OSGEMEOS and the Institutionalization of Street Art: Cyclical Narratives

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Abstract

When discussing the paradox of displacing the street art aesthetic, i.e. commissioning street artists to create work for art galleries, museums, or public murals, one inevitably has to address issues of co-opting, appropriation, and the institutionalization of a movement that began as a countercultural form of expression. Two commissioned pieces by OSGEMEOS are used as a case study. This paper parses through the discourse surrounding their production and removal. The goal therein is to break down these narratives and gain insight into the mechanisms at work and the inherent contradictions in the process of institutionalizing street art.

Keywords: Street Art, Institutionalization, Co-opting, Appropriation, Grafite

1. Introduction

The Brazilian artist duo OSGEMEOS, twin brothers Otávio and Gustavo Pandolfo, have gained international recognition over the years and have almost become the poster-children for grafite in São Paulo.[1] They began as young grafiteiros on the streets of São Paulo, building their reputation both in the graffiti scene and in the street art world for their innovative style and fantastical characters.[2] Since 2002, they have been taking on commissions for large-scale public works and have been involved in gallery and museum exhibitions with increasing frequency. Nevertheless, they continue to produce uncommissioned and unauthorized works of street art and graffiti, both in their hometown of São Paulo and internationally. For this reason, their work represents an intriguing case study for the intersection between the "art world" and the street art scene, or the problematic relationship between the dominant culture and a movement that began as a countercultural force.

The countercultural aspects of street art and graffiti in their various manifestations have been well-documented by various cultural theorists. In the 2014 Lisbon Street Art & Urban Creativity conference proceedings, a detailed analysis of the complex relationship between street artists in São Paulo – OSGEMEOS in particular – and their urban environment is presented (Kuttner, 2014). Even in works that neither explicitly present political messages nor at first glance seem to embody the violence of the "anti-discourse" proposed by Jean Baudrillard (1993) OSGEMEOS as well as other grafiteiros in São Paulo dialogue with and counteract the hegemony of the modernist urban environment, restoring human interaction to spaces that had been rendered voids or non-places due to urban development plans strategically implemented to reinforce social divisions and exert control. In the case of OSGEMEOS, they expose the absurdity of these structures by repopulating the voids with fantastical and colorful characters, forming an alternate society and thus breaking down the wall's functionality as a boundary to interaction. The work of OSGEMEOS and their peers in São Paulo functions in this way when applied on a large scale throughout an urban environment, spontaneously and without authorization or official sanctioning of any kind. Yet, what happens when the dominant culture ceases resistance to such a movement, begins to officially sanction it, or moreover, even begins to commission it? At what point is this aspect of the movement's significance lost? There is a

certain paradox involved in the promotion and dissemination of a countercultural movement, in that it inherently involves subverting, trivializing, or co-opting it to some extent.

Surely, when street artists are commissioned or given official authorization to complete a work on a public or private exterior wall, even if this work is thematically and stylistically identical to the works that are created illegally, the result must be categorized as a work of public art. However, it may still make reference to the countercultural movement iconographically or stylistically, or to put it simply: it may embody a street art aesthetic. This has also been referred to as an "urban aesthetic" by Peter Bengtsen (2014: 76) who differentiates between street art, which is primarily unsanctioned in nature, and urban art, which describes "commercial art products made by artists who are somehow associated with the street art world" (Bengsten, 2014: 66). Bengtsen (2014: 76-77) also cites Patrick Nguyen who (somewhat disparagingly) provides a list of "urban art cliché subject matters" or tropes as the primary method of visually connecting urban art to street art. Despite the presence of such visual connections, the way that a street artist's commissioned work interacts with the public space is fundamentally altered due to the circumstances surrounding that work's creation, and its removal as well. In The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Nicholas Riggle (2010: 243) argues that street artworks "are largely disconnected from the artworld because their significance hinges on their being outside of that world." However, more importantly for this article, when a street artist produces a commissioned work in a public context, that work becomes a part of public discourse and the subject of reflection, criticism, and debate. So regardless of whether or not one still considers the results of these works to be "street art" – and surely most people concerned with the semantics of the issue would not – these kinds of authorized projects still tend to generate a form of coded discourse in the public sphere that can be used to gain insight into the relationship between street art and the dominant culture.

Having previously dealt with the issues of spatial theory regarding OSGEMEOS and street art in São Paulo, at this point the discussion will turn to the complex problems concerning both the suppression and authorization thereof, as well as the process of being co-opted or institutionalized. Although a variety of sources will be used for statements on OSGEMEOS' work (newspaper articles, catalogue texts, and interviews), the critical analysis of these statements will be primarily based on a text that was published before OSGEMEOS established their reputation in São Paulo and internationally: "Resistance and appropriation in Brazil: How the media and 'official culture' institutionalized São Paulo's Grafite" by Neil E. Schlecht (1995). Schlecht provides an excellent overview of the problematic relationships between the dominant culture and counterculture in the early stages of São Paulo's grafite scene, at a time when the young Pandolfo twins were just beginning as local grafiteiros. These relationships will be reexamined here in light of two major works by OSGEMEOS: the piece they created for the 2008 exhibition titled "Street Art" at the Tate Modern, London, as well as one other "giant" painted in the Anhangabaú district of São Paulo in 2009. The current paper parses through the written documentation of the public discourse surrounding the commissioning, production, and removal of these two works by OSGEMEOS. The goal therein is to break down these narratives and gain insight into the mechanisms at work and the inherent contradictions in the process of institutionalizing street art. Furthermore, by comparing the discourse surrounding these works to the research conducted by Schlecht (1995) this paper challenges the popular narrative that the development of the discourse surrounding street art's acceptance can be described as a finite linear progression – gradually emerging from a status of rejection to one of complete assimilation by the dominant culture – and proposes that the process could more accurately be described as a cyclical dynamic. So although this phenomenon may not be limited to one particular region, São Paulo and the work of OSGEMEOS are used here as a case study. Further studies of similar processes in other areas, such as New York City, Lisbon, or Berlin may potentially help create a more all-encompassing theory.

2. A Tale of Two Giants

In the summer of 2008, the Tate Modern commissioned several street artists to add a distinctly urban aesthetic to the northern façade of this art institution, resulting in 6 large-scale works by Blu, Faile, JR; Sixeart, Nunca, and OSGEMEOS. This exhibition, which may have seemed somewhat unconventional for the Tate, was simply titled "Street Art." The starting point for this analysis is the figure painted by OSGEMEOS for this exhibition (Fig. 1: http://www.osgemeos.com.br/en/projetos/street-art-2/#!/2893). The piece was not officially titled, but is part of OSGEMEOS' series of Gigantes (Giants).

The Giant is a standing yellow figure depicted directly from the front, with a height of approximately 25 meters. The male figure is nude with the exception of his shoes, a small pouch on his chest, and an orange head covering, which masks his mouth and hair. The two-dimensional figure is painted with outlines in a style similar to cartoons and comic books, with light shading giving the torso a sense of fullness, despite being supported on two emaciated legs. Dangling from his right hand, the viewer sees a bundle of CCTV security cameras hanging from their cables. One imagines that this hooded giant was a human rights vigilante who marauded the city of London, snatching up any surveillance equipment he came across. The specific physical characteristics of this comic-like figure, the yellow skin, almond eyes, bony limbs, are hallmarks of OSGEMEOS' oeuvre, having placed numerous such figures on walls, bridges, and other urban structures in their hometown of São Paulo, Brazil, as well as countless other cities worldwide.

Although this work was commissioned by the Tate – that is, it was not a late-night "bomb" or illicit act of graffiti or street art – there are several distinctive features that allude to the street art aesthetic, such as the figure's orange headwrap and the bundle of seized surveillance cameras. The head covering is a clear reference to the act of creating illegal works in public spaces, where graffiti and street artists cover their faces with some sort of cloth for two purposes, both to protect themselves from excessive inhalation of fumes and to conceal their identity. This kind of head covering is a motif that repeats itself frequently throughout various works by OSGEMEOS and other street artists. Ironically however, with this work having been sanctioned and commissioned, the transgressive act of unsolicited street intervention appears only in symbolic form.

The bundle of security cameras is an equally direct reference to the transgressive, but this is not a recurring theme in their work. Surveillance poses a threat to all street artists who create unsanctioned work, thus making it a popular thematic element and one of the tropes listed by Nguyen (in Bengsten, 2014) yet OSGEMEOS' use of this motif here is decidedly site-specific, referencing the massive amount of CCTV cameras in the streets of London. Although the image suggests a rebellion against the panopticism of London, the edge of its critique is arguably blunted by the fact that it is located within a sanctioned space and therefore does not represent a direct intervention. This commissioned work is connected to the street art aesthetic due to the presence of symbolic references to rebellion, anonymity, and illegality, but does not embody several of the transformative aspects that characterize OSGEMEOS' street interventions in the urban environment of São Paulo.

At the end of August 2008, after the six massive murals had transformed the Tate façade for their allotted three months, they were removed as scheduled. This event happened with relatively little fanfare or protest. After all, it had been clear from the outset that these were meant to be temporary works and would not become the permanent face of the Tate. The museum cooperated with a firm called "Graffiti-Busters" not only for the removal of the pieces, but also during the planning phase to ensure that the works would not cause permanent damage to the brickwork. The façade was treated with a protective layer shortly before the commissioned works were executed. This allowed the pieces to be removed using hot, high-pressure cleaning systems without harming the landmark's façade. According to the company website: "All six areas of 'Street-Art' were removed successfully over a three week period to the client's complete satisfaction." (Graffiti-Busters, 2013: n.p.) There was little confusion or doubt about the motivations for the removal, although it may have almost seemed like an inside joke that a group called the "graffiti-busters" came to the site with their banner on the crane during the cleaning process.

In November 2009, slightly over a year after the Tate "Street Art" exhibition had concluded, OSGEMEOS were given the authorization to paint another massive mural on the side of a building in São Paulo, in the area called "Vale do Anhangabaú" adjacent to a park and directly in the central business district. The work (Fig. 2: http://www.lost.art.br/osgemeos_gigante.htm), commissioned by the Sesc, a government-sponsored organization for culture, recreation, and education, was yet another figure in OSGEMEOS' series of giants, and on a similar scale to the Tate piece, spanning the entire façade of an eight-story building. [3] The figure, depicted frontally, has a form and pose comparable to the giant on the Tate, but in contrast to the previous work, this giant is clothed, barefoot, and his face exposed. He is wearing tight-fitting brown pants and a multicolored shirt buttoned all the way up. The face is painted in OSGEMEOS' trademark yellow with thin outlines and light shading. The figure's wide mouth implies a very slight but awkwardly subdued smile. The work was titled O Estrangeiro (the Foreigner) and could thus be interpreted as a celebration of one of the most diverse cities in Latin America. Furthermore, it was created in

conjunction with a cultural festival to commemorate the Ano da França no Brasil (Year of France in Brazil). Prior to the creation of this figure, OSGEMEOS had created a similar mural of the same character in Heerlen, Holland for the "Cultura Nova" festival. There they also collaborated with a French artist collective named Plasticiens Volants to create a giant inflatable puppet that was 20 meters high (Nobile, 2012). The figure at Anhangabaú was based on the previous works in Heerlen, and the puppet was then resurrected for an appearance at a ceremony in the Vale do Anhangabaú upon the completion of the project. This event drew three thousand visitors according to local newspapers:

At the end of 2009, OSGEMEOS had a positive demonstration of their popularity in the central district. Nearly three thousand people walked through the Vale do Anhangabaú to see the open-air show "The Foreigner," which gave shape to the characters created by them, such as the giant 20-meter puppet that gave the event its name (Canto, 2009: 5).[4]

Unlike the giant on the Tate, there are not many elements that symbolically link this work to the underground world of illegal street interventions or to rebellion against a system. Only in one detail can a slight allusion to this be found; the buttons in the figure's shirt are round faces, and the uppermost of these is depicted as wearing a ski mask. Aside from that, O Estrangeiro appears somewhat quirky and awkward but non-threatening. OSGEMEOS have been known to incorporate a variety of fantastic elements in their work that are (to varying degrees) inspired by or in direct reference to the folkloric traditions of northeastern Brazil, e.g. the "bumba-meu-boi" folkdance (Manco, 2005: 66). However, this particular image of O Estrangeiro (in contrast to the previous version in Holland) has very few aspects that fit that description. The somewhat rustic garments allude to the traditional fashion of that region, and there is also a small figure (about the size of the giant's nose) dancing on the giant's head and wearing a large seahorse-like creature on his back. The blank expression on the face of O Estrangeiro shows that he is either incognizant of or unperturbed by the smaller creatures. Whether or not these particular figures directly reference a Brazilian folkloric tale, these are the kinds of fantastical creatures in OSGEMEOS' work that are often cited as being inspired by that tradition.

When the painting of O Estrangeiro was commissioned, it was agreed upon that it would stay up for 30 days before being removed. However, due to the popularity of the piece, it was allowed to stay until the demolition of the building, which had been planned to take place within a year. 'The Foreigner,' was supposed to remain on the wall for 30 days. Local officials said that due to the wide acceptance of the work, the Commission for the Protection of the Urban Landscape would authorize the figure to gain a permanent dwelling in that space until the demolition of the property (Moura, 2012: C8).[5]

The property was in fact demolished in early 2012, a bit later than expected, but not without controversy. Prior to the structure's demolition, O Estrangeiro was "buffed" or painted over with gray paint, leaving only the shadow of the figure in its wake. No explanation was given for this action, but local reports indicate that the artists knew of the city's plans. Gustavo Pandolfo is quoted as saying, "we were aware that he was going to be painted over now." (Moura, 2012: C8)[6] Initial reactions from journalists, bloggers, and residents who were not informed about the city's plans or the temporary nature of the piece ranged from neutrality to sarcastic outrage:

The 'disappearance' of the grafite generated polemics yesterday in social networks. 'One more example of the lack of support for culture in Brazil', wrote one internet user. Another ironically stated 'It's only not allowed to erase the corruption.' (Moura, 2012: C8)[7]

Despite the fact that this perceived government suppression was mostly based on erroneous assumptions, the dialogue surrounding the placement and the removal of the giant shows a large degree of tolerance among the general public for the street art aesthetic, at least in its sanctioned and sponsored form as public art created by street artists, or a "street art mural." At the same time, OSGEMEOS continue to put up illegal works that gather less public attention and may not survive as long as O Estrangeiro. Although O Estrangeiro may superficially appear similar to those works in terms of the style and kind of figures portrayed, it lacks some of the critical anti-establishment tone that is more frequently seen in their non-commissioned pieces. However, O Estrangeiro may indeed retain some of the functionality of their other street work in São Paulo in that the colorful giant similarly combats the monochromatic hegemony of the concrete landscape in that district and helps counteract a certain degree of loss of social interaction in public space,

especially taking into account the public gathering that took place upon its completion.

Nevertheless, this work cannot be seen as a forceful reappropriation of public space, and furthermore, one could argue that O Estrangeiro lacks any capacity to function in the same way as their illegal works simply due to the fact that it was permitted and commissioned by a government institution. Despite the stylistic and thematic connections to their grafite, O Estrangeiro should technically be labeled "public art." However, because this distinction is not always made by journalists, politicians, and laymen commenting on the issue, especially in Brazil where the grafite is generally used to denote both sanctioned and unsanctioned works, public discourse surrounding sanctioned works by street artists can also be used to gauge public opinion on street art in general.8 Despite the widespread conflation of terms, a subtle but important distinction is provided by the legal system, even though it may have been unintentional; according to the local São Paulo newspaper, Estado de S. Paulo, the law "2007 Lei no 14.451" established the anti-pichação (anti-tagging) program in the municipality.[9] This program, however, "excludes grafite which has been executed on private property or municipal property that has been authorized by the owner or a qualified municipal authority." Brandalise, 2009)10 The terminology is interesting, as the word "grafite" is still used in the law to refer to authorized works. The law, on the other hand, is not referred to as an "anti-grafite" law in this article, but "anti-pichação" instead, thus revealing the conflicting associations with these two forms of painting on walls. Nevertheless, the law that the article refers to is in fact part of a larger project called Cidade Limpa, or "clean city," enacted in 2007 to combat visual pollution in the urban environment, which also banned large-scale billboard advertisements in the city. A later article in the Folha de S. Paulo commented on the consequences for grafiteiros who are willing to work in approved spaces:

Sides of São Paulo buildings that used to harbor giant advertisements before the "Clean City Law" of 2007 are now being freed up by the city government for grafiteiros and muralists (Correa, 2011: C1).[11]

The editorial briefly summarizes developments in public and official opinion regarding grafite over the last five years, leading up to the decision to permit works sponsored by the property owners. To paraphrase, the article refers to the city's "ambiguous" relationship with grafite, but suggests that major changes have occurred in the last five years (2006-2011), with the term no longer being associated with vandalism mainly due to the international reception of Brazilian street art in the U.S.A. and Europe, such as the Tate Modern exhibition. The article concludes:

In any case, by institutionalizing urban art, turning it into something commercial and official, the city without billboards and poster ads could turn into the world capital of grafite.[12]

Some authors have indicated that the international reception of OSGEMEOS specifically, as well as their involvement in public affairs in São Paulo, have been key factors in the recent change in public opinion and official policies on grafite. In the 2012 catalogue for the OSGEMEOS exhibition at the Boston ICA, Pedro Alonzo states:

OSGEMEOS [met] with the mayor of São Paulo, Gilberto Kassab, in 2008. His 'Clean City' campaign enacted policies prohibiting most forms of outdoor advertisements and aggressively enforced the cleaning of graffiti. OSGEMEOS tried to convince Kassab to stop the 'buffing' of walls and instead preserve the city's extensive urban art. Although no official policies were enacted, São Paulo's city government is increasingly tolerant of graffiti, reserving cleaning activities for specific neighborhoods. This presents an ironic situation given that São Paulo outlawed public advertisements, which in turn expanded space for more graffiti (Alonzo, 2012: 114).[13]

Alonzo echoes two important sentiments expressed in the Folha de S. Paulo. Firstly, he too observes that the Cidade Limpa Act of 2007 is in fact beneficial to grafiteiros in that the ban on billboards frees up more space for street artists and graffiti writers. Secondly, Alonzo also sees the increasing tolerance of grafite as being a recent development, in part driven by OSGEMEOS. As evidence, Alonzo cites the fact that OSGEMEOS, following their meeting with the mayor, were permitted to recreate a large-scale piece that had been buffed. Furthermore, still others have suggested that it is no coincidence this meeting took place in the same year that OSGEMEOS and Nunca adorned the Tate's façade. According to an article in ARTnews by Carolina Miranda, the recognition given to the grafiteiros by this international institution helped shape public policy in São Paulo:

The Tate Modern exhibition has had the side effect of getting at least one city to reconsider how it deals with graffiti. […]

But just as Tate Modern was honoring the brothers' work, the city of São Paulo was busy whitewashing their murals in the interest of eliminating "visual pollution." One official told a reporter that the cleanup was an embarrassment to the city: "You have the English pampering our graffiti art, and we're not giving it the least bit of value?" São Paulo will now establish a registry of street art to be preserved (Miranda, 2008).14

These policies are a stark contrast to the arbitrary nature of punishing grafiteiros as described by OSGEMEOS eight years earlier in an interview for the graffiti magazine Art Crimes: "There is an anti-graffiti law, and they punish writers with jail time. But really each police officer makes his own law. It depends on the place where you paint. Maybe nothing happens, or maybe you will go to jail" (OSGEMEOS, 2000).

Looking at these statements made within the same time span that OSGEMEOS were developing from local grafiteiros to international street artists, it is tempting to see the trend as a gradual linear development towards public acceptance and government tolerance of grafite in their city of birth. Furthermore, as OSGEMEOS have become the poster-children for São Paulo grafite in recent years, it would seem reasonable to assume that they were the main driving force behind this development. However, there is one major issue with this narrative: this process had already taken place almost two decades earlier. In an article published in the 1995 edition of Studies in Latin American Popular Culture, titled "Resistance and appropriation in Brazil: How the media and 'official culture' institutionalized São Paulo's Grafite," Neil Schlecht expounds on the evolving relationship between grafiteiros, public opinion, the media, and government policy during the 1980s and early 1990s in São Paulo. The content of his analysis not only helps to illustrate the grafite zeitgeist in which OSGEMEOS grew up and began their career, but it also provides a foundation for the evaluation of later statements concerning OSGEMEOS' role in influencing public opinion and policy in the following decades. By comparing Schlecht's (1995) analysis to the discourse surrounding OSGEMEOS' work, the assumption of a linear development in the relationship between street art and dominant culture reveals itself to be a false narrative. Instead, that relationship, as well as the discourse that constructs it, appears to take on a cyclical form.

3. Revisiting Neil E. Schlecht and the Institutionalization of São Paulo Grafite

According to Schlecht, upon his arrival in 1988, grafite in São Paulo had undergone a significant transformational process through its interaction with elements of dominant culture. From an obscure, marginal–not to mention unauthorized and illegal–expression, it had evolved into an issue of considerable social and political significance, elevating selected grafite artists [grafiteiros] to media celebrities and government spokespersons, while others struggled to maintain their marginal/outsider status and the essence of their expression (Schlecht, 1995: 37).

Although Schlecht's research was conducted when OSGEMEOS were just beginning to create grafite in São Paulo, long before their first sanctioned works, his statements can still be used to place later comments about the reception of their work (and grafite in general) in context. It seems that OSGEMEOS' predecessors had already been through similar interactions with the media and government. They too struggled with the dichotomy between gaining celebrity and retaining "marginal/outsider status" or what may more commonly be referred to as street cred. The grafite landscape in São Paulo at that time was fundamentally similar to later years in terms of its diversity of form: figurative images, patterns, tags, and words were interwoven in the same spaces, sometimes even by the same artists. Several of the biggest names in São Paulo grafite in the 80's, such as Alex Vallauri, Maurício Villaça, and Rui Amaral also worked with comic-like figures or fantastic imagery, as OSGEMEOS and their contemporaries continue to do today.

Schlecht (1995) continues by describing the result of the interactions with dominant culture as a form of co-opting. Thus, according to Schlecht, the process of institutionalization and appropriation had already reached its ultimate conclusion before OSGEMEOS even began to work internationally, implying a linear narrative. Nevertheless, Schlecht acknowledges that this process is a two-way exchange, that the subculture did indeed exert influence on the dominant culture in both the perception and formation of public space. Therefore, although Schlecht's (1995: 37) focus is on "elite appropriation of the marginal," he leaves the door slightly ajar for the possibility that current and future grafiteiros such as OSGEMEOS may retain a certain amount of countercultural critical validity, even though the grafite movement in general may have already been institutionalized by dominant culture in São Paulo. This distinction between institutional-

ization/marginalization as a group vs. on an individual level is reflected beyond São Paulo in street art as well, albeit inversely, as Peter Bengtsen (2013: 67) has stated: "I would argue that it is really only a relatively few artists, who generally also produce commercial artwork, who have been accepted, while street art as such remains marginalised."

A major factor in the subversive potential of grafite lies in the relationship between the grafiteiro and the urban space in which they operate (Kuttner, 2014). Although Schlecht (1995) touches upon that concept, instead of expounding upon the transformative potential of grafite, he focuses on the loss of that potential in three stages:

Three stages of cultural domination–rejection, domestication, and recuperation–were all discernible in the media's portrayal of grafite [...] The media assisted in transforming grafite into an institution, extracting it from its oppositional spatial, symbolic and linguistic contexts and repositioning it in dominant culture contexts (Schlecht, 1995: 39).

The first stage, rejection, is essential for differentiating the movement from the dominant culture, and in the case of grafite can be exemplified by its illegality, the risk of arrest mentioned previously in the OSGEMEOS interview, or simply by publicly labeling it a sign of social and moral decay, as has often been the case in similar movements worldwide, like the graffiti writers of New York City in the 70's and 80's. This kind of reaction has been analyzed by some researchers, such as Joe Austin (1997), in terms of a "moral panic."15 Yet this oppositional polarization also gives the movement more subversive power and an increased appeal, especially among youth culture (e.g. perhaps also the Pandolfo twins during their youth) and the disenfranchised.

Domestication, the second stage according to Schlecht, was mainly driven by media outlets, which began to shift the paradigm of grafite away from its associations with vandalism and first conferred the title of art to it. This title had apparently been used to discuss grafite in São Paulo long before OSGEMEOS started exhibiting in art galleries at the beginning of the 21st century. Furthermore, Schlecht describes how the media awarded celebrity to grafiteiros, who then in turn willingly participated in the domestication of grafite. This process, "while seemingly establishing grafiteiros as cultural spokespersons, in fact reduced them as a group to colorful, exotic media personalities" (Schlecht, 1995: 39). This sets a precedent for OSGEMEOS' television interviews and appearances in Brazilian media that would occur in the next two decades. The reductive aspect of the media exposure is debatable, since the media outlets are not in a position to exert any influence on their work in the streets. However, there is certainly an aspect of selection involved; the media may choose to spotlight artists who are deemed more palatable to a wider audience.

As a result of the domestication phase and setting the stage for the recuperation phase, a second movement was still lingering in the phase of rejection, one which has attracted far more vitriol: the pichação movement. Over the last three decades, pichação has completely taken over the São Paulo urban landscape, permeating it to a previously unimaginable extent. The extreme proliferation of pichação, as well as its strong rejection of any aesthetic flourishes or color, had the effect of making grafite seem harmless by comparison, even though many grafiteiros (including OSGEMEOS) incorporate pichação into their works of grafite. Thus, Schlecht (1995: 45) reports that in "1989, the focus of media criticism shifted to pichação." In a sense, as grafite was finishing the domestication process and being prepared for recuperation, pichação was assuming the role as the quintessential subversive force in urban visual culture. In the book Graffiti Brasil, the contrast between the public perception of grafite and pichação is described as a driving force in the commissioning and permitting of murals done by local grafiteiros:

The constant presence of pichação on every public wall, particularly those that are the most prominent, certainly helps the permission process. Walls in São Paulo in particular never stay clean for more than a few weeks, and property managers often see their way to an arrangement for a mural in the hope that it will keep the wall in their charge free of pichação (Manco, 2005: 46).

Whereas grafite was once seen as the lesser of two evils, at one point it became seen as an aesthetic protective layer against a pichação attack. However, this strategy was nullified to some extent when pichadores began targeting grafite murals specifically for this reason, most notably those of OSGEMEOS; Torkel Sjöstrand reports in a 2012 issue of UP magazine: "several large murals by the famous twin brothers OSGEMEOS have been destroyed by pixadors" (Sjöstrand, 2012: 31). As a result of these "attacks," the distinction between the "domesticated" grafite scene and the obstinate anti-aesthetic of pichação has only further solidified in public discourse since Schlecht's (1995) research.

The strong distinction between the two forms is reflected in the statements of Celita Procopio de Carvalho, the president of the board of trustees of the FAAP, sponsor for the 2009 OSGEMEOS gallery exhibition Vertigem. In her introduction to the catalogue, she states:

Likewise, graffiti and graffitist are no longer seen in the same way. They are no longer labeled as vandals, a status they shared until very recently with the taggers and today their images compose the cityscape (Procopio de Carvalho, 2009).

In this catalogue, the Portuguese words "grafite" and "grafiteiro" are translated as "graffiti" and "graffitist" even though most of the works the author is referring to would more accurately be described as "street art" in English. However, the word "tagger" is used as the English translation of pichador, further exemplifying the dichotomy in public opinion and official policy towards the two different forms of street intervention in Brazil. The irony in this statement is that OSGEMEOS also at times incorporate pichação lettering into their street grafite pieces. However, Carvalho ignores that fact and – in order to justify the foundation's decision to exhibit works by the grafiteiros OSGEMEOS – she drives home the message that grafite is a domesticated and fully recuperated cultural movement, now firmly situated within dominant culture.

These statements, made in 2009, serve as an example of the third stage described by Neil Schlecht: recuperation. After neutralizing grafite's potential as a countercultural and critical tool in the domestication phase, recuperation means that the now emasculated object is redefined within the dominant culture paradigm. Referring back to the late 1980s and early 1990s, Schlecht explains:

Concurrently, however, a media backlash directed at grafite, critical of its supersaturation in São Paulo, began to gain strength. Journalists [...] decried grafite for having renounced its foundation as protest and alternative, subaltern expression. Thus the media confirmed the process of cultural transformation and domination, [...] grafite was recodified as a commercial and cultural product: stylized, artistic and safe (Schlecht, 1995: 47).

Once again, it must be noted that all three stages of this transformation took place during OSGEMEOS' youth, as they were first being integrated into the grafite culture. That is to say, they grew up in an environment where local media outlets were turning their predecessors into local celebrities during this "domestication" process. Moreover, they were also immersed in the recuperation phase as it was propelled not only by São Paulo media, but also government institutions and the media. According to Schlecht:

[The] authorities of cultural institutions, the political system and government bureaucracies, first recognized and then assimilated, co-opted and redefined grafite, transforming it into a component of hegemonic society (Schlecht, 1995: 51).

If this statement from 1995 is taken at face value, one would have to assume that OSGEMEOS as well as other grafiteiros from their generation all function within the paradigm of hegemonic society, and one could reference quite a bit of visual evidence to support this position, including sanctioned and/or commissioned works where the critical value – at least from a countercultural standpoint – is not easily perceptible, such as O Estrangeiro at Anhangabaú. Furthermore, it is problematic to regard OSGEMEOS as pioneers in the sense of bringing grafite into museums and galleries, since Schlecht (1995: 51) reports: "Most art associations and museums, by the end of the 1980s, also offered their approval and support of grafite."

Therefore, although some recent critics, curators, and journalists have credited OSGEMEOS with being a major driving force toward a paradigm shift concerning the relationship between grafite or street art and dominant culture in Brazil, it is clear from Neil Schlecht's (1995) analysis that many São Paulo grafiteiros had already lived through similar developments even before OSGEMEOS began to garner international acclaim. As OSGEMEOS' style was evolving, placing less of a focus on their bubble letter pieces, and more on the proliferation of their distinct brand of characters with folkloric references, local perception of their form of expression had already gone through major shifts that simultaneously paved the way for them to promulgate their work while also potentially subtly undermining its countercultural significance through appropriation and co-opting.

This issue is further complicated by street artists such as OSGEMEOS who commercialize their work by entering the art market via gallery exhibitions or otherwise. The illegal work on the streets could also be seen as a way to boost the image and thus also the value, of the work to be sold in the galleries. Peter Bengtsen (2014: 126) notes how Eddie Colla uses street work to critique institutionalization while participating in it: "The street artwork can therefore also be construed as a means to promote his commercial work[.]" Analogously, OSGEMEOS have also been known to create

unsolicited street art pieces in cities where they have major exhibitions, thereby opening themselves up to similar questions about possible commercial motivations for doing so.

Despite the fact that contemporary commentators attempt to pack OSGEMEOS' career trajectory into a linear narrative of grafite reception that Schlecht describes as having already occurred in the 1980s, the same sort of discourse and debates concerning the location of unsanctioned forms of art in relation to the dominant culture have been continually re-emerging with such frequency that it appears to be more than just a case of collective amnesia. Granted, some aspects of the debate remain unresolved, such as the potential of street art, graffiti, or similar forms of expression to retain elements of subversion even during or after the process of being co-opted by hegemonic culture. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to describe the discourse as a stasis with entrenched camps on either side. Instead, it resembles more of an ebb and flow dynamic. These processes and stages, rather than being regarded as a finite linear development, may in fact be more accurately described as cyclical. Therefore OSGEMEOS can be seen as part of a second generation of São Paulo grafiteiros who are navigating the socio-political landscape of the reception and rejection of their form of expression, not as explorers of new territory, but as native speakers of the language of the politics of graffiti, street art, and public art, and with an acute awareness of the tightrope they walk between these cultural spheres.

Neil Schlecht summarizes the ambiguous position of grafite in São Paulo in the mid-nineties: "As semi-legal, officially authorized expression, grafite was positioned in a cultural no man's land–one foot in the dominant culture, the other outside" (Schlecht, 1995: 56). It is this in-between position that came to define the location of OSGEMEOS' body of work as a whole, which is aptly symbolized by the two particular giants selected for this analysis. Like their "foreigner," O Estrangeiro, OSGEMEOS' work may at times feel awkward and out of place in both cultural spheres. In the case of the Tate giant, despite being naked and exposed, he nevertheless tries to remain mysterious by covering his face. More importantly, his feet are firmly positioned at the edge of the white cube, directly within the interstices of these two cultures.

Notes

1 - The Portuguese word, grafite, is selected here because labeling OSGEMEOS' work is otherwise problematic. In Brazil, grafite refers to the application of colored paint on surfaces, which encompasses street art as well as most graffiti writing. It is also generally used in Brazil to describe public works by these artists that are similar in style and content. This is differentiated from pichação, a specific style of tagging with black letters originating in São Paulo, or arte nas ruas, which denotes the use of non-paint media, such as posters or stickers. OSGEMEOS mainly produce grafite but have at times worked with pichação. Their grafite, however, includes work that would be classified as street art in English as well as other work that would be classified as graffiti writing.

2 - Grafiteiros is a Portuguese term for someone who produces grafite.

3 - SESC is an acronym for Serviço Social do Comércio.

4 - [Original text: No final de 2009, 'OsGêmeos' tiveram uma demonstração positiva da sua popularidade no Centro. Perto de três mil pessoas passaram pelo Vale do Anhangabaú para ver o show ao ar livre 'O Estrangeiro', que dava forma a personagens criados por eles, como o bonecão de 20 metros que deu nome do evento.] This was reported slightly inaccurately, as the puppet and the painted figure were both representations of "the foreigner" and therefore the event was not only named after the puppet.

5 - [Original text: 'O Estrangeiro', deveria ficar na parede por 30 dias. A prefeitura diz que a grande aceitação da obra fez com que a Comissão de Proteção à Paisagem Urbana autorizasse que o personagem ganhasse moradia fixa no espaço até a demolição do imóvel.]

6 - [Original text: "'Tínhamos conhecimento de que ele ia ser apagado agora.'"]

7 - [Original text: "O 'sumiço' do grafite gerou polemica ontem nas rede sociais. 'Mais um exemplo da falta de incentivo à cultura no Brasil', escreveu uma internauta. Outro ironizou: 'Só não vale apagar a corrupção'."]

8 - Further evidence that these concepts are often conflated in Brazil , Tristan Manco (2005: p. 46) "Brazilian writers also tend not to get as hung up on the distinction between legal and illegal work as their North American and European counterparts. While writers elsewhere knock each other for 'only doing legals', it isn't something you often hear in Brazil."

9 - *Pichação* is often translated as "tagging" for the sake of simplicity but actually denotes a specific style of tagging.

Pichação is a codified form of rune-like lettering with black paint that originated in São Paulo and is unique to Brazil. The primary objective of pichadores is to prolifically tag as many buildings, as high up, and as prominently as possible.

10 - [Original text: "'excluídos do programa os grafites efetuados em imóveis particulares ou próprios municipais, autorizados pelo proprietário ou autoridade municipal competente.'"]

11- [Original text: "Laterais de edifícios paulistanos que, antes da Lei Cidade limpa, de 2007, abrigavam anúncios publicitários gigantes, estão sendo agora liberadas pela prefeitura para grafiteiros e muralistas."]

12 - [Original text: "Em todo caso, ao institucionalizar a arte urbana, tornando-a algo comercial e oficial, a cidade sem painéis publicitários pode se tornar a capital mundial do grafite."] Correa introduces the term "arte urbana" or "urban art" here, which seems to be used as an umbrella term to include grafite and arte nas ruas (in both their sanctioned and unsanctioned forms) and perhaps pichação to some extent.

13 - It should also be noted that although Alonzo chooses the word "graffiti" in this text, he is most likely referring to both graffiti writing and street art in Brazil, or grafite as well as pichação.

14 - Again, note that there is a conflation of terms in this text, probably a result of the linguistic differences in terminology.

15 - See also Kimvall (2014).

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Fig. 1: OSGEMEOS - Street Art Exhibition. Tate Modern, London, 2008. http://www.osgemeos.com.br/en/projetos/street-art-2/#!/2893

Fig. 2: OSGEMEOS - O Estrangeiro. São Paulo, 2009. http://www.lost.art.br/osgemeos_gigante.htm