a more cosmopolitan atmosphere, while actually making work, on the ground, and interacting face-to-face with these communities in a transparent way.

Banksy is an example of a street artist who shares this concern with the betterment of society by critiquing oppression resultant from capitalism. He takes a critical stance in his work which is sometimes focused on positive change, however the method by which he puts forth his critique is divergent from that of the artists discussed in this study in that it is rooted in sarcasm and wit instead of the unabashed, philanthropic sincerity that can be found in JR, Swoon, and Os Gêmeos’s work.

Banksy began painting in 1992 in Bristol, UK with the DryBreadz Crew and became known for his stencil graffiti; he was one of the first artists to make this form of street

---

<sup>446</sup> Banksy, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, DVD, Directed by Banksy (2010), US: Oscilloscope Laboratories, 2010.

art ubiquitous.<sup>447</sup> In his film, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, Banksy says of his practice: “I’ve learnt from experience that a painting isn’t finished when you put down your brush – that’s when it starts. The public reaction is what supplies meaning and value. Art comes alive in the arguments you have about it. If we’ve done our job properly with *EXIT* [his film], then the best part of the entire movie is the conversation in the car park afterwards.”<sup>448</sup> Again, this quote which emphasizes that conversation is more important than the artwork itself, is reminiscent of the work of Swoon, Os Gêmeos, and JR, in that their form of collaboration is mainly rooted in dialogue, as I have demonstrated. Banksy has also, similarly created work that is anti-capitalist and critical of various civil rights issues, much like the artists featured in this dissertation.

Like Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos, Banksy possesses an entrepreneurial spirit, however, Banksy has achieved an unprecedented celebrity status in the realm of street art and mainstream consciousness more generally, while maintaining anonymity. Banksy is perhaps the most well-known practitioner of street art. His feature film, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, won several awards including the 2011 Independent Spirit Award, was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary in 2010 (the same year that his film was released), and was named one of *Time Magazine’s* 100

---

<sup>447</sup> Blek le Rat used stencil graffiti before Banksy, however Banksy’s broader reach is the reason that he is most associated with the medium. Over the years, there has been some speculation as to whether Banksy ripped-off Blek le Rat’s style. However, this does not appear to be accurate and the two artists have spoken fondly of each other.

<sup>448</sup> Banksy, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*.

Most Influential people. His work sells for hundreds of thousands at auctions,<sup>449</sup> and he has even designed the opening credits of a *Simpson's* episode.<sup>450</sup>

Banksy's anonymity creates a spectacle of ambiguity that extends to the aims of his practice. He achieves an anonymity that the artists in this study do not, nor do they strive for. Unlike JR, who adopts a mask, but is a public figure and artist whom people know who goes out and interacts with people, it is not clear who Banksy is. He does not make public appearances and his work is surreptitious, appearing "out of nowhere" on the streets or existing from the distance afforded by film and television. Banksy defies categorization in that his main mode of operation is through contradiction: he is well known, but not known at all, he is a bigwig in the art market and among collectors, yet he donates a large amount of money to charity, he makes work that is extreme in its political messages, (something which is usually divisive) but that is attractive to a large range of people, he makes pieces that can be classified as "original" Banksy's, though the notion of originality and the stencil have a very contentious relationship. Like Os Gêmeos, Swoon, and JR, Banksy addresses various forms of societal, social, and political critique. However, Banksy's anonymity is his form of branding which is ironic, as he is critical of the notion of branding in his work.

---

<sup>449</sup> Forbes Magazine ran a feature on Banksy and attributed at least \$20 million dollars to his name.: Danielle Rahm, "Banksy: The \$20 Million Graffiti Artist Who Doesn't Want His Art To Be Worth Anything," *Forbes*, October 22, 2013, [www.forbes.com/sites/daniellerahm/2013/10/22/banksy-the-20-million-graffiti-artist-who-doesnt-want-his-art-to-be-worth-anything/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/daniellerahm/2013/10/22/banksy-the-20-million-graffiti-artist-who-doesnt-want-his-art-to-be-worth-anything/).

<sup>450</sup> "MoneyBart," *The Simpsons*, Episode 467, first broadcast October 10, 2010 by FOX, Directed by Nancy Kruse and written by Tim Long.

Instead of his anonymity functioning as an anti-branding technique, it has had the opposite effect. As scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser argues, Banksy's is the "quintessential neoliberal creative practice, as it relentlessly puts forward the idea of the "free" enterprising individual—who does not ask for permission but rather takes and rearranges and reuses."<sup>451</sup> Sara Banet-Weiser explains that Banksy's "is a brand that trades on a recognizable unrecognizability, profiting from (even while admonishing) the codes of celebrity visibility."<sup>452</sup>

A second fundamental difference in Banksy's practice apart from his unique brand, is the method by which these sentiments are expressed, and hence, why I did not devote an entire chapter to Banksy in this study: Banksy is known for his employment of spectacle and "pranksterism" in his art, which is in direct contrast to the sincerity and earnestness of Swoon's, and Os Gêmeos's, and even JR's practices.<sup>453</sup> Examples of Banksy's work include placing a blow-up doll dressed as a Guantanamo Bay detainee in an orange jumpsuit, with a black hood and handcuffs (an image that was in the cultural consciousness at the time) inside of the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad ride at Disneyland in 2006, which remained there for an hour before it was discovered and taken down. For his *Barely Legal* exhibition also in 2006, his first

---

<sup>451</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, 95.

<sup>452</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, 113.

<sup>453</sup> I would consider expanding this study to include Banksy, along with other artists who use humor as the central tactic in their art practice at a later date, however, for this project, I wanted to focus on a small group of artists who demonstrate the philanthropic turn.

exhibition in the United States, Banksy painted Tai, an elephant obtained legally from the Los Angeles Zoo, pink with gold fleur-de-lys designs which matched the wallpaper in the Los Angeles warehouse which housed him. As one would expect, this piece became a target for criticism from animal rights activists. Banksy's supposed point was to call attention to the problem of "world poverty" which was understood as "the elephant in the room" which Banksy dared visitors to not speak about.<sup>454</sup> Banksy explained: "1.7 billion people have no access to clean drinking water. Twenty billion people live below the poverty line. Every day hundreds of people are made to feel physically sick by morons at art shows telling them how bad the world is but never actually doing something about it. Anybody want a free glass of wine?"<sup>455</sup> This show was attended by Hollywood elite, had an advance opening, valet parking, and the works in the exhibition were for sale. Banksy has also successfully placed his own works on the walls of major museums surreptitiously in both Britain and the United States accompanied by their own tongue-in-cheek captions. For his 2013 New York "residency" called *Better Out, Than In* which took place over thirty-one days, one of his thirty-one stunts was a pop-up tent which he installed in Central Park from which he sold his works which sell for \$200,000 at auction for only \$60. Though they were

---

<sup>454</sup> Edward Wyatt, "In the Land of Beautiful People, an Artist Without a Face," *The New York Times*, September 16, 2006, [www.nytimes.com/2006/09/16/arts/design/16bank.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/16/arts/design/16bank.html?_r=0).

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

branded as “100% authentic original signed Banksy canvases,” only eight sold.<sup>456</sup> His controversial opening sequence for *The Simpsons* shows workers in an Asian sweatshop creating Simpsons merchandise. And the most recent piece by Banksy is a spectacular temporary theme park called *Dismaland*, a dystopian Disneyland which critiques consumerism, celebrity culture, law enforcement, and where instead of the usual, unwavering Disney cheerfulness, employees at *Dismaland* wear the honest, worn-out expressions of minimum-wage labor. This mode of critique which Banksy employs makes him akin to the De Certeuan drifter, participating within the same structure that he is subverting. This is a very different approach than that of Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos’s. In exposing this element of *The Simpsons* franchise, Banksy simultaneously “practices in the discourse of outsourcing” and therefore participates in the outsourcing of labor that he critiques.<sup>457</sup> When interviewed about his film, which has similar contradictions, Banksy replied: “It seemed fitting that a film questioning the artworld was paid for with proceeds directly from the artworld. Maybe it should have been called ‘Don’t Bite the Hand That Feeds You.’”<sup>458</sup> In 2011, the link on his website for the “Shop” took one to a screen that read: “Banksy does not endorse or profit from the sale of greeting cards, mugs, tshirts, photo canvases etc. Banksy is not on Facebook, Myspace, Twitter or Gaydar. Banksy is not represented by any form

---

<sup>456</sup> Danielle Rahm, “Banksy: The \$20 Million Graffiti Artist.”

<sup>457</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, 117.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

of commercial art gallery.”<sup>459</sup> While he does in fact sell his work to collectors, the pieces are often stencils on canvas, which essentially render the sellable object simulacra at best, as Banksy’s work operates most effectively on the streets. Banksy is notably friends with Damien Hirst— who is similarly tongue-in-cheek, but who is renown for his involvement and manipulation of the commercial market. Damian Hirst’s *For the Love of God*, a diamond encrusted human skull replacing the opulent, usurious Medieval cathedral by encouraging this type of grotesque monetary black hole apparatus, in reverse, by a collector, within a commercial realm, is even more overt than Warhol. It has been cut off from golden umbilical cords or subjection to an influx of a larger, unpredictable cultural and capital tide. Banksy’s work is a product of this spectacle. Swoon, Os Gêmeos, and JR are part of a younger generation of street artists who take a different, more direct and intimate approach in their art that favors human connection in the service of an overarching philanthropic urge, over motivation by capital.

Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos do not aim to create an overarching global consciousness the way Banksy does, so much as act as advocates for the populations that they work within. The consciousness or awareness that results from their work

---

<sup>459</sup> Since, Banksy has updated his site to this phrase: “Banksy is not represented by an art gallery, is not on Facebook and has never used Twitter. All questions, requests and complaints should be sent to [faq@banksy.co.uk](mailto:faq@banksy.co.uk).” Also his website forces the viewer to take a tour through a series of images that center on politics in Gaza in order to proceed to the official site. Therefore he is relying on his fame by having faith that those navigating his site will continue to click through (even though there is no indication that one will eventually arrive at his website) in order to address a cause that he is passionate about. [banksy.co.uk](http://banksy.co.uk).



through encounter and or participation is as much a result of the artist as other participants or viewers. Grant Kester has shown that there is a “tendency in community-based projects to define the participants *serially*, as socially isolated individuals whose ground of interconnection and identification as a group is provided by an aesthetically ameliorative experience administered by the artist.”<sup>460</sup> While each of the three artists in this dissertation would welcome an “ameliorative experience” as a result of their work, they do not see themselves as antidotes to systematic forms of oppression. Instead, they use their platforms, and see themselves as speaking out to potentially effect change. In the case of Os Gêmeos and Swoon, they are a part of or become a part of, the communities with whom they work. Os Gêmeos are citizens of São Paulo and speak out against injustices in their own community, which affects them as well. Swoon entered as an outsider with the intention to improve a situation in the case of Konbit and *Dithyrambalina* - however these situations were natural disasters, and their misfortune was not entirely due to socio-economic circumstances. Swoon also transcended the status of an outsider coming in and actually became a family member in the form of a godparent to one of the children in Haiti. Also, Swoon’s relationships are on-going, as are Os Gêmeos’s. All of these artists do work on the ground and interact with people and this interaction is *part* of the process, not just something that occurs after, as Banksy mentioned.

---

<sup>460</sup> Grant Kester, “Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art,” *Afterimage* 22 (January 1995).

Resistance can broadly be divided into two basic forms: open and overt, or subversive and covert. Of course, there is much overlap and continuity in between, and many acts of resistance contain both. Inherently, activism (in the sense of direct action conceived to bring about change) is an open form of resistance, though results and desired outcomes may prove subversive. For instance, a project such as Ricardo Dominguez's *Transborder Immigration Tool*, deemed a form of "artivism" by Dominguez, is an overt and direct action. Dominguez's project operates within, and indeed relies upon, an extant, corporate and invasive structure (cellular and GPS networks) and openly uses it in order to accomplish its subversive goal of assisting illegal immigrants across the Mexico-U.S. border safely. The same technological tools used to survey and track citizens in Steven Graham's militarized urban public spaces are appropriated and used as humanitarian and destabilizing agents at the border.

Much street art operates in this subversive vein. Often hinging on the reclamation of public space by the citizenry through aesthetic intervention, the subversive nature of the street lies in the fact that it is all encompassing. Its medium is the people. Art of the street relies on something along the lines of Barthes' "third way," Homi K. Bhabha's "third space," or de Certeaus's "in-between," especially in the cases explored here. In cultivating the public space of the street for its own ends, street art draws attention to both the aesthetic and the political and provides another model of resistance. Street art is dependent on its environment for its potency, in terms of the geographical location, but also in the temporal elements involved, whether these

be the result of human intervention or chance encounter. Swoon, JR, and Os Gêmeos appear to subscribe to the Situationist belief that “the means of expression are meaningless . . . if they are not at the same time techniques for sharing or transmitting speech, for the production of community,” and therefore, a cosmopolitan ideal.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- @149ST. "Writer's Vocabulary." Accessed June 1, 2015. [www.at149st.com/glossary.html](http://www.at149st.com/glossary.html).
- Abinal, Emile. e-mail message to author, June 14, 2010. for the exhibition *Viva la Revolución: Dialogue with the Urban Landscape*.
- Alonzo, Pedro. *Os Gêmeos*. New York: Gingko Press Inc., 2012.
- Armstrong, Justin. "The Contested Gallery: Street Art, Ethnography and the Search for Urban Understandings." *AmeriQuests*, Vol 2, No 1 (2005). Accessed May 18, 2011. [libdig10.library.vanderbilt.edu/index.php/ameriquests/article/view/46/37](http://libdig10.library.vanderbilt.edu/index.php/ameriquests/article/view/46/37), 8.
- Arrested Motion Blog. "Streets: Pixadores Attack Mural by Os Gêmeos, NUNCA, NINA, Finok, and Zefix." [arrestedmotion.com/2010/03/streets-pixadores-attack-mural-by-os-gemeos-nunca-nina-finok-and-zefix/](http://arrestedmotion.com/2010/03/streets-pixadores-attack-mural-by-os-gemeos-nunca-nina-finok-and-zefix/).
- ArtPrimo. "Art Primo Caps 101: An Introduction to Spraypaint Nozzles." [http://artprimo.com/catalog/art\\_primo\\_caps-101](http://artprimo.com/catalog/art_primo_caps-101).
- Artsy Blog. "Photo Booth: In the Studio with JR." [www.artsy.net/article/inthestudiojr-photo-booth#!](http://www.artsy.net/article/inthestudiojr-photo-booth#!).
- Astiasarán, Clara, Janet Betet, José Parlá, and JR. *Wrinkles of the City*. Bologna, Italy: Damiani/Standard Press, 2012.
- Banai, Nuit. *Yves Klein (Reaktion Books - Critical Lives)*. London: Reaktion Books, 2014.
- Banksy, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*. DVD. Directed by Banksy. 2010. US: Oscilloscope Laboratories, 2010.
- Banksy. *Wall and Piece*. London: Random House, 2007.
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *Authentic(TM): The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*. New York: NYU Press, 2012.

- Beale, Scott. "Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea Travel Down the Hudson River." *Laughing Squid*, August 11, 2008: <http://laughingsquid.com/swimming-cities-of-switchback-sea-travel-down-the-hudson-river>.  
I'm not sure this is right.
- Belenky, Mary Field, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule. *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.
- Bernstein, Alyssa R.. "Moral Cosmopolitanism." In *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*, edited by Deen Chatterjee, et al, 711. Spring, 2012.
- Berrebi, Marco JR, Christian Caujolle, and Françoise Docquier. *Women Are Heroes*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2012.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bishop, Claire. *Participation*. The MIT Press, 2006.
- Blakely, Edward J. and Mary Gail Snyder. "Divided We Fall: Gated and Walled Communities in the United States." *Architecture of Fear*, Nan Ellin, ed. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997.
- Blankstein, Andrew, Richard Winton, and Andrew Ng. "Tagging outside an L.A. street art exhibit fuels debate." *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 2011. [articles.latimes.com/2011/apr/20/local/la-me-04-19-tagger-art-20110420/2](http://articles.latimes.com/2011/apr/20/local/la-me-04-19-tagger-art-20110420/2).
- Bloom, Julie. "Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea: A Floating City with Junkyard Roots." *The New York Times*, August 18, 2008. Accessed May 1, 2014. [www.nytimes.com/2008/08/18/arts/design/18flot.html?](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/18/arts/design/18flot.html?).
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Kathe Robinson. "Delegation and Political Fetishism." *Thesis Eleven*, February 1985.
- Bousteau, Fabrice. "JR à Paris: Les Yeux Braqués Sur Le Monde." *Beaux Arts Magazine*, Issue 304 (October, 2009).
- Brissac, Nelson. "Urban Art in Megacities| São Paulo." Seminar, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, June 18, 2014.

- Brooke, James. "Subways are Cleaner, Transit Authority Says." *The New York Times*, June 14, 1986. <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/14/nyregion/subways-are-cleaner-transit-authority-says.html>.
- Buchloh, Benjamin. "The Primary Colors for a Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Avant-Garde." *October* 37, Summer 1986.
- Buchloh, Benjamin H. D.. "Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the Ends of Portraiture." *Face-Off: The Portrait in Recent Art*. Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1994.
- Caldeira, Teresa. *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Caldeira, Teresa. "From Modernism to Neoliberalism in São Paulo: Reconfiguring the City and its Citizens." *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age*, edited by Andreas Huyssen. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Caldeira, Teresa. "Worlds Set Apart." *LSE Cities*, Newspaper Essay, South America, December 2008. [lsecities.net/media/objects/articles/worlds-set-apart/en-gb/](http://lsecities.net/media/objects/articles/worlds-set-apart/en-gb/).
- California Institute of Earth Art and Architecture. "What is Superadobe?" Accessed February 2013. [calearth.org/building-designs/what-is-superadobe.html](http://calearth.org/building-designs/what-is-superadobe.html).
- Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. London: Vintage, 1997.
- Causton, Jennifer. "The Challenge of Mainstreaming Conflict Sensitivity: PCIA Methodologies and the Organizational Culture of NGOs." *Atlantic International Studies Journal*, Volume 5: Spring 2009,. [http://atlismta.org/online-journals/0809-journal-intervention/the-challenge-of-mainstreaming-conflict-sensitivity/#\\_ftn103](http://atlismta.org/online-journals/0809-journal-intervention/the-challenge-of-mainstreaming-conflict-sensitivity/#_ftn103).
- Chaffee, Lyman G. *Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries*. Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993.
- Chastanet, Francois. *Pixacao: São Paulo Signature*. Paris: XGpress, 2007.

- Co. Create Blog. "Advertising Comes Back to São Paulo Streets — Via Graffiti." [www.fastcocreate.com/1681353/advertising-comes-back-to-sao-paulo-streets-via-graffiti](http://www.fastcocreate.com/1681353/advertising-comes-back-to-sao-paulo-streets-via-graffiti).
- Coetzee, S.K., & Klopper, H.C.. "Compassion fatigue within nursing practice: A concept analysis." *Nursing and Health Sciences*, 12 (2010):235-243. Doi: 10.1111/j.1442-2018.2010.00526.x.
- Couderc, Sylvie. "The Ten Commandments, An Interview," transcribed by Sylvie Marchand in Bordeaux, France. December 16, 1985.
- Crampton, Thomas. "Behind the Furor, the Last Moments of Two Youths." *The New York Times*, November 7, 2005. [www.nytimes.com/2005/11/07/world/europe/behind-the-furor-the-last-moments-of-two-youths.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/07/world/europe/behind-the-furor-the-last-moments-of-two-youths.html?_r=0).
- Crimp, Douglas. "Face Value." In *About Face: Andy Warhol Portraits*, edited by Nicholas Baume, 123. Hartford, Conn.: The Wadsworth Atheneum, 1999.
- Crocker, Lizzie. "Is Damien Hirst Behind the Banksy Machine?" *The Daily Beast*, November 7, 2013. [www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/11/07/is-damien-hirst-behind-the-banksy-machine.html](http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/11/07/is-damien-hirst-behind-the-banksy-machine.html).
- Crow, Thomas. Preface to *Modern Art in the Common Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Curry, Caledonia. "Swoon." February 5 – 7, 2009. Festival presentation. The Influencers 2009: Art, Communication Guerrilla, Entretenimiento Radical. Centro de Cultura Contemporanea de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.
- Davis, Mike. *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*, Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk, eds. NY: The New Press, 2007.
- De Certeau, Michael. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Deitch, Jeffrey. "Art in the Streets." In *Art in the Streets*, edited by Jeffrey Deitch, Roger Gastman, and Aaron Rose, 13. New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2011.

Deitch, Jeffrey, and KET. "Os Gêmeos Talk About How They Became Artists."

Deitch Projects. "Swoon - Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea."  
[www.deitch.com/projects/sub.php?projId=248](http://www.deitch.com/projects/sub.php?projId=248).

Derrida, Jacques. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Deutsche, Rosalyn. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*. Graham Foundation/MIT Press Series in Contemporary Architectural Discourse. Chicago, IL: Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996.

Deutsche, Rosalyn. "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City." *October* 47 (1988): 3-52.

Doyle, Jennifer. "Santiago Sierra." *Frieze*, Issue 113, (2008).

Dulles, John W. F.. *Anarchists and Communists in Brazil, 1900-1935*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973.

Emerson, Spy. "Swimming Cities From Spy's Perspective." *Juxtapoze*, December 21, 2009. [www.juxtapoz.com/current/swimming-cities-from-spy-perspective](http://www.juxtapoz.com/current/swimming-cities-from-spy-perspective).

Favela Mundo. "*Favela Mundo - Brazilian NGO - short video*." You Tube video. Upload by Favela Mundo, October 20, 2014. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF1DqLfEnL8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF1DqLfEnL8).

Felshin, Nina. *But Is It Art?: The Spirit of Art as Activism*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.

Fraser, Andrea. "L'1%, C'est Moi." *Texte zur Kunst* 83, September 2011.

Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Fried, Michael. *Courbet's Realism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.



- Fried, Michael. *Manet's Modernism or the Face of Painting in the 1860s*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Ganz, Nicholas. *Graffiti Women: Street Art from Five Continents*. New York: Abrams, 2006.
- Garb, Tamar. "Interview: Tamar Garb in Conversation with Christian Boltanski." *Christian Boltanski* London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1997.
- Gastman, Roger and Caleb Neelon. *The History of American Graffiti*. New York: Harper Design, 2011.
- Gert, Bernard. "The Definition of Morality." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. (Fall 2015 Edition). <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/morality-definition/>.
- Graffiti Archaeology News Blog. "'Graffiti' to be Legalized in Brazil?" <http://grafarc.org/news/2008/08/graffiti-to-be-legalized-in-brazil/>.
- Greenbaum, Hillary and Dana Rubinstein. "The Origin of Spray Paint." *The New York Times Magazine*, November 12, 2011. [www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/magazine/who-made-spray-paint.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/magazine/who-made-spray-paint.html?_r=0).
- Grey City (Cidade Cinza)*. Directed by Marcelo Mesquita and Guilherme Valiengo. Montreal, Canada: Sala 12 Filmes, 2013. DVD.
- Grigoriadis, Vanessa. "Barging into Venice." *New York Magazine*, June 7, 2009. Accessed May 15, 2012. <http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/57181>.
- Grimes, William. "Poppa Neutrino, Trans-Atlantic Adventurer, Dies at 77." *The New York Times*, January 27, 2011. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/28/us/28neutrino.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/28/us/28neutrino.html?_r=0).
- Gurock, Jeffery S. "Jacob A. Riis: Christian Friend of Missionary Foe? Two Jewish Views." *American Jewish History*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (September 1981): 42.
- Habermas, Jurgen, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)." *New German Critique* NO. 3 (Autumn, 1974): 54.

- Hariman , Robert and John Louis Lucaites. *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Harvey, David Alan. "Conversation with JR." *Burn Magazine*, October 8, 2013. [www.burnmagazine.org/essays/2013/10/jr-conversation](http://www.burnmagazine.org/essays/2013/10/jr-conversation).
- Hays, Constance L.. "Transit Agency Says New York Subways are free of Graffiti." *The New York Times*, May 10, 1989. <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/10/nyregion/transit-agency-says-new-york-subways-are-free-of-graffiti.html>.
- Heliotrope Foundation. Accessed June 1, 2014. [heliotropefoundation.org](http://heliotropefoundation.org).
- Iddings, Ana Christina DaSilva, Steven G. McCafferty, and Maria Lucia Teixeira da Silva. "Conscientização Through Graffiti Literacies in the Streets of a São Paulo Neighborhood: An Ecosocial Semiotic Perspective." *Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (January/February/March 2011): 6.
- Inside Out: The People's Art Project*. Directed by Alastair Siddons. Paris, France: Social Animals, 2013. Film.
- Irving, Sean. "Interview with NYC artist Swoon." *Lifelounge*, February 19, 2011. Accessed February 10, 2013. [www.lifelounge.com.au/art-anddesign/interview/interview-with-nyc-artist-swoon.aspx](http://www.lifelounge.com.au/art-anddesign/interview/interview-with-nyc-artist-swoon.aspx).
- James, Jesse. "Art In Istanbul! JR Takes Wrinkles of the City To Istanbul." *Stupid Dope*, June 11, 2015. [stupiddope.com/2015/06/11/art-in-istanbul-jr-takes-wrinkles-of-the-city-to-istanbul](http://stupiddope.com/2015/06/11/art-in-istanbul-jr-takes-wrinkles-of-the-city-to-istanbul).
- Jameson, Frederic. "On Magic Realism and Film." *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 12 Issue 2 (Winter 1986).
- JR. "The Art of Storytelling: Havana and the Wrinkles of the City." *CultureShockArt*, June 24, 2014. [cultureshockart.wordpress.com/tag/calligraphy](http://cultureshockart.wordpress.com/tag/calligraphy).
- JR. "JR: My Wish: Use Art to Turn the World Inside Out." *TED*. Accessed April 1, 2015. [www.ted.com/talks/](http://www.ted.com/talks/)

jr\_s\_ted\_prize\_wish\_use\_art\_to\_turn\_the\_world\_inside\_out?language=en.

“JR Street Artist Biography.” Stencil Revolution, accessed July 3, 2013.  
www.stencilrevolution.com/profiles/jr.

JR. “Subtitles and Transcript.” *TED*. Accessed January 3, 2015. www.ted.com/talks/jr\_s\_ted\_prize\_wish\_use\_art\_to\_turn\_the\_world\_inside\_out/transcript?language=en.

JR. “Women Are Heroes By JR.” *jr-art.net*. Accessed March 2, 2015. www.jr-art.net/videos/women-are-heroes-by-jr.

JR. “Women Are Heroes/India/2009.” *JR-Art.net*. Accessed March 2, 2015.  
www.jr-art.net/projects/women-are-heroes-india.

JR. “Women Are Heroes On A Container Ship, In Le Havre.” *jr-art*. Accessed April 1, 2015. www.jr-art.net/news/women-are-heroes-on-a-container-ship-in-le-havre.

JR and Emile Abinal. *Women Are Heroes*. Blue-ray, directed by JR (2010, Paris, France, 27.11 Production, 2010), film.

JR and José Parlá. “The Wrinkles of the City, Havana Cuba”. Moderated by Bryce Wolkowitz. SVA Theatre, NYC. May 22, 2013. Q&A session.

JR and Kristie Lu Stout. “Interview with Artist and Photographer, JR.” *CNN*, aired October 5, 2012. edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1210/05/ta.01.html.

Kamiya, Gary. “The Nomad: The Happiest Man in the World.” *The New York Times*, March 18, 2007. www.nytimes.com/2007/03/18/books/review/Kamiya2.t.html?\_r=0.

Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*. Translated by M. Campbell Smith. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Incorporated, 1972.

Kelling, George L. and James Q. Wilson. “Broken Windows: Police and Neighborhood Safety.” *The Atlantic*, March 1982.

- Kennedy, Randy. "Award to Artist who gives Slums a Human Face." *The New York Times*, October 19, 2010. [www.nytimes.com/2010/10/20/arts/design/20ted.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/20/arts/design/20ted.html?_r=0).
- Kester, Grant. "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art." *Afterimage* 22 (January 1995).
- Kester, Grant. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Conversation in Modern Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Kester, Grant H.. *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Khatchadourian, Raffi. "Onward and Upwards with the Arts: In the Picture: An artist's Global Experiment to Help People be Seen." *The New Yorker*, November 28, 2011 edition, 56-63.
- King, Frederic. "Swoon on Konbit Shelter." Vimeo, 9:04, 2015. [vimeo.com/108711286](http://vimeo.com/108711286).
- Kleingeld, Pauline. "Six Varieties of Cosmopolitanism in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (July, 1999): 505.
- Knight, Christopher. "MOCA's Art in the Streets Gets the Big Picture Wrong." *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 2011. [articles.latimes.com/2011/may/29/entertainment/la-ca-knight-graffiti-notebook-20110529](http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/29/entertainment/la-ca-knight-graffiti-notebook-20110529).
- Konbit Shelter. "About." Accessed May 1, 2012. [konbitshelter.org](http://konbitshelter.org).
- Konbit Shelter: Blog. [konbitshelter.tumblr.com](http://konbitshelter.tumblr.com).
- Kickstarter. "Konbit Shelter: Sustainable Building in Rural Haiti." Last updated January 2, 2013. [www.kickstarter.com/projects/328491151/konbit-shelter-sustainable-building-in-rural-haiti/updates](http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/328491151/konbit-shelter-sustainable-building-in-rural-haiti/updates).
- Koppel, Niko. "Showcase: 'Subway Art.'" *NYTimes.com*, June 12, 2009. Lens: Photography, Video and Visual Journalism, [lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/12/showcase-5](http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/12/showcase-5).
- Korfman, Michael and Marcelo Nogueira. "Avant-Garde in Brazil." *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2004), p. 125-145.

- Kurland, Andrea. "Swoon: The Lattice Effect." *Huck Magazine*, April 26, 2012. <http://www.huckmagazine.com/art-and-culture/art-2/swoon>.
- Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.
- Lacy, Suzanne. *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Seattle, Wash: Bay Press, 1995.
- Larruscahim, Paula Gil. "From Graffiti to Pixação." *Tijdschrift over Cultuur & Criminaliteit* (4) 2 (2014), 69.
- Lawrence. "Interviews: Swoon – The Swimming Cities of Serenissima." *Arrested Motion*, March 30, 2009. <http://arrestedmotion.com/2009/03/interview-swoon-the-swimming-cities-of-serenissima>.
- Lee, Suzie. Arrested Motion Interview, "Interviews- JR: 'Wrinkles of the City: Berlin,'" *Arrested Motion*, April 17, 2013. [arrestedmotion.com/2013/04/streets-interviews-jr-wrinkles-of-the-city-berlin](http://arrestedmotion.com/2013/04/streets-interviews-jr-wrinkles-of-the-city-berlin).
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Phillippe Nemo*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.
- Lewis, Jacquelyn. "Swoon's 'Swimming Cities' Crashes the Venice Biennale." *Art in America*, June 3, 2009. [www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/swoons-swimming-cities-crashes-the-venice-biennale/](http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/swoons-swimming-cities-crashes-the-venice-biennale/).
- Liebermann, Oren. "Gaza Resident Sells a Door, Unwittingly Parts with a Banksy Masterpiece." *CNN*, April 6, 2015. [edition.cnn.com/2015/04/02/middleeast/gaza-war-door-banksy-artist/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/02/middleeast/gaza-war-door-banksy-artist/index.html).
- Lima, Zeuler R.M.A. and Vera M. Pallamin. "An Uncommon Common Space." In *Encountering Urban Places: Visual and Material Performances in the City*, edited by Lars Frers and Lars Meier, 88. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007.
- Lippard, Lucy R.. *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. New York: New Press, 1997.
- MacDonald, Heather. "Graffiti is Always Vandalism." *The New York Times*, December 4, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/>

2014/07/11/when-does-graffiti-become-art/graffiti-is-always-vandalism.

MacDonald, Heather. "Radical Graffiti Chic." *City Journal*, vol. 21, no. 2. (Spring 2011). [city-journal.org/mobile/story.php?s=7018#.UvGNH3ddWvk](http://city-journal.org/mobile/story.php?s=7018#.UvGNH3ddWvk).

Magepa S.A. "Magepa S.A." Accessed April 9, 2012. [magepa.com](http://magepa.com).

Majkut, Paul. "Media." *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, edited by Hans.

Manchester, Elizabeth. "Santiago Sierra 160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People El Gallo Arte Contemporáneo. Salamanca, Spain. December 2000." [Tate.org.uk](http://Tate.org.uk), [www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sierra-160-cm-line-tattooed-on-4-people-el-gallo-arte-contemporaneo-salamanca-spain-t11852](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sierra-160-cm-line-tattooed-on-4-people-el-gallo-arte-contemporaneo-salamanca-spain-t11852).

Manco, Tristian, Lost Art, and Caleb Neelon. "*Graffiti Brasil*." New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005.

Margolles, Teresa. "Santiago Sierra." *Bomb Magazine*, 86 (Winter 2004). [bombmagazine.org/article/2606/santiago-sierra](http://bombmagazine.org/article/2606/santiago-sierra).

*Megacaos Blog*. "ENTREVISTA - AUTOPSIA - ANDRÉ." <http://www.megacaos.com/2013/03/entrevista-autopsia-andre.html>.

Meskimmon, Marsha. *Cosmopolitan imagination and Contemporary Art*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

"Mission." *Ayiti Resurrect*, last updated April 20015. [www.ayitiresurrect.org/mission](http://www.ayitiresurrect.org/mission).

"Mission." Guilds, accessed May 1, 2015. [guilds.co/mission](http://guilds.co/mission).

Mitchell, W.J.T.. *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

"MoneyBart." *The Simpsons*, Episode 467. Directed by Nancy Kruse and written by Tim Long. 2010. FOX, 2010. Television.

Moore, Ryan. *Sells like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture, and Social Crisis*. New York: NYU Press, 2009.

- MTN. "Ultimate Graffiti Artists: Os Gêmeos." Accessed October 15, 2012. [www.mtn-world.com/blog/2012/10/15/ultimate-graffiti-artists-os-gemeos](http://www.mtn-world.com/blog/2012/10/15/ultimate-graffiti-artists-os-gemeos).
- Muniz, Vik and BOMB. "Os Gêmeos." *BOMB Magazine*, 102 (Winter 2008). [bombmagazine.org/article/3045/os-g-meos](http://bombmagazine.org/article/3045/os-g-meos).
- Museum of Modern Art*. "Erich Heckel – Jungling." Accessed July 30, 2015. <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/67163?>
- Neelon, Caleb. "Os Gêmeos." *Juxtapoze*, No. 114 (July 2010): 59.
- Neelon, Caleb and Allen Benedikt. "Brazil." *12OzProphet Magazine*, No. 6 (1998). [www.12ozprophet.com/news/throwback\\_thursday-12ozprophet-issue-6-feat-os\\_gemeos/](http://www.12ozprophet.com/news/throwback_thursday-12ozprophet-issue-6-feat-os_gemeos/).
- New Orleans Airlift. "Dithyrambalina." Musical architecture project. Accessed May 1, 2014, [www.neworleansairlift.org/index.php/component/k2/item/64-dithyrambalina](http://www.neworleansairlift.org/index.php/component/k2/item/64-dithyrambalina).
- Newman, Oscar. *Defensible Space*. New York: MacMillan, 1970.
- Nguyen, Patrick and Stuart MacKenzie. *Beyond the Street: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art*. Berlin: Gestalten, 2010.
- Norton, Michael I. and Dan Ariely. "Building a Better America — One Wealth Quintile at a Time." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (Association for Psychological Science, 2011): 9.
- O'Brien, Glenn. "New York/New Wave." *Artforum International*, February 2003.
- Os Gêmeos. "Os Gêmeos and Instituto Ayrton Senna Form Partnership for Education." Accessed November 25, 2014. [www.osgemeos.com.br/en/tag/instituto-ayrton-senna](http://www.osgemeos.com.br/en/tag/instituto-ayrton-senna).
- Os Gêmeos. "Os Gêmeos at the Vancouver Biennale." Artist talk at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Vancouver, British Columbia, September 5th, 2014.

- Parlá, José. *Wrinkles of the City: La Havana* (2012), Film; *Wrinkles of the City* was commissioned by the 2012 Havana Biennale.
- Piece by Piece*. Directed by Nic Hill and narrated by Senior One. Underdog Productions, 2005. Documentary.
- Platow, Raphaela. "Holding Up A Frame." *Keith Haring: 1978-1982*. Cincinnati: Contemporary Arts Center, 2010.
- Rahm, Danielle. "Banksy: The \$20 Million Graffiti Artist Who Doesn't Want His Art To Be Worth Anything." *Forbes*, October 22, 2013. [www.forbes.com/sites/daniellerahm/2013/10/22/banksy-the-20-million-graffiti-artist-who-doesnt-want-his-art-to-be-worth-anything/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/daniellerahm/2013/10/22/banksy-the-20-million-graffiti-artist-who-doesnt-want-his-art-to-be-worth-anything/).
- Rally.org. "Musical Houses in New Orleans." [Rally.org/dithyrambalina](http://Rally.org/dithyrambalina).
- Rieff, David. "Battle Over the Banlieues." *The New York Times*, April 15, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/15/magazine/15elections.t.html?pagewanted=all>.
- Reimann, Kim D.. "Up to No Good? Recent Critics and Critiques of NGOs." In *Subcontracting Peace: The Challenges of the NGO Peacebuilding*, edited by Oliver P. Richmond and Henry F. Carey. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005.
- Rosand, David. *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Rushmore, RJ. "Tim Hans shoots . . . Swoon." *Vandalog*, September 1, 2013. <https://blog.vandalog.com/2013/09/tim-hans-shoots-swoon>.
- Ryzik, Melena. "Life of Wonderment: Swoon Blurs the Line Between Art and Activism." *The New York Times*, August 6, 2014. Accessed August 7, 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/10/arts/design/swoon-blurs-the-line-between-art-and-activism.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/10/arts/design/swoon-blurs-the-line-between-art-and-activism.html?_r=0).
- Saltz, Jerry. "Entropy in Venice." *New York Magazine*, June 19, 2009. <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/57466/index1.html>.
- Schjeldahl, Peter and Hugo Martinez, *United Graffiti Artists 1975*. New York: United Graffiti Writers Inc., 1975.



- Schlecht, Neil E.. "Resistance and Appropriation in Brazil: How the Media and 'Official Culture' Institutionalized São Paulo's Grafite." *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, Vol. 14 (1995), 1-20.
- Sekula, Allan. "The Body and the Archive." *October*, Vol. 39 (Winter, 1986), 3-64.
- Sepp, Ranier and Lester Embree. Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2010.
- Signore, John Del. "Swoon, Artist," *Gothamist*, Arts & Entertainment, September 3, 2008. [gothamist.com/2008/09/03/swoon\\_artist.php](http://gothamist.com/2008/09/03/swoon_artist.php).
- Smith, Neil. *New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the New Revanchist City*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Sooke, Alastair. "JR: Artist with the city as his canvas." *The Guardian*, February 28, 2011. [www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8351889/JR-Artist-with-the-city-as-his-canvas.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8351889/JR-Artist-with-the-city-as-his-canvas.html).
- Sontag, Susan. "America, Seen Through Photographs Darkly." *On Photography*. New York: Rosetta Books, 2014.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Picador, 2001.
- Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003.
- Stewart, Alastair. "The View From the Street: The Murals of Otavio and Gustavo Pandolfo are Part Urban Chaos — and Part Other Worldly. And Very Brazilian." *The Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 2010. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703909804575123662556132070>.
- Stimson, Blake and Gregory Sholette. *Collectivism after Modernism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2007.
- "Street Art, Artists." Tate Modern. Accessed May 1, 2013. [www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/street-art/street-art-artists](http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/street-art/street-art-artists).

- Stylefile. "Os Gêmeos." [www.stylefile-magazine.com/179-0-Os+Gêmeos.html](http://www.stylefile-magazine.com/179-0-Os+Gêmeos.html).
- "Support the Inside Out Project." *Inside Out*. Accessed May 15, 2015. [www.insideoutproject.net/en/donate](http://www.insideoutproject.net/en/donate).
- Swoon. *De Dentro e De Fora*, press release quoted in: "Swoon 'Encampment Ersilia' in São Paulo." *Juxtapoz*, September 23, 2011. [www.juxtapoz.com/current/swoon-qencampment-ersiliaq-in-sao-paulo](http://www.juxtapoz.com/current/swoon-qencampment-ersiliaq-in-sao-paulo).
- Swoon. "Ersilia." [caledoniacurry.com/ersilia.php](http://caledoniacurry.com/ersilia.php).
- Swoon. "Konbit Shelter." [caledoniacurry.com/Konbit.php](http://caledoniacurry.com/Konbit.php).
- Swoon: "*Submerged Motherlands*." April 11, 2014 – August 24, 2014. Museum exhibit. Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY.
- Swoon. "Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea." [caledoniacurry.com/switchback.php](http://caledoniacurry.com/switchback.php).
- Swoon. "The Miss Rockaway Armada." [caledoniacurry.com/rockaway.php](http://caledoniacurry.com/rockaway.php).
- "Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals." *The New York Times*, Friday, July 21, 1971.
- Tatham, Michael. "Unaccommodated Man: The Photography of Diane Arbus." *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 55, No. 655 (December 1974), 563.
- "TED Prize." *TED*, accessed May 10, 2015. [www.ted.com/participate/ted-prize](http://www.ted.com/participate/ted-prize).
- Thompson, Nato. "Ethical Considerations in Public Art." *Scandalous: A Reader on Art and Ethics*. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 110.
- Times Square Art. "Parallel Connection." Accessed August 1, 2015. [TimesSquareNYC.org/MidnightMoment](http://TimesSquareNYC.org/MidnightMoment).
- Trippe. "Os Gêmeos Mural with Futura in NYC." *Fecal Face*, August 12, 2010. [www.fecalface.com/SF/good-stuff/2092-os-Gêmeos-mural-w-futura-in-nyc](http://www.fecalface.com/SF/good-stuff/2092-os-Gêmeos-mural-w-futura-in-nyc).

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).  
 “Culture: Intangible Heritage.” [http://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/index.php?s=films\\_details&pg=33&id=3759](http://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/index.php?s=films_details&pg=33&id=3759).
- Walrus TV, “Walrus TV Artist Feature: Swoon Interview from “The Run Up,” Youtube, 10:02, May 27, 2009. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtEDSQblGVo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtEDSQblGVo).
- Wall, Sophie. “São Paulo Street Art: in conversation with Eduardo Saretta.” *Bristo Latino*, April 27, 2015. <https://bristolatino.wordpress.com/2015/04/27/sao-paulo-street-art-in-conversation-with-eduardo-saretta/>.
- Warholstars.org. “John Giorno.” Accessed April 12, 2014. <http://www.warholstars.org/warhol/warhol1/warhol1b/johngiorno.html>.
- Went, Laurel and Claudia Penteadó. “GE Gallery Launches in Billboard-Free São Paulo: Almap BBDO, GE Take Advantage of Loophole in Ban of Visual Pollution With Artful Panels That Beautify the City.” *AdAge* (July 30, 2012). [adage.com/article/global-news/ge-gallery-launches-billboard-free-São-paulo/236376](http://adage.com/article/global-news/ge-gallery-launches-billboard-free-São-paulo/236376).
- Wenzel, Marita. “Zakes Mda’s Representation of South African Reality.” In *Word and Image in Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures*, edited by Michael Meyer. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.
- Wyatt, Edward. “In the Land of Beautiful People, an Artist Without a Face.” *The New York Times*, September 16, 2006. [www.nytimes.com/2006/09/16/arts/design/16bank.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/16/arts/design/16bank.html?_r=0).
- “Yves Klein: Blue Monochrome.” Museum of Modern Art. [www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=80103](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=80103).
- Zimbardo, Phillip G.. “The human choice: Individuation, reason, and order versus deindividuation, impulse, and chaos.” *1969 Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, edited by W. J. Arnold & D. Levine. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1970.