The hands behind the cans

Gemma Galdon Clavell - gemma@eticasconsulting.com
Liliana Arroyo Moliner - liliana@eticasconsulting.com
Eticas Research & Consulting, Barcelona

Marcus Willcocks - m.willcocks@csm.arts.ac.uk
Gamze Toylan - gamze.toylan@gmail.com
Adam Thorpe - a.thorpe@csm.arts.ac.uk
University of the Arts London, Central Saint Martins, UK

Abstract

Nowadays, walking around any city is a guarantee of seeing graffiti, while the public transportation are still a good canvas for writers. It is a well-established social phenomenon and has catch the attention of ethnographers, academic artists and other scholars that have entered the worlds of graffiti writers to explain their origins, trajectories, motivations, their identity construction, their conception of the self and their role and relation with society at large. However, still there is no synthetic effort of categorisation that provides understandable and communicable approaches to graffiti in the real world.

From some sectors graffiti is still something to "deal with". Generally speaking, authorities and dutyholders consider graffiti as threat a security and safety issue, turning it into something that needs to be addressed. For social workers, for instance, graffiti can be a means of communication with certain youth sectors or even a tool for social cohesion generation.

Departing from this perspective, Graffolution was designed: an EC funded project for generating awareness and advance in the provision of best practices for tackling graffiti in Austria, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom. The first rule encountered is no-one-size-fits-all and referring to graffiti and graffiti writers, this requires a complex understanding of the phenomenon, their trajectories as well as individual and collective dispositions.

The aim of this paper is to provide a consistent typology of graffiti writers, offering a comprehensive picture of whose are the hands behind the graffiti cans. This serves a double level purpose: advancing at the theoretical level putting forward the socio-cultural approaches to careers and social backgrounds provided by ethnographic approaches, as well as capturing the complexity of the phenomenon to serve as an operative conceptual basis for practitioners, professionals and decision makers.

In doing so, the analysis is made on the transcripts obtained for 22 semi-structured interviews, carried out in the four participating countries. The transcripts have been analysed according to the "persona" methodology, which constitutes a systematic and novel approach and a qualitative technique for clustering information. As a result, three main categories have been defined according to important ambitions, challenges and stages of typical 'journeys' or 'pathways' of actors. These findings contribute to form a basis of a) highlight the misconceptions around graffiti as a petty crime, and b) offer a guide to understand graffiti writers under a socio-cultural perspective.

Keywords: graffiti writers, qualitative methods, persona methodology, typology

Introduction

Graffiti was born in deprived areas of New York in the 70s (Castleman 1984; Miller 2002) and was established in Europe starting in the late 70s in the UK and spreading to other countries at uneven pace in the 80s. There was a subculture where Graffiti was born, due to the inequalities that minorities were living in that moment and their needs for protest. Graffiti was not only the act of painting a subway, it belonged to the Hip Hop movement: "Rapping and breaking became the prime expressions of a new young people's subculture called ''hip-hop'. Graffiti is the written word. There is the spoken word of rap music... (rap music playing) and then there's the acrobatic body language of dances like ''bre-

aking" (Silver and Chalfant 1983; "Style Wars" 1983).

Referring to the literature a basic definition of graffiti can be made by its description as "...visual perceptible elements (...), that vary in their colour selection, size and complexity and are often attached unsolicited at places that are well visible" (Steinat 2007).

Nowadays, walking around any city is a guarantee of seeing graffiti, while the public transportation are still a good canvas for writers. It is a well-established social phenomenon (Berti 2010; Alderton 2013). However, from some sectors graffiti is still something to "deal with". Generally speaking, authorities and dutyholders consider graffiti as threat a security and safety issue, turning it into something that needs to be addres-

sed. For social workers, for instance, graffiti can be a means of communication with certain youth sectors or even a tool for social cohesion generation (Gamman 2011; Rahn 2002). Under this perspective, Graffolution was born: an EC funded project for generating awareness and advance in the provision of best practices for tackling graffiti. The first rule encountered is no-one-size-fits-all and referring to graffiti and graffiti writers, requires a complex understanding of the phenomenon, the trajectories as well as individual and collective dispositions (Graffolution 2014b). This paper is based on the knowledge generated during the first year.

The aim of this paper is to provide a consistent typology of graffiti writers, offering a comprehensive picture of whose are the hands behind the graffiti cans. This serves a double level purpose: advancing at the theoretical level putting forward the socio-cultural approaches to careers and social backgrounds provided by ethnographic approaches, as well as capturing the complexity of the phenomenon to serve as an operative conceptual basis for practitioners, professionals and decision makers.

 In doing so, the analysis is made on the transcripts obtained for 22 semi-structured interviews, carried out in Austria, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom. Their speeches are analysed according to the "persona" methodology, which constitutes a systematic approach and a qualitative technique for clustering information. As a result, three main categories have been defined according to important ambitions, challenges and stages of typical 'journeys' or 'pathways' of actors. These findings contribute a basis to a) highlight the misconceptions around graffiti as a petty crime, and b) offer a guide to understand graffiti writers under a socio-cultural perspective.

Graffiti and graffiti writers: the state of the art

Graffiti has been evolving since the very beginning and three main phases can be contemplated in graffiti history, corresponding to major graffiti scene changes and milestones (Graffolution 2014b). The first phase corresponds to graffiti writing – both in the urban and transport facilities- appearance, in New York City during the 70's and spreads through mass media into Europe in the late 70's beginning of the 80's. In general terms, by the end of the 80's decade authorities and public institutions start to define graffiti writing as a problematic issue in public spaces (Carr 2005). However, by the beginning of 1990 a graffiti industry starts to grow and roots in developed countries which will lead to graffiti writing democratization in that it will become an (economically)

affordable practice (Krammer 2012).

There is a turning point in the evolution of graffiti in the 1990s. First, parallel to the massive commercialization of Hip-Hop, graffiti became established all across Europe. In parallel, some authors identify that particularly during the 1990s multiple forms of hip hop culture, including music, fashion, graffiti and more, started to become co-opted into more mainstream UK popular cultures and began to appear within advertising and commercial outputs as well as increasing adoption by different youth cultures (Turco and Ismali 2013; Willis 2006). This followed activities also emerging from the USA in the late 1980s, which, as Paul Willis argues, reflected novel stage in capitalism with 'new forms of accumulation based on a kind of symbolic anti-capitalism, taking its cues from the streets, stealing semiotically from already economically dispossessed and deprived communities' (Willis 2006).

With the turn of the century street art enters the frame (Christian Hundertmark 2005), thus not considered graffiti these two practices can share tools and spaces, creating new dynamics into the urban artistic intervention field and the appropriation of public space (Hughes 2009). The criminalisation of graffiti and the phenomenon of street art are both extended phenomena that will be addressed in the following sections.

Criminalisation of graffiti

Shortly after its spread, graffiti is also listed within the potential factors that lead to fear of crime in public spaces such as being drunk in public, making noise, and littering as well as robbery, car theft and burglary (Breetzke and Pearson 2014; Gray, Jackson, and Farrall 2008). This recognises graffiti as a visible "signal of risk" (Innes 2004). This also leads to graffiti or other anti-social behaviours' potential to encourage further anti-social activities. This leads to a significant point: concern of crime, feeling of insecurity and fear are the products of social construction of the crime (Innes, 2004). Accordingly, the perception of security and insecurity depend on a) the view of individuals, b) where the graffiti is observed, and c) what kind of graffiti is observed (Arudo 2003; Breetzke and Pearson 2014; Johnson 2011; Kirchner 2014).

'Graffiti' and 'graffiti vandalism' are often used as synonyms in the reviewed literature (Association for European Transport 2004; Cultural Studies Essay 2013) . Interestingly, those actors with a duty of paid responsibility towards graffiti prevention or removal appears to be those who use the term 'graffiti vandalism' the most. Especially law enforcement and

associations/organisations acting against graffiti vandalism tend to strongly point out the negative effects that are said to be connected to graffiti such as gang-problems, raising feelings of insecurity and leading to further criminal activities (Feltes et al. 2003; Gray, Jackson, and Farrall 2008; Keizer, Lindenberg, and Steg 2008; McGovern 2013) though some of the claims are ambiguously substantiated, or not at all.

Austin & Sanders stress that variables such as gender, race, age, prior victimization, social integration, and perceptions of increasing crime rates have all been shown to impact attitudes concerning safety in local neighbourhoods, and whether particular instances of graffiti are seen to act negatively, neutrally or positively (Austin and Sanders 2007).

Graffiti is also seen as defacing of public or private property without the owner's permission and considered as criminal damage (Islington Borough Council, London 2014). On the other hand, graffiti writers argue that what they recognise as "culture" or "creativity" is recognised as crime such as damage to private property (Colt 45 2010). Respectively, (Iveson 2009) suggests that the conflict of graffiti lies in the definition of the problem itself, which can only be overcome by developing a common interest definition.

Several authors (Jacobson and Kirby 2012; Spicer 2007); describe graffiti as typical youth crime and anti-social behaviour. Additionally, some categorise graffiti as a symptom of 'youth delinquency' as a whole (Geason and Wilson 1990; Landeskriminalamt NRW 2006). Theories of vandalism link graffiti vandalism to youth delinquency and The Youth Action Bulletin briefly describes negative effects of vandalism and graffiti vandalism.

However, and despite this image of an ungovernable activity, the literature reveals some of the key don'ts: writing on houses of worship, people's houses, other writer's names, tombstones, memorial walls and cars as well as involving civilians in one's practice. The excerpt reflects, as opposed to what some may suggest graffiti writing is not without rules and should not be considered as an uncontrollable phenomenon. As Berti aptly points: "Graffiti writers are depicted as if they were the bringers of conflict to public space, a ubiquitous shadow threatening the normal development of the City as a uniformed place, coherent and in harmony" (Berti 2010, 20).

The rise of Street Art and the new meanings of Graffiti

As mentioned above, since the turn of the century and the new conceptions of graffiti (and probably due to the appearance of the street art phenomenon) different approaches beyond the criminalisation have been possible. The best

example is the pro-social models of graffiti. Pro-social models categorise graffiti related activities through constructive contributions to society in cultural, social, economic and political terms (Graffolution 2014a; Graffolution 2014b). In many instances, sources reviewed choose to use the term 'street art' as well as, or in effort to distinguish from, (possibly negative) associations with graffiti or graffiti vandalism. However, it is clear that there is much cross-over between street art and graffiti practices and practitioners.

Ferrell already describes graffiti as a form of resistance which can be interpreted as social construction rather than destruction, and which may or may not constitute vandalism, dependant on multiple factors in parallel with legal status (Ferrell 1993). It is widely discussed that the line between legitimate and illegitimate images is far less defined than is assumed. This is further considered in Hayward's report of Ask Bristol, showing the difference between the perceptions on graffiti pieces or murals (much more identified with vandal graffiti) and street art (Hayward, Carol 2006). Besides, public perceptions of graffiti do not always align with the categorisation of graffiti as vandalism. So it depends on who is looking at it and which are their duties on graffiti their relationship with the area or the surface sprayed and their understanding (Graffolution 2014a).

The advent of this new "urban art" form that conquers the street instead of the walls of a museum, opens the door to graffiti as a commodity. During the last decade graffiti has been consolidated as a consumer product, and has multiple times been reported a market good (Molnar 2011). Doubtlessly, for the lay public is not the same a graffiti writer than a street artist. Being both terms ambiguous and generic, the connotations for the former recall vandalism, while for the latter are tied to vanguard movements (Graffolution 2014a).

Again, this is also based on general perceptions and it is easier to measure the "offenders prosecuted" than those participating or promoting pro-social activities related to graffiti. In Europe, it is uncertain the number of graffiti that are made every day or how many graffiti writers are trained. Indeed, there are no official statistics on graffiti that can be compared and graffiti is considered among many other things as vandalism and petty crimes: data on graffiti is often in a sort of hotchpotch or mixture of minor crimes (Graffolution 2014a). Consequently, the impact of graffiti is mainly built on criminal records and perceptions of dutyholders than on reliable and representative data. It is therefore impossible to heft the phenomenon.

But whose are the hands behind the cans? As graffiti history is generally well-known and has catch great attention, this

paper proposes a typology for a better understanding about the hands behind the (spray) cans and their urges, motives, aspirations and conditions. Splitting from the criminalization paradigm based on the "broken windows theory" (Thompson 2012; WA Police 2014) and combining the contributions about graffiti and writers made under the socio-cultural approaches (Castleman 1984; Lachmann 1988; Macdonald 2002; Miller 2002; Rahn 2002; Shannon 2003; Snyder 2009) is the opportunity to synthetize the heterogeneity avoiding excessive simplifications.

The portrait(s) of graffiti writer(s)

Graffiti writers have been long pictured as teens with assertive needs struggling to reinforce their identities though tagging, can in hand, hiding under a hood. Institutions and public administration have reproduced this conceptualization of the graffiti writers in policy matters. This has had repercussion in the academic field, an important proportion of the current graffiti analysis and literature on graffiti writers stem from crime prevention strategies and criminalist theorization (Graffolution 2014a). Defining graffiti as a problem has also led to restrictive and prosecution solutions. There is prosecution and interest in socially constructing the idea of "organized criminals", as news usually reflects (see Rivas 2013).

Despite the general perceptions, the sources reviewed make clear that graffiti writers and their activities are certainly not all the same and most change forms of intervention in public space and transport (including destructive and constructive interventions) and approaches over time (Bannister 2013; Cullinane 2011; Haworth, Bruce, and Iveson 2013; Lewisohn 2011; McAuliffe 2013; Neelon 2003; Stik 2011). This problematises policies and modes of categorisation which group graffiti or graffiti vandalism activities and other crimes into mixed classifications - for example Keizer et al.(2008) on broken windows theory, or on criminal damage (HM Government, UK 1971). Graffiti practitioners also experiment with making different legal and illegal works simultaneously and develop their practice according to situation, context, opportunity, political and cultural trends and spend time finding and evolving their own 'styles' or 'approaches' (Clarke 1978; Cullinane 2011; Gamman and Willcocks 2009; Meredith 2013; Woodward 2009).

Data and methods

Quantitative and comprehensive data on graffiti and graffiti writers is practically inexistent and incomparable. There are no official statistics and beyond ethnographies (Shannon 2003), the best source are the records gathered by duty-holders and law enforcement agencies. For this reason, the Graffolution consortium decided to apply qualitative techniques to gather information, in form of semi-structured interviews to different stakeholders and dutyholders. The countries surveyed are Austria, Germany, Spain and the UK. Graffolution is the first project that "sits all parties around the same table" at the same level, asking exactly the same issues and topics to all of them. This offers a multi-faceted view on the graffiti phenomenon. However, for the sake of consistency in this paper only the interviews concerning graffiti writers will be discussed. First because this is the group of interest for this paper as it is the most urgent change in the mind-set that needs to be done. Second, due to time and space constraints the authors have preferred to explain the persona methodology in detail for graffiti writers only. The rest of this section covers the data gathering process, the sample and the mechanics of the persona methodology.

Gathering data: in-depth interviews with stakeholders:

Semi-structured interviews were based on one commonly agreed interview guideline, used for all stakeholders, including graffiti writers. The guideline covered the following topics: understanding/definition of graffiti, relationship to graffiti, experiences/motifs, impact, the legal framework, prevention strategies/measures, exchange/networking, outlook/future approaches and needs towards graffiti.

For the project, 85 in-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders from public and state authorities, police and law enforcement agencies, transport operators, organisations from the social and cultural domain of graffiti, as well as graffiti writers (according to age, socioeconomic status and gender). All interviewees were chosen due to their experience about graffiti in their country. When possible, key players were invited. In general terms, the success rate of participants is close to 25% of those contacted.

In total 22 graffiti writers were interviewed in the four countries. To reach them, the snowball procedure was deemed the better method. First because using personal contacts was easier as graffiti writers are not as contactable as others, and second, due to the mutual trust needed in order to engage a criminalised group in a research. Accordingly, the limitations of the sample are caused by the bias on our personal contacts and the rejection of the project on behalf of certain profiles of graffiti writers (those more used to illegal practices).

The persona methodology

An important part of the work within the analysis has been

the integration and refinement of a methodology to define and visualise 'personas' to help distil the most important characteristics, among different graffiti writers and other actors related to graffiti. The development and application of the design-informed-processes to achieve this was led by Willcocks, Toylan and Thorpe (2015), from the team at Universtiy of the Arts London (UAL) who first delivered this work. Within the Graffolution project, this aimed to benefit and/or influence the effectiveness of responses, escaping from the one-size-fits-all approaches and measures for prevention and awareness generation. For the purpose of this paper, this is the initial stage for understanding the complexity of graffiti writers.

The creation of the research-informed personas, and visualisation of some key characteristics, has been instrumental in facilitating the visualisation of important ambitions, challenges and stages of typical 'journeys' or 'pathways' of writers which could reveal opportunities for different approaches, that might inform decision makers of any kind. The persona methodology is based on an iterative process departing from a spreadsheet for the systematization of codes previously applied with Atlas.ti (for further details see Graffolution 2015). The process applied is described and visualised here in Figure 1.

These personas were then compared to identify common and unique personas and persona characteristics, in order
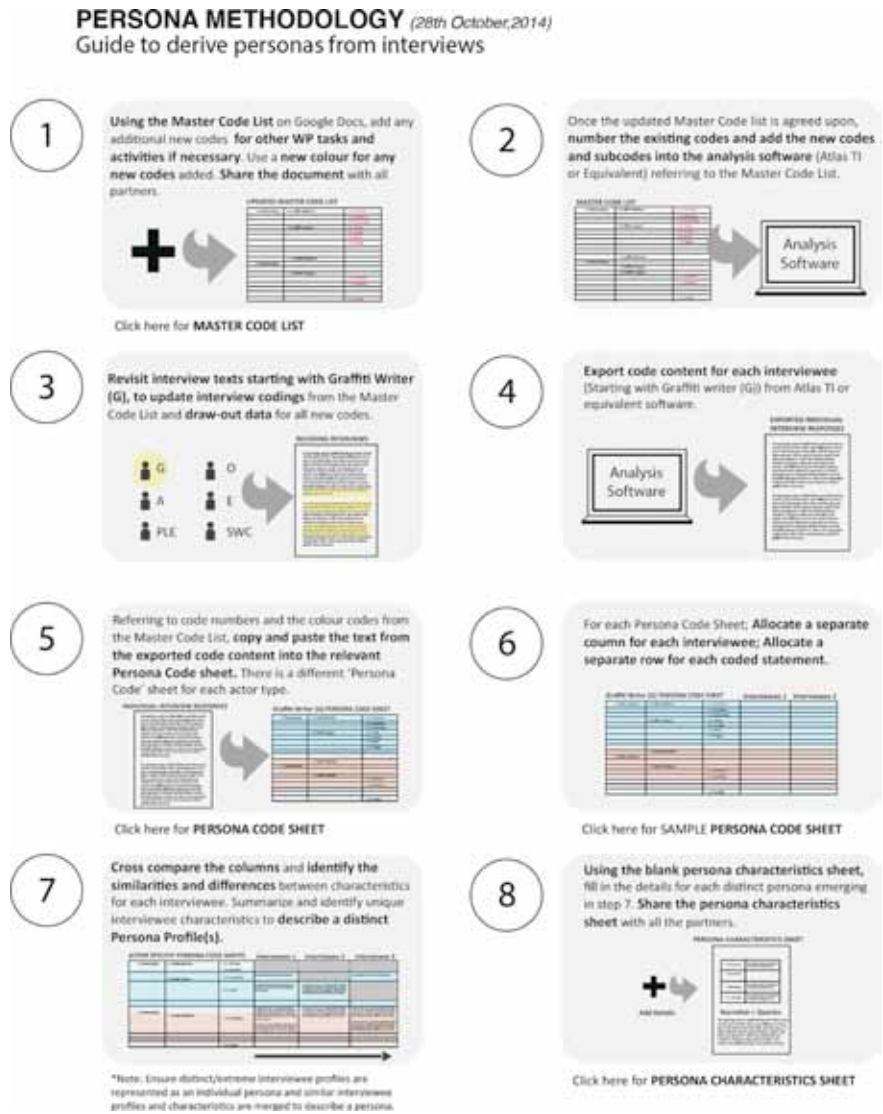

Figure 1. First graffiti persona identification methodology. Annotated illustration of how Graffolution research-informed sets of personas were established. UAL (Graffolution, 2015).

to generate a set of personas that are representative of the different types of actor as defined through the 22 interviews and 300+ literature sources consulted.

In order to make Persona data quickly and easily accessible, key characteristics for the distinct personas developed were represented as visualised persona sheets.These reflect attributes including persona motivations in regard to graffiti, their likely levels of agency, their respective personal ambitions, what they want to see more of and less of, particularly in contexts of public areas and transport. 'Touch points' and opportunities to use the Graffolution platform for existing and potential designed 'devices' relevant to the persona are also illustrated (e.g. a persona who checks his/her smart phone for emails and calendar updates on the way to work).

Results and discussion

One of the very early findings was already during the recruiting process. When approaching almost any graffiti writer their reluctance and distrust regarding the project and the convenience of collaborating with a project where duty holders (mainly transport operators and PLEAs) were also present, was a pattern to be considered. Generally speaking, their willingness to contribute was associated to their closeness to legal practices of graffiti. Those aligned with pro-social aspects of graffiti or self-considered artists were more willing to participate.

All of the interviewees are - or have been - highly active in graffiti writing. Besides this common feature, there are differences concerning the duration, intensity and special field of their engagement. Some of the graffiti writers are part of the illegal graffiti scene, while others turned to legal graffiti writing or other forms of engagement like for example building up a graffiti gallery or a graffiti shop. Despite that, the interviewees differ according to their age (younger and older writers), economic status (lower and higher), gender (male and female writers) as well as their location (from smaller towns to major cities).

The development for the countries surveyed differs. As graffiti was born in New York subways, the spreading channel was mass media more than direct contact, particularly in those countries not belonging to the Anglo-Saxon culture. According to the interviewees, the UK was the first country to adopt this form of social protest in the late 70s, followed by Austria and Germany. In Spain, due to the existence of a dictatorship until 1975, the phenomenon of graffiti arrived in the mid-1980s.

From the graffiti writers' point of views, there is no universal definition of graffiti, as they all have their different styles and ways to engage in graffiti. But there are several aspects, where the interviewed writers from all countries agree with. At first, for the writers, graffiti is more than a picture or a name on a wall.

For a fourth of them graffiti is more than a practice of writing, is a life-style or mentality. For another 26% it is a risky game, related to adrenaline rush and excitement (particularly for those painting illegal). The ego factor is present among the 22% that define graffiti as a way to get recognition and to have a voice via a simple message "I was here" (particular to tags). It is also important the aspect of the immortalization of their work and themselves. In relation to the previous one but more focused on them, 14% of the interviewees consider graffiti as platform for self-expression and self-exploration, a way to connect with their artistic expression needs. Next to its self-affirming and identity-establishing function, graffiti also provides the possibility to become a part of an "exclusive" community – especially for those who see graffiti as a way of life and mentality rather than just a practice. Almost a 10% live graffiti as an addiction and a minor proportion consider it a social phenomenon (4,5%).

But it is important to point out that their relationship towards graffiti and therefore also their self-understanding as a writer can´t be seen as something static but changes over time. The interviews reveal that the evolution and progression of a graffiti writers practice is acknowledged in some cases as a career and depending on the perspective as an "artistic career" or a "criminal career". In these instances whether actors are referring to a 'career' positively or negatively, it shows that some graffiti writers are dedicated and motivated to embark on a journey of learning and development be that legal or illegal. The majority of the writers quit their illegal activities when they're entering adult life or at least turn to legal forms. Out of this changed feeling can develop a simple rejection of graffiti or also an engagement in other fields of the phenomenon like doing commissioned work, publishing or writing for a scene magazine, providing workshops, etc. so that the changed attitude towards illegal graffiti does not automatically mean the "loss of the identity as a part of the graffiti scene", although some might be "less obsessed with graffiti".

Graffiti often plays an outstanding role in the process of creating identity, both individually and collectively. For the writers, graffiti is understood both as an individual and group activity in terms of appearance, spaces, time of dedication, reasons, and commitment to a broader subculture. All the interviewees started with tags when they were adolescents or before their twenties.

The stereotype of graffiti writer is linked to the image of a young man with hood and a spray can in his hand. Different forms of social sorting (including discrimination and labelling) towards young people observed have been observed. However, this is more a perception than reality according to numbers: as aforementioned, while tag is a particular activity that is mainly a teenager activity, graffiti goes beyond early adulthood and more girls and women are joining the scene. Oldest graffiti writers interviewed mainly have the understanding that graffiti is an important way (especially for young people but not limited to them) to express own feelings, transport messages and opinions.

Referring to the social background of the writers, a general classification seems to be difficult as graffiti writers belong to every social class, although it is possible to identify focuses. In Spain, it seems that those dedicated to graffiti are from poorer and middle-classes. In Germany the majority of the writers cannot be located to the under- but to the middle- and upper class. In the UK and Austria the boundaries are less clear and are more a polarized phenomenon.

Initially graffiti writers were males, and the graffiti scene is living a process of feminization and the proportion of girls and women has increased since its consolidation. Early adopters of graffiti were mainly boys, while the female early adopters came a little bit later and now are experimenting a high increase, particularly in street art. However, it was difficult to interview women for the project. One of the few that accepted to participate pointed out that "is hard for a woman to enter the scene and to be accepted by the males". In addition it was mentioned that there also appeared aggressive reactions to works of females only because of the fact that it was done by a woman or a girl but not because of the skills or other characteristics (e.g. words like "whore" painted on graffiti of a female writer). According to the interviewees, such circumstances may of course discourage female writers early in their writer "career", although it is important to bear in mind that this is a male's perception.

Most of the writers don´t see their behaviour as anti-social. As it was stated by German sprayers, for them graffiti is something they do for themselves but not against others or at least for the reason to get attention (GG2). Further mentioned aspects are that graffiti also provides the possibility to escape from society and their daily world. And although the writers know that what they do is basically rejected by society the common sense of the interviews was that it isn't their purpose to act against society but to live out their passion which includes some sort of conflict with society. Besides, it is worth mentioning that some of the graffiti writers who were reluctant to participate in the project highlighted that by naming the project "Graffolution" it was departing from the idea that there is some "problem" with graffiti, while they feel that there is no problem with that. In particular, one of them told us "we just paint, we do not kill anyone".

The persona analysis

Beyond any regional cultural, social, historical etc. differences, the personas work to reflect personal features which repeatedly proved to surface as common and significant among different graffiti related interviewees, and which proved notably different in other cases. After the whole iteration process, three main trends or profiles were found. The organisation of the personas is made around their social and demographic background, their relationship with graffiti (background, practice, risk & efforts), their view on legal practice and prevention and future vision. According to these criteria, three persona profiles have been found and are described below.

PERSONA PROFILE MAP

agency (low) — agency (high)
self-initiated — employed/commisioned
age <16 — age >60
payment — self-satisfaction
peer-peer recognition — peer-other recognition
open to sharing — closed to sharing

Figure 2: Persona 1 - Mark, 35, Artist. Toylan, UAL (Graffolution, 2015).

Persona 1: Mark, 35, artist.
Mark would correspond to an average married man aged 35, who started in graffiti with some random tagging, an activity they would do as a group. Quite soon he was interested in its artistic value, being his expression and that of the others. He remembers the rush of graffiti painting, considers it an effective way of communication and helps to engage a community. He is now dedicated to canvas.

According to Figure 2, he has a relatively high agency (capacity), and generally paints employed or commissioned (rather than self-initiated). He does it for self-satisfaction more than payment and seeks peer-other recognition. He wants the world to know his talent and consequently, he is open to sharing.
In the future, Mark would like to see more legal walls provi-

ded for artists to practice, network and share their skills. He would also like to see some changes in the law to accommodate graffiti artists who have great talent and skill and decriminalise them. Along with this, he asks for less policing and would recommend to authorities to evaluate the artworks before wiping them down.

Persona 2: Eva, 26, Designer + Artist
Eva would be a freelance designer interested in travelling, culture and art. Eva could have started with friends (later forming part of a crew), probably doing stencil and always trying to paint legal. She has always been aware of the legality and she now is no longer part of a crew. Only paints murals for specific causes.
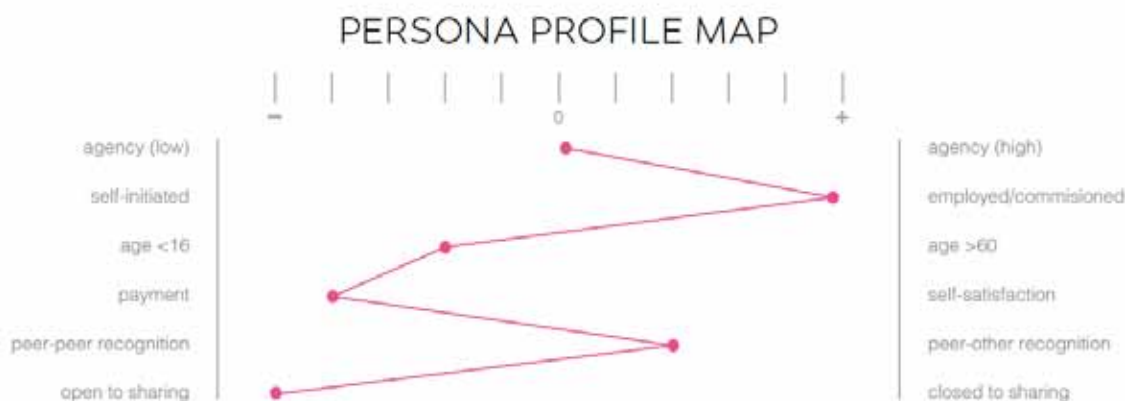According to figure 3, she has an average capacity (agency), always works under employment or doing commissioned

Figure 3: Persona 2 - Eva, 26, Designer + Artist. Toylan, UAL (rfol2015).

graffiti as a way of earning a living, personal recognition is not the most important element but she wants her job to be appreciated and she is totally open to sharing practices.

Eva supports the rise of street art communities, and would like to see more people appreciating the social value of graffiti and its positive impacts. She has the impression that people can be more connected to the city through graffiti.
In the future she would like to see less people vandalising public property. She also believes that providing people with more accessible spaces will reduce risk factors to a large extent. She would extremely recommend substituting fines and imprisonment by training, as a way to develop the artistic skills and reduce vandalism.

Persona 3: Mr X, 15, graffiti writer

This persona is the most similar to the imaginary described in the literature and the public perception. Is a sixteen year-old boy. As a kid he was drawing anywhere, on any surface he could find. He belongs to a crew, skip lessons at school as are uninteresting and spend their leisure time planning the next wall to paint.

He started to do graffiti influenced by his friends and due to the rush and adrenaline it brings. He started tagging after school to kill boredom. He tries to improve his style every day and spends a lot of time looking at others' graffiti.
As figure 4 shows, Mr X has a relatively higher agency than Eva and lower than Mar. His graffiti are always self-initiated and done for self-satisfaction. He rarely gets paid for this.

PERSONA PROFILE MAP

Figure 4: Persona 3 - Mr X. 15, Graffiti writer. UAL (Graffolution, 2015)

The aim is self-recognition and peer-to-peer recognition. The crew is fundamental and he holds the more closed position to sharing.

In the near future he would like to see cities flooded with graffiti. He feels that lots of people are scared due to prosecution, and it is necessary that they gather and share their strategies to avoid being caught. He feels that legal spaces would never work as sites of graffiti, he would never use them, just because several times contests and other activities have been used to catch graffiti writers.

Conclusions

Beyond the criminology approaches and the ethnographic incursions, the main strands of analysis of Graffolution include the progressive feminization of the graffiti scene, the approximation of graffiti to the high culture and the impact the public conceptualization of graffiti has had in the development of graffiti history. Graffiti is a social phenomenon and all social changes are also echoing in the graffiti scene. Through this analysis other topics arise, among them the demystification of graffiti as a juvenile act and furthermore, the analysis of the commodification process of urban expressions.

Focusing on the socio-cultural aspects of the phenomenon graffiti, the research so far brings up that it is quite difficult to give a general definition of graffiti, but not because of larger differences between the researched countries, but because of the heterogeneous points of view that vary with the way the respective person comes in contact with graffiti. But it gets clear that a description of these "visual elements" often

revolves around the two questions concerning their artistic value and the legality of the attachment. However, it seems that writers who are more active in street art and less involved in vandalism incidents come from higher social and educational groups.

As heterogeneous as the different definitions of graffiti are, as varying are also the backgrounds of the writers. Giving a common threat, it can be stated that graffiti is mostly – but not exclusively – a youth phenomenon. In general graffiti writing is taken up by young people in their teens. Thereby the status as a writer can´t be seen as something static but as a sort of biography that develops with the stages of the writer´s life and can include a more artistic or professional approach and a turn towards legal forms of graffiti as the time goes by, but also a general denial of graffiti or even some sort of criminal career.

There is a general agreement in all researched countries, that the large majority of them are male. And although it is stated that females slightly start to engage more in graffiti, it seems that girls and young women are generally less attracted –So beside the teenagers and pre adults, there is also a hard core of older writers that is firmly established in the graffiti scene. Along with their experience mostly goes a more professional and sometimes even work-related relationship towards graffiti.

To reduce the complexity and gain in comprehension, the persona analysis has been performed. It is based on interviews and allocating the different participants according

to key criteria such as their social and demographic back-ground, their relationship with graffiti (background, practice, risk & efforts), their view on legal practice and prevention and future vision. As a result three main profiles have been found: Mark, the artist (35); Eva (26) the designer and artist, pro--legal walls and Mr X. (15) the traditional profile of graffiti wri-ter. These three profiles could be seen as three main trends and representative roles within the current graffiti scene. This exploratory typology shows how biased is to keep applying criminalist and unified approaches when referring to those writing graffiti in one or other form. The myth has a portion of reality, but a part cannot be taken as the whole.

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