

The Changing Face of Wall Space:
Graffiti-murals in the context of neighborhood change in Los Angeles

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Stefano Bloch

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Abdi Samatar, Chair

May 2012

© Stefano Bloch, 2012

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the financial support from the University of Minnesota Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship (2010-2011), travel and research stipends from the University of Minnesota—Department of Geography, and the University of California, Santa Cruz.

For educational support I thank Professor Elaine May in the American Studies Department at the University of Minnesota, the UCLA Departments of Urban Planning and Geography, UC Santa Cruz, L.A. City College, the faculty and staff at Los Angeles Valley College. I also thank Rob Kent and the California State University, Northridge—Department of Urban Studies and Planning for employing me as I completed my degree.

For administrative support I thank the University of Minnesota—Department of Geography staff members Bonnie Williams, Jodi Larson, and Glenn Powell, Christina Rice at the Los Angeles Library Photo Collection, photographer José Tchopourian, the Los Angeles Mural Conservancy, the Los Angeles City Archives, the USC Digital Archives, the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, and Pilar Castillo and Debra J.T. Padilla at the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC).

Thank you to Gabe 88, Robert “Wisk” Alva, Robert “Relax” Reiling, and the many members of the Los Angeles graffiti community, including members of the City Bomb Squad (CBS) Crew, the Kings Ruling Society (KRS) Crew, The Underground Kings (TUGK) Crew, graffiti-muralists Eye One, Cache, Mear One, Yem One, Kofie and Duce. Also thank you to muralists Judith Baca and Ernesto De La Loza, Alex at lataco.com, and to my many respondents in the Echo Park and Silver Lake communities.

Thank you to photographer and friend Christian Guzman, Daniel Sykes, Christopher Gudiel, Michele Zukovsky, Kyle Green, Lisa Rainey Brownell, and the staff at the *Radical History Review* and the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers. Also thank you to the spider who spun a web on my window sill and killed flies for me as I wrote through the summer months in Los Angeles.

I greatly appreciate the support and guidance from my advisors at every stage of my education: Dr. Steven Mark Sachs at Los Angeles Valley College, Professor Christopher Connery at UC Santa Cruz, Dr. Allen Scott, Professor Denis Cosgrove, and Professor Michael Storper at the UCLA Departments of Geography and Urban Planning, and my Ph.D mentors and advisors Brenda Kayzar, thank you so much, Abdi Samatar, thank you so much, George Henderson, thank you so much, Karen E. Till, thank you so much, and Edward W. Soja, thank you so much.

It was Professor Chris Connery who during my third year as an undergraduate at U.C. Santa Cruz in 1999 took an interest in my background. Being open and inquisitive enough to ask the right questions during a meeting in his office, I revealed to him my role in the graffiti community. After convincing me that my experiences could be a starting point for future social scientific research, I went on to win the University of California Humanities Undergraduate Research Award for my proposed study of “civic spots.” That short proposal was the starting point for this dissertation.

And of course, thank you to my partner Maria, our son Black Thomas, and our daughter Rainy Matilda Bear for making it so difficult for me to work on this dissertation as every minute spent writing was a minute spent away from them.



Professor Roger Miller (1950-2010)

Roger was a dedicated teacher and historical urban geographer at the University of Minnesota. He developed and taught courses on the city in film, planning theory and history, the social geography of Sweden, and the geography of global cities. He was a faculty member in the Department of Geography, American Studies, and Director of Graduate Studies for the Humanities Program, and worked with the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA). He was a proud recipient of the Morse Alumni Award for excellence in teaching and author of several articles that addressed a breadth of geographic topics from gender and consumption in U.S. suburbs, to the integration of social theory and GIS. He always looked forward to his yearly trips motorcycling across North America photographing physical and human-made landscapes.

Roger was my advisor, mentor, and friend. I dedicate this dissertation to him.

Abstract

In this historical geography of the changing appearance of wall space in and around the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, I show how the proliferation of graffiti-murals indicates the rise of a new form of practice in the production of urban aesthetics. I rely on data gathered through empirical and qualitative research—specifically, ethnographic methods that include archival image analysis, original photography, personal and participant observation, and extensive formal and open-ended interviews with members of the graffiti and mural communities. Throughout this dissertation I discuss the production and destruction of murals and graffiti-murals in the context of over 70 years of socio-spatial neighborhood change. I rely on the writings of geographers, sociologists, urban theorists, and art theorists who understand the production of alternative urban aesthetics as necessarily political, participatory, and place-based.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	i
Dedication	ii
Abstract	iii
List of Figures	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
<i>Preface</i>	2
<i>Introduction</i>	4
Theoretical Framework	6
<i>Urban Socio-Spatial Theory</i>	7
<i>Landscape Studies</i>	10
<i>Theories and Practices of Public Art</i>	11
Accessing the Field	15
<i>Trust Issues</i>	18
<i>Contemporary Ethnographies and “Ethnography at the Edge”</i>	26

Methods and Methodology	30
Chapter 2: Graffiti in L.A.	35
A First-Person Introduction to the Graffiti Community in L.A.	36
What is Graffiti?	51
<i>Eye One, Seeking Heaven</i>	59
<i>Literature on Graffiti: Academic Approaches</i>	66
<i>Framing Graffiti as Social and Spatial</i>	71
<i>Graffiti in the Capitalist Urban Environment</i>	73
The Geography of L.A. Gang Writing	82
<i>Gang Writing: a primer</i>	87
3. Graffiti/Murals: a Battle for Wall Space	96
Murals in L.A.: a brief history and typology	97
<i>Los Tres Grandes</i>	99
<i>The WPA/PWAP in L.A.</i>	101

<i>Critical/Chicano Murals</i>	105
<i>The Olympic Festival Murals</i>	110
<i>Graffiti-murals: a definition</i>	113
An Era of Mural Destruction	116
<i>Bombers</i>	123
<i>Chaka</i>	127
The Beginning of the End for the Critical Chicano Mural Movement?	151
4. Building the Wall: Evolution of a Gang Member, 1975.	158
The Arroyo, the River, the Hill, and the Ravine:	167
<i>The Arroyo Seco</i>	168
<i>The Los Angeles River</i>	173
<i>Depictions of Bunker Hill and Public: the photography of Leonard Nadel</i>	179
<i>Chávez Ravine</i>	197
Judith Baca's Evolution of a Gang Member, 1975.	214

5. <i>Inner City Kickin' It</i>, 1996.	232
.....	
The Belmont Tunnel: a thirdspace perspective.	237
.....	
Ernesto De La Loza's <i>Inner City Kickin' It (Drug and Alcohol Free)</i>, 1996.	259
.....	
<i>Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA)</i>	265
.....	
6. <i>Los Angeles: untitled</i>, 2004	277
.....	
Neighborhood Change in Echo Park	283
.....	
<i>Gentrification</i>	285
.....	
Graffiti Murals in Echo Park	290
.....	
<i>Mear One</i>	291
.....	
<i>Los Angeles: untitled</i>	302
.....	
<i>Conclusion</i>	312
.....	
<i>Coda</i>	314
.....	
7. Summary of Central Findings	316
.....	
Bibliography	321
.....	

List of Figures

Chapter 1

- Figure 1.1. “Subway Kids.” c. 1974. Photo by Jon Naar. p. 19
- Figure 1.2. Oiler. Photo by Gabe the Saint. p. 26
- Figure 1.3. The author (right) and Mear One CBS (left).
Photo by Kalen Ockerman. p. 31
- Figure 1.4. Detail, Judith Baca’s *Hitting the Wall: Women in Marathon* with graffiti. Photo by José Tchopourian, 2012. p. 34

Chapter 2

- Figure 2.1. Bruin with Chico, 1994. Source: 50mmlosangeles.com p. 37
- Figure 2.2. Power, c.1989. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 37
- Figure 2.3. Volt, c.1997. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 38
- Figure 2.4: Chaka, 1989. Source: *Los Angeles Times* p. 38
- Figure 2.5. Skill, c.1998. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 39
- Figure 2.6. Else, detail, c. 2005. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 39
- Figure 2.7. Omega character, 1990. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 40
- Figure 2.8. Eye One Zapatista character, 2006. 50mmlosangeles.com p. 40
- Figure 2.9. 125 tag, 1997. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 41
- Figure 2.10. Tempt, c.1995. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 41
- Figure 2.11. Dove on freight train, 1996. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 42
- Figure 2.12. Duce with Gin, 1993. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 42
- Figure 2.13. Eskape, c.1998. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 43
- Figure 2.14. Feevo, 2007. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 43
- Figure 2.15. Haze with Phable, c. 1992. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 44
- Figure 2.16. Hex, c. 1990. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 44
- Figure 2.17. Nuke, “This is my City,” 2011. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 45
- Figure 2.18. Pranks with Crae, c.1999. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 45
- Figure 2.19. Vyal with Kofie and Retna, c.2001. 50mmlosangeles.com p. 46
- Figure 2.20. Eklips piece, c. 1993. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 47

Figure 2.21. Swan, 2003. www.50mmlosangeles.com	p. 47
Figure 2.22. “CBS” in Melrose Alley by Axis, 2005.	p. 48
Figure 2.23. Unit (left) at the Belmont Tunnel, c. 2002.	p. 49
Figure 2.24. Shepard Fairey’s Hope and Obey images.	p. 53
Figure 2.25. Fairey wheatpaste collage with graffiti artist Saber in Echo Park, 2008. Photo by Mark Mauer.	p. 57
Figure 2.26. “Lost Angeles” by The Phantom, 1987. Herald-Examiner Collection / Los Angeles Public Library.	p. 58
Figure 2.27. Flowers in spray can by Eye One. Courtesy Eye One.	p. 61
Figure 2.28. <i>L.A. Weekly</i> with “Speak Freely” placard by Revok, 2007.	p. 63
Figure 2.29. Illegal Revok rooftop near downtown Los Angeles, 2008.	p. 63
Figure 2.30. Revok throw-up over anti-graffiti mural, L.A., 2008.	p. 63
Figure 2.31. “If graffiti changed anything it would be illegal,” Banksy.	p. 65
Figure 2.32. Map showing the central-most portions of Los Angeles.	p. 84
Figure 2.33. Map of the Echo Park District.	p. 85
Figure 2.34. “Sur” (Spanish for “south”) and the number “13” (indicating Southern California). Photo by Christian Guzman.	p. 89
Figure 2.35. “WS” (for West Side) Echo Park LS (for <i>locos</i> , or “crazies” in Spanish). Photo by Christian Guzman.	p. 89
Figure 2.36. Chaz with his <i>Señior Suerte</i> character and Old English-style <i>placas</i> on the Arroyo Seco, 1975. Photo by Kathy Boróquez.	p. 91
Figure 2.37. Old English alphabet.	p. 92
Figure 2.38. L.A. gang writing alphabet.	p. 93
Figure 2.39. Old-School L.A. graffiti alphabet.	p. 93
Figure 2.40. Typical “wildstyle” graffiti alphabet.	p. 94

Chapter 3

Figure 3.1. Siqueiros in front of his <i>América Tropical</i> , 1932. <i>L.A. Times</i> .	p. 100
Figure 3.2. WPA logo with cityscape in background.	p. 102
Figure 3.3. Dean Corwell mural, 1937. Eyre Powell Press Services, Herald-Examiner Collection / Los Angeles Public Library.	p. 103
Figure 3.4. <i>California History</i> by Lucile Lloyd, 1936. LAPL.	p. 104

- Figure 3.5. *We Are Not a Minority* by El Congreso de Artistas Cosmicos de las Americas de San Diego, 1978. Photo by Dean Musgrave. Herald-Examiner Photo Collection / Los Angeles Public Library. p. 107
- Figure 3.6. *Going to the Olympics* by Frank Romero, 1984. Courtesy of www.lataco.com p. 110
- Figure 3.7. Kent Twitchell's *7th Street Altarpiece* in Downtown L.A., 1984. Photo by Mike Sergieff. Herald-Examiner Collection / Los Angeles Public Library.
- Figure 3.8. "Cisco." 1996. Photo by Stefano Bloch. p. 112
- Figure 3.9. Depiction of artist Lita Albuquerque, *7th Street Altarpiece*. Source: www.lamurals.org.
- Figure 3.10. Twitchell's *7th Street Altarpiece* with graffiti, c. 2002. Photo by Dave Condi. p. 123
- Figure 3.11. Wisk, 1992. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 127
- Figure 3.12. Sleez, c.1989. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 128
- Figure 3.13. Chaka, c.2004. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 128
- Figure 3.14. Sleez and Chaka courthouse elevator tag. Mark Boehm, *Los Angeles Times*, 1991. p. 131
- Figure 3.15. Oiler on building. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 134
- Figure 3.16. Oiler on freeway "heaven," 1993. 50mmlosangeles.com p. 134
- Figure 3.17. Twitchell's *7th Street Altarpiece* depicting Jim Morphesis. Courtesy of Robert "Wisk" Alva. p. 136
- Figure 3.18. Gin (left) and Duce (right) on Kent Twitchell's *7th Street Altarpiece*, 1992. Courtesy of Robert "Wisk" Alva and Robert "Relax" Reiling. p. 137
- Figure 3.19. *Buckle Up* by Steven Rose. kgmadman.wordpress.com p. 137
- Figure 3.20. Gkae and Air on Rose's *Designate a Driver*, c.1995 Source: kgmadman.wordpress.com p. 138
- Figure 3.21. Ozie, YR, Skuz, and Ken on Avila's *Kids at Play*, 1997. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 139
- Figure 3.22. Tribe, c.1997. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 141
- Figure 3.23. Buket on Frank Romero's *Going to the Olympics*, c. 2001. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 145
- Figure 3.24. Buket on Alonzo Davis's *Eye on '84*, c. 2001. www.50mmlosangeles.com p. 146

Figure 3.25. Buket (left), CBS (right) on mural c. 2001. www.50mmlosangeles.com	p. 146
Figure 3.26. Buket (center) on <i>L.A. Marathon</i> , c. 2001.	p. 147
Figure 3.27. Ralos throw-up atop Twitchell’s <i>L.A. Marathon</i> , c.2000. www.50mmlosangeles.com	p. 147
Figure 3.28. A fire extinguisher “Boost” tag c. 2000. www.50mmlosnagels.com	p. 148
Figure 3.29. CTF and BRUK on Twitchell’s <i>Ed Ruscha</i> , c.2006. www.50mmlosnagels.com	p. 148
Figure 3.30. <i>L.A. Freeway Kids</i> with graffiti. Source: www.lataco.com	p. 151
Figure 3.31. <i>Instant Mural</i> by Gronk, 1974. Source: Harry Gamboa Jr.	p. 152
Figure 3.32. The state of Alonso Davis’s <i>Eye on ’84</i> . Photo by José Tchopourian, 2012.	p. 157
Chapter 4	
Figure 4.1. WPA plaque in black with purple spray paint detail, 2010. Photo by Stefano Bloch.	p. 160
Figure 4.2. Sunset Boulevard under construction, c. 1936. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.	p. 161
Figure 4.3. “Caution-Men at Work, WPA,” 1940. Courtesy of the Los Angeles City Photo Archives.	p. 163
Figure 4.4. Flood on Sunset, c1938. LAPL Photo Collection.	p. 165
Figure 4.5. Sunset Boulevard rock slide, c. 1950. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.	p. 166
Figure 4.6. “The Force at Work.” Arroyo Seco, 1933. L.A. City Clerk.	p. 169
Figure 4.7. “Gangway for Arroyo Seco Freeway!” 1947. Herald-Examiner Collection / LAPL.	p. 170
Figure 4.8. “A whole mountain is being moved...” 110 Freeway tunnels just east of Dodger Stadium. Herald-Examiner Collection / LAPL.	p. 170
Figure 4.9. “First motorists...,” 1940. The new arroyo is visible at left. Herald-Examiner Collection / LAPL	p. 172
Figure 4.10. Traffic on the new Arroyo Seco. LAPL Photo Collection.	p. 172
Figure 4.11. L.A. River banks with graffiti. Photo by Mark Mauer.	p. 174

- Figure 4.12. MTA letters in the L.A. River, 2008. *Los Angeles Times*. p. 175
- Figure 4.13. The concreting of the Tujunga Wash in Van Nuys, c.1967. p. 178
Source: *Journal of Moral Education* 34/2.
- Figure 4.14. Judith Baca with youth working on the *Great Wall*, c.1979. p. 178
Source: *Journal of Moral Education* 34/2.
- Figure 4.15. A serene view of Bunker Hill, 1940. Photo by Ansel Adams. p. 181
Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.
- Figure 4.16. “Urban Poor,” c. 1951. LAPL. Photo by Leonard Nadel. p. 183
- Figure 4.17. Apartment on Bunker Hill. City Hall in background, 1951. p. 184
Photo by Leonard Nadel. LAPL Photo Collection.
- Figure 4.18. Children on fire escape in Bunker Hill, 1954. p. 185
Herald-Examiner Photo Collection / Los Angeles Public Library.
- Figure 4.19. “Women washing clothes in a tub, slum dwelling,” 1952. p. 186
Photo by Leonard Nadel. LAPL Photo Collection.
- Figure 4.20. “Garcia family members pose outside their slum dwelling,” p. 187
1951. Photo by Leonard Nadel. LAPL Photo Collection.
- Figure 4.21. “Photograph of a small child sitting in a highchair in the p. 187
kitchen of a slum dwelling. Family was evicted by the Health
Department.” Photo by Leonard Nadel. LAPL Collection.
- Figure 4.22. “For Rent sign.” “Absolutely no Spanish or Mexicans. p. 188
No children. No pets. One or two adults only,” 1951.
Photo by Leonard Nadel. LAPL Photo Collection.
- Figure 4.23. “View of Fickett Hallow,” c. 1949. p. 188
- Figure 4.24. “Children watch Harbor Freeway construction,” 1948. p. 189
- Figure 4.25. “Demolition work in preparation for the construction p. 190
of the Harbor Freeway near Court Street.” LAPL.
- Figure 4.26. “Aerial view overlooking construction on Bunker Hill,” 1967. p. 190
Los Angeles Public Library, Herald-Examiner Collection.
- Figure 4.27. “Mr. John Barnes poses with his wife and three children p. 192
in the Roger Young Village,” 1952. Photo by L.Nadel. LAPL.
- Figure 4.28. “The Guzman family...” Photo by Leonard Nadel. p. 192
Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.
- Figure 4.29. “A pregnant Mrs. Lourdes Benigno and her three children p. 193
pose outside of their unit 1147 at Rodger Young Village” 1952.

- Figure 4.30. “The Gillen family inside their kitchen at the Aliso Village Housing Projects,” 1952. Photo by Leonard Nadel. LAPL. p. 194
- Figure 4.31. “The Altamayo family poses in front of their apartment at Ramona Gardens after their relocation,” 1952. Photo by L. Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. p. 194
- Figure 4.32. Photographer Leonard Nadel titled this photo “Freedom Train,” 1952. This image also appears in Cuff (2000). Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. p. 195
- Figure 4.33. Interracial rally at Rodger Young Village in Griffith Park, 1952. Photo by Leonard Nadel. LAPL Photo Collection. p. 195
- Figure 4.34. “Balisone Homes Housing Project,” January 11, 1949. p. 196
- Figure 4.35. A rare snow day in L.A. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. p. 196
- Figure 4.36. Two children on an unpaved road in Chavez Ravine, 1950. Photo by Leonard Nadel. L.A. Public Library Photo Collection. p. 199
- Figure 4.37. Veteran Bill Nickolas. Photo by L. Nadel. LAPL. p. 200
- Figure 4.38. Crossing a dirt road, 1949. Photo by Don Normark. LAPL Photo Collection. p. 200
- Figure 4.39. Children on a hillside in Chavez Ravine, c.1949. Photo by Don Normark. LAPL Photo Collection. p. 201
- Figure 4.40. “Dominquez family in front of their slum dwelling,” 1951. p. 202
- Figure 4.41. “For Rent sign, slum housing,” 1949. Photo by D. Normark. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. p. 203
- Figure 4.42. L.A. Housing Authority Letter, 1950. LAPL. p. 205
- Figure 4.43. “A Herald-Examiner reporter points out the future location of home plate.” Chavez Ravine, 1957. LAPL Photo Collection. p. 206
- Figure 4.44. “Plea to the mayor, 'Help us keep our homes and freedom,’” 1953. L.A. Mayor Norris Poulson (1953-1961) smiling before protestors. LAPL Herald-Examiner Collection. p.208
- Figure 4.45. All-female protestors and Chavez Ravine residents inside Mayor Fletcher Bowron’s (1938-1953) office, 1951. Herald-Examiner Collection / L.A. Public Library. p. 208
- Figure 4.46. “Mrs. Alice Martin, 73, and friend, Mrs. Ruth Rayford, 85, await eviction. They look ready to fight!” 15 May 1959. Herald-Examiner Collection / Los Angeles Public Library. p. 209

- Figure 4.47. “Los Angeles County Sheriffs forcibly evict Mrs. Aurora Vargas, 36, from her home at 1771 Malvina Ave. in Chavez Ravine,” 9 May 1959. LAPL Photo Collection. p. 210
- Figure 4.48. Forced eviction of Aurora Vargas. “Four months later groundbreaker for Dodger Stadium took place.” Also reproduced in Stefano Bloch (2012). LAPL. p.210
- Figure 4.49. Evicted from their Chavez Ravine home.9 May 1959. Photo by Howard Ballew. Herald-Examiner Collection / LAPL. p. 211
- Figure 4.50. A second eviction letter, 14 May 1959. Herald-Examiner Collection / LAPL. p. 211
- Figure 4.51. Looking east, Dodger Stadium and its expansive parking lot under construction, c.1961. L.A. City Clerk’s Office. p. 212
- Figure 4.52. Pee-Wees in Chavez Ravine, c. 1955. LAPL. p. 215
- Figure 4.53. “Graffiti Reading: Happy Valley 13 gang, 1965.” Herald-Examiner Collection / Los Angeles Public Library. p. 217
- Figure 4.54. “Division of the Barrios & Chavez Ravine” by Judith Baca. Courtesy of SPARC. p. 218
- Figures 4.55. “Evolution of a Gang Member” (left portion) by J. Baca, 1975. *Chicano Wall Art, the First Generation, 1968 – 1985*. Courtesy of Elliot Barkan. p. 222
- Figures 4.56. “Evolution of a Gang Member” (right portion). By Judith Baca, 1975. *Chicano Wall Art, the First Generation, 1968 – 1985* collection. Courtesy of Elliot Barkan. p. 223
- Chapter 5**
- Figure 5.1. *Harbor Freeway Overture* by Kent Twitchell, 1984. Robin Dunitz murals archive, USC. p. 234
- Figure 5.2. Population Density maps of L.A. Lewis Center, UCLA. p. 235
- Figure 5.3. Opening of the Belmont Tunnel at the Toluca Station, 1928. California Historical Society, 1860-1960, USC Digital Archives. p. 238
- Figure 5.4. Hollywood Subway, 1930. Chamber of Commerce Collection, USC Digital Archives. p. 238
- Figure 5.5. The Belmont Tunnel, c.1992. Courtesy of Gabe 88. p. 239
- Figure 5.6. Inside the Belmont Tunnel, c.2000. Courtesy of Gabe 88. p. 240
- Figure 5.7. The first piece painted at Belmont, and one of the first in L.A., 1982, by Shandu. Photo by Shandu, courtesy of Gabe 88. p. 241

Figure 5.8. View of Belmont, 1988. Courtesy of Gabe 88.	p. 244
Figure 5.9. Belmont walls with Mear CBS tag, c. 1990.	p. 244
Figure 5.10. L.A. graffiti legends Volt, Hex, and Slez of LOD, 1988. www.50mmlosnagels.com	p. 245
Figure 5.11. Toluca Substation at Belmont, 2003. Photo by Unit.	p. 246
Figure 5.12. Players on the <i>Tarasca</i> field with Downtown in the background. Courtesy Gabe 88.	p. 247
Figure 5.13. <i>Tarasca</i> players and graffiti artists at work, 2003. Courtesy Gabe 88.	p. 248
Figure 5.14. <i>Palota Tarasca</i> player in action at Belmont, 2003. Courtesy Gabe 88.	p. 248
Figure 5.15. <i>Palota Tarasca</i> players in front of memorial production for Skate One by members of the graffiti crews UTI, THC, and CBS in 1996. Courtesy Gabe 88.	p. 249
Figure 5.16. <i>Tarasca</i> spectators and graffiti piecers (background). Courtesy Gabe 88.	p. 250
Figure 5.17. Graffiti artists painting below street level at Belmont, c.2003. Courtesy Gabe 88.	p. 251
Figure 5.18. “Save Belmont Art Park” protest, 2004. Photo by Gabe 88.	p. 254
Figure 5.19. Sketch filling in his section. Photo by Unit.	p. 256
Figure 5.20. <i>Norteño</i> music being played during Belmont’s last days. Courtesy Gabe 88.	p. 256
Figure 5.21. The destruction of Belmont, 2004. 50mmlosangeles.com .	p. 257
Figure 5.22. Re-development of Belmont site.	p. 257
Figure 5.23. A mother with her children (east side), <i>Inner City Kickin’ It</i> . Source: L.A. Mural Conservancy.	p. 262
Figure 5.24. Gerber Baby above buffed Wonder Bread logo (center east), <i>Inner City Kickin’ It</i> . Source: L.A. Mural Conservancy.	p. 262
Figure 5.25. <i>Trabajadores</i> throwing-up their culture/purging alcohol, <i>Inner City Kickin’ It</i> . Source: L.A. Mural Conservancy.	p. 263
Figure 5.26. Fetus (left), race horses (right) (west most portion of wall). <i>Inner City Kickin’ It</i> . Source: L.A. Mural Conservancy.	p. 263
Figure 5.27. <i>Inner City Kickin’ It (Drug and Alcohol Free)</i> , full wall, c. 1996. Source: L.A. Mural Conservancy	p. 264

Figure 5.28. <i>The Wall That Cracked Open</i> by Willie Herron.	p. 271
Figure 5.29. “Eroe OTR” over Wonder Bread section of <i>Inner City Kickin’ It</i> , 2000. www.50mmlosangeles.com	p. 274
Figure 5.30. “Lyfer TKO” with “Jel” over De La Loza’s mural, 2000.	p. 274
Figure 5.31. “Sever” over De La Loza’s depiction of a trabajador, 2000. www.50mmlosangeles.com .	p. 275
 Chapter 6	
Figure 6.1. Chicken character on a section of the Sunset wall in Echo Park, by Cache, 2004.	p. 284
Figure 6.2. Banksy’s satirical rat stencils, 2001. 50mmlosangeles.com	p.291
Figure 6.3. Mear One with <i>Thought Control</i> on canvas, 2006.	p. 292
Figure 6.4. <i>What Type of World are You Buying Into?</i> by Mear, 2002. Photo by Stefano Bloch.	p. 293
Figure 6.5. <i>What Type of World are You Buying Into?</i> detail. Photo by Stefano Bloch	p. 294
Figure 6.6. Robbie Conal’s <i>Read My Apocalips</i> , Shepard Fairey’s <i>Hug Bombs and Drop Babies</i> , and Mear One’s <i>Let’s Play Armageddon</i> , 2004.	p. 295
Figure 6.7. The western-most sections of the Sunset retaining walls as it appeared soon after De La Loza painted it in 1996.	p. 296
Figure 6.8. “Mear” with <i>Third Eye Women</i> , 2001.	p. 296
Figure 6.9. Cache painting his first section of the Sunset walls, 2004. Courtesy of Eye One.	p. 297
Figure 6.10. Mear’s character incorporated into Cache and Eye One’s graffiti-mural. 2004. Courtesy Eye One.	p. 298
Figure 6.11. <i>Third Eye Women</i> altered. Photo by Stefano Bloch, 2006.	p. 298
Figure 6.12. Cache’s chicken on bike. Photo by Stefano Bloch.	p. 300
Figure 6.13. Detail, Zapatista character, “Los Angeles: untitled,” 2011. Photo by Christian Guzman.	p. 303
Figure 6.14. “Throw ups.” Photo by Stefano Bloch	p. 304
Figure 6.15. Main section, <i>Los Angeles: untitled</i> , 2011. Photo by Christian Guzman.	p. 306
Figure 6.16. Eye One illegally touching up his mural in 2011. Photo by Stefano Bloch	p. 307

Figure 6.17. The WPA plaque, now covered in pink paint, 2011. Photo by Stefano Bloch.	p. 308
Figure 6.18. A landslide adjacent to one section of the Sunset retaining wall. Photo by Stefano Bloch.	p. 310
Figure 6.19. Vines on Eye One's Zapatista characters, 2011. Photo by Stefano Bloch.	p. 311
Figure 6.20. Mural with recent collaborator Kofie. Photo by Stefano Bloch	p. 312
Figure 6.21. "End Mural Moratorium," 2011. Photo by Stefano Bloch.	p. 315

Chapter 1. Introduction

Preface

*Murales ya están muertos.*¹ This statement from Chicano art historian Shifra Goldman may seem erroneous given the fact that as I write these words muralist Judith Baca and a team of volunteers are painstakingly restoring the ½-mile-long *Great Wall of L.A.* mural painted along one of the 15-foot-high concrete banks of the Tujunga Wash—a tributary of the Los Angeles River. The damage to Baca's 25-year-old social realist mural, which depicts L.A.'s contentious history of development and U.S. race relations, was caused in part by the harsh Southern California sun and periodic torrents of rainwater washing down the flood-control channel. Despite the fading images and spots of chipped paint, this particular mural, unlike the ones she painted along L.A. freeways and on public retaining walls, is not dead. Unlike her others murals, which have been buried under layers of graffiti and painted over by overzealous graffiti-abatement crews, the *Great Wall of L.A.* remains a living symbol, perhaps a relic, of the critical Chicano muralist tradition.

The mural's placement on public infrastructure, the collaborative efforts that went into producing it, and the political message it makes regarding alternative histories and contested futures posit this mural as symbolic of Los Angeles's rich mural tradition. But given the losing battle with graffiti during the 1990s and the precipitous increase in the production of illegal, though tacitly tolerated, graffiti-murals over the last several years, the question needs to be asked: have traditional and critical Chicano murals been supplanted by graffiti-murals as the aesthetic backdrop to "the mural capital of the world"?²

As I show in this historical geography of the changing appearance of wall space in and around the Echo Park district of Los Angeles, the proliferation of graffiti-murals

¹ Murals are dead, paraphrased from "*Actualmente los murales ya están muertos. Los nuevos artistas Mexicanos deben buscar otros medios, otras maneras de crear un arte público*" ("Currently murals are dead. New Mexican artists should look for other ways to create public art") Shifra Goldman quoted in Amador (2000, 43) and Rosette (2009, 1), translated from Spanish into English by S. Bloch.

² Los Angeles has long been touted as "the mural capital of the world" given the number of Mexican, traditional, and Chicano murals painted in the city beginning in the 1930s.

painted on public wall space may indicate the rise of a new aesthetic, motivation, and practice in the production of wall art. I explore this supposition by relying on data gathered through empirical and qualitative research—specifically, ethnographic methods that include archival image analysis, original photography, personal and participant observation, and extensive formal and open-ended interviews with members of the graffiti and mural communities. Throughout this dissertation I discuss particular periods of socio-spatial change in and around Echo Park, and the production—or destruction—of murals and graffiti-murals therein.

In the remainder of this chapter, **chapter 1**, I provide a theoretical framework for my research, discuss approaches to studying graffiti, and provide a discussion of my own research methods and methodologies. In **chapter 2**, following a series of excerpts from several interviews conducted with members of the graffiti community, I define graffiti as a precursor to graffiti-murals, provide a typology of contemporary forms of street art, provide a literature review of the academic approaches to graffiti, contextualize graffiti in the neoliberal urban environment, and provide a short historiography of gang writing—or *placas*—as the precursor to both Chicano murals and street graffiti.

In **chapter 3** I begin my discussion and classification of murals produced in Los Angeles between 1932 and 1984 by Mexican muralists, artists working under the auspices of the Work Projects Administration (WPA), and *los muralistas* aligned with the Chicano rights movement *la causa*. As part of this brief history and typology I also define graffiti-murals before providing a discussion about some of the factors that led to the destruction of tradition murals in L.A. during the 1990s.

In **chapter 4** I provide a history of neighborhood restructuring in and around the Echo Park and Silver Lake districts of Los Angeles. I rely on the photography of Los Angeles Housing Authority photographer Leonard Nadel as a means of illustrating this period of community upheaval before moving on to my case study of Judith Baca's *Evolution of a Gang Member* painted on the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls in 1975.

In **chapter 5** I provide a case study of Ernesto De La Loza's *Inner City Kickin' It* by first introducing the destruction of the Belmont Tunnel and Yard from a thirdspace perspective. Within my discussion of De La Loza's mural I provide an analysis of the

Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) of 1990 and how it has effected the longevity of both legally and illegally produced murals on the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls. In **chapter 6** I provide a short discussion of identity politics as an introduction to my case study of Cache and Eye One's illegally produced *Los Angeles: untitled*. I discuss their graffiti-mural in the context of contemporary neighborhood revitalization, showing how the Echo Park community's tacit acceptance of these graffiti-murals challenge traditional dualisms that posit graffiti as either in or out of place. Finally, in **chapter 7** I list my central findings from each of the previous 6 chapters.

Introduction

While working on this dissertation I took a break to wait in line for over an hour to see an exhibition called "Art in the Streets" curated by Jeffrey Deitch, Roger Gastman, and Aaron Rose at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. "Art in the Streets" is a retrospective of the graffiti phenomena in the United States over the past 40 years from the perspective of photographers, journalists, film makers, and of course practitioners. But just like actual art in the streets, there is no single definition for all that is written on and in public space. Even the term "art" used in the title of the exhibition is open to debate.

Many residents, writers, policy makers, and academics have attempted to delineate and define the various forms of graffiti, from political markings and personal messages, to gang insignias and community murals, to so-called hip hop graffiti and street art. Too often these different forms of graffiti are seen as part of an evolutionary hierarchy of urban aesthetics in which graffiti becomes more aesthetically pleasing and sophisticated, not to mention spatially contained, over time. At the same time, the city is simply seen as a container at worst, and canvas at best, for the production of these cryptic inscriptions and aesthetically questionable forms of street art.

Part of the difficulty in defining graffiti is that those who attempt to do so often take a position on its legal and aesthetic merits as they extract it from its socio-spatial and historical context. Because of this, various forms of graffiti, as well as graffiti writers, become subject to despatialized policy analysis, sociological evaluation, and art criticism.

The resulting compartmentalized and dualistic perspectives of graffiti result in romanticisation on one hand, and criminalization on the other.

The schizophrenic approach to, and understanding of, graffiti has resulted in an inconsistent treatment of those who produce it. Such inconsistencies have prompted much of my own fascination with how others see and respond to graffiti. For example, in 1994 Daniel Ramos—or “Chaka”—the most prolific tagger in L.A. history, was offered a scholarship by the Art Department upon acceptance to the California State University at Northridge after serving one year for vandalism in the California State Prison at Wayside. In 1995 William Masters was not criminally charged for shooting in the back an unarmed and underage Cesar Rene Arce—or “Insta”—as he wrote on a Los Angeles freeway underpass. Arce died and Masters was celebrated by some members of law enforcement, the media, and the local community as “a do-gooder,” “observant neighbor” and “white knight” (Riccardi and Tamaki, 1995, Riccardi, 1995) for combating graffiti and the “Mexican skinheads” who painted it (O’Neill, 1995).

In 2008 Cyrus Yazdani—or “Buket”—a Los Angeles graffiti writer who became infamous for his brazen acts of graffiti posted on www.youtube.com was given a 44-month prison sentence for felony vandalism. “Revok,” by all measures the most prolific contemporary L.A. graffiti writer, is currently holding a signing at a Los Angeles art gallery to raise money for his criminal defense after having his house raided on conspiracy to commit acts of vandalism. In 2011, Cristian Gheorghiu—or “Smear”—was arrested for a violation of his probation for a vandalism conviction for producing and showing his work in a gallery exhibit.

While each of these and several more cases like them play out, Banksy, the world’s most well-known street artist and graffiti writer, was recently nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary for his street art spoof film *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010). His work consisting of satirical stencils sells for six figures when it is not illegally spray painted on walls in London, Los Angeles, and famously on the West Bank Separation Barrier constructed between the State of Israel and the Palestinian territory.

In direct response to the popularity of graffiti and street art, the New York Times recently reported on the “surge in graffiti” in many U.S. cities (Nagourney, 2011),

whereas the *Los Angeles Times* responded to the MOCA show with a report on the debate surrounding the “rise in tagging outside of exhibit” (Blankstein, Winton, and Ng, 2011). Based on these and similar discussions about graffiti, it seems the popular debate has not changed in the 40 years chronicled by the MOCA show.

Because people’s reactions to graffiti are often based on subjective interpretations of aesthetics and personal responses to acts of criminality, the debate about the potential merits of graffiti is as moot now as it has always been regardless of graffiti’s ebbs and flows of popularity and its apparent acceptance in some circles. What is less debatable is the acknowledgement that graffiti can be seen as part and parcel of the changing appearance of the urban environment over the past several decades. It is with this understanding that I begin my study of the changing face of wall space and the rise of the graffiti-mural.

The contemporary urban environment has been lamented as late capitalist, conceptualized as post-modern, characterized as neo-liberal, and heralded as transnational and progressive. What each of these perspectives has in common is the recognition of the complex ways in which urban space has been transformed into something that defies easy categorization. Just as murals and later hip hop graffiti have been associated with the development of the modern urban environment after post-war urban renewal, I propose that graffiti-murals are the act and aesthetic of best fit for the contemporary urban environment.

Overarching Theoretical Framework

Quantitative and technocratic approaches to the study of cities typically include data revealing the location and size of a given population, statistical information regarding local demographics, and indices revealing a place’s economic productivity. In the past century, with the birth of professionalized urban planning in the U.S. and Great Britain (Hall, 2002), qualitative approaches to the study of cities have included a consideration for a place’s role in spurring social innovation (Mumford, 1938), creating opportunities for achieving anonymity (Wirth, 1938), and in fostering the presence of street life and spontaneous social interaction (Jacobs, 1961).

Such humanistic and ethnographic approaches to the study of cities have inspired a large body of planning literature in which the nuances of daily life are crucial to understanding a city (Davidoff, 1965; Friedman, 2008). Those nuanced “cultural and sociopolitical manifestations of urban lives and everyday practices” that comprise the city are, in the words of anthropologist Setha Low (2005, 2), best “illustrated by urban ethnographies.” Continuing such a qualitative and ethnographic approach to the study of cities, I am interested in those indicators of urban life that often transcend quantification. While such an approach is steeped in and informed by a variety of epistemological and philosophical traditions, I offer just three representative bodies of literature as a way of framing my own work.³

Urban Socio-Spatial Theory

With the rise of politically self-sufficient, ethnically diverse, and economically powerful suburban and exurban regions, the distinction between what is a city and what is not a city in the traditional sense is difficult to make. Likewise, the inner city is no longer synonymous with crime and crowding, nor is it a privileged location of cultural institutions.⁴

The “new urban sociology” (Gottdiener and Hutchison, 2006), whose adherents take a regional approach to studying “areas,” distinguishes the city from even its most diverse, culturally rich, and crime-ridden suburban and exurban fringe. According to this approach, the city is defined in terms its nighttime activities, personalized spaces of participation, forms of monumental architecture, hip amenities, and the possibility for spontaneity built into legal code. Richard Florida (2002) has articulated similar themes as part of his recommendation to cities to foster technology, talent, and tolerance as they plan for, accommodate, and attract the creative class to revitalized city centers.

³ In chapter 2 I discuss the literature on graffiti as part of my theoretical framework.

⁴ Incidents of homicide may be as prevalent in, for example, parts of the “suburban” San Fernando Valley as in parts of central L.A. As of March 1, 2012, 10% of the reported 87 homicides in L.A. have occurred in the Valley, in which 1.7 of L.A.’s 9.8 million residents reside. In 2011 12% of the 613 homicides occurred in the Valley (<http://projects.latimes.com/homicide/map/>).

Each of these ways of defining a city or urban environment—from Florida’s argument for selling the city, to the new urban sociology’s goal to update our understanding of the city—is explicit about the necessity for particular outlets and spaces of engagement, opportunities for social interaction, and a variety of forms and mediums of cultural expression. This pluralistic approach is important to my own understanding of what characterizes a city and helps constitute its aesthetic environment. By aesthetic I mean the outward surface appearance of urban space as it is marked, dressed, decorated, and imprinted both legitimately—and therefore legally—and illegitimately—and therefore illegally—by a variety of actors. As I argue in this dissertation, subversive urban aesthetics in particular act as a visual indicator of social interaction, alternative spatial practice, identity formation, representation, and as contestation against socio-spatial and aesthetic forms of control.

I draw upon socio-spatial approaches that define the city not only in terms of traditional demographic and economic indicators, but also in terms of cultural and symbolic forms of expression and representation, transgression, and contestation simultaneously. As defined by Ollman (1971) and Harvey (1996), such a dialectical approach helps identify how opposing practices and politics act together to create new urban realities and influence the ways people perceive of and produce the urban environment as an enacted space with all of its inherent complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes. Such a socio-spatial approach also draws upon Lefebvre’s (1974 [1991]) theorization of urban space as perceived, conceived, and lived.

According to Lefebvre’s conceptual triad, perceived space is society’s organized spaces that establish and connect different locations, as well as physically distinguish places in the built environment. Perceived space can also be thought of as the abstract, dominant space of a society as conceptualized by technocrats, bureaucrats, planners, politicians, and those who wield both power and creative authority. Such authoritative prescriptions for space dictate how environments should look, function, and support particular types of production and consumption. Perceived space is absolute, fixed, and framed in David Harvey’s (2006) spatial matrix, and seen as “material firstspace” as part of Soja’s (1996) trialectics of space. Conceived space most closely matches Soja’s (1996)

notion of an “imagined secondspace”—where places are imagined and subjective, and are given to images, representations, and imagination.

Most important for my own theorization and approach to the active production of urban space is the concept of lived space, or what Soja (1996) calls “critical thirdspace.” Lived space is the everyday space that people produce, inhabit, and act within. Similar to the concept of “place,” lived space consists of day-to-day human networks, a diversity of urban aestheticization processes, and the complex symbolisms of the underground and vernacular side of social life. The notion of lived space has been used by cultural geographers in thinking about the production of the urban environment as both the manifestation of abstract economic processes as well as the material location of social and cultural activities and ideologies.

According to Soja (1996), lived space is the dialectical outcome of the first two parts of Lefebvre’s triad. Soja sees lived space/critical thirdspace as a summation of all spatial practices and representations of authoritative space. He gives analytical priority to lived space as it is in everyday lived space that society can be investigated, understood, and potentially transformed. This lived, or third, space can be viewed as a postmodern milieu of complexity, diversity, and multiplicity. Because thirdspaces are both “real and imagined,” they demand a nuanced analysis of both the abstract and social production of space and an understanding of diverse spatialities. However, this is not to suggest that lived space occupies a privileged position within a hierarchy of space; rather, it should be thought of in relation to, or in dialectical tension with, the other two parts of Lefebvre’s spatial triad. Because of the equal importance of all three spatial concepts, Soja (1996) moves beyond the conventional dialectical approach and proposes a “trialectics of spatiality.” This more inherently spatial mode of trialectical reasoning frames my research and ultimately my methodology.

Spatial trialectics allows me to research the city as a space of representation in its three constituent parts—space that is conceived by its inhabitants and occupants, as it is perceived by local government and those who wield power over the sanctioned production of public and private property, and how space is lived and enacted through everyday uses. As Soja (1996) argues, the trialectic defends against the dialectic’s

tendency to produce binary reductionism and totalization of space. By identifying the three aspects of how space is perceived, conceived, and lived, the conflicts that arise and the paradoxical alliances that form between, for example, business owners, residents, local government, muralists, and graffiti writers becomes less about mutual antagonism and categorization and more about interaction and trialectic interplay in the production of place.

Landscape Studies

I also draw upon various theoretical perspectives in landscape theory to study the urban environment as it is simultaneously perceived, conceived, and lived. In particular, cultural materialist, Marxist, and phenomenological theories of landscape as they are discussed, respectively, by Denis Cosgrove (1984), Don Mitchell (2002), and Tim Cresswell (2003) have influenced my view of the urban built environment.

Cosgrove's view of the landscape as a social construction, learned way of seeing, and an ideological concept allows for a subjective interpretation of the built urban environment. In fact, cultural materialist landscape studies are rooted in a subjective way of seeing that come out of geography's declaring itself open to moral discourse as part of a movement away from scientifically objective accounts of an essential landscape as a unit of analysis. According to Cosgrove, to progressively approach the landscape as a unit of analysis one must take into account its history, spatial and temporal context, differing perspectives of its symbolic and visual representation, and, as Gillian Rose (1993, 343) argues, its sophisticated role as an ideological device in perpetuating particular social constructs and enacting erasures.

Mitchell (2002) grounds Cosgrove and Rose's concerns for bias in landscape interpretation in the everyday terrain where failure to identify manifestations of power becomes most dangerous for vulnerable members of the lower and working classes. While visually and structurally the capitalist landscape works by producing, reproducing, and often hiding or ignoring the existence of particular groups, cultures, activities, and ideologies, capital must also use "existing ways of life" to its own advantage. Such is the paradox with graffiti, which is systematically criminalized until the point that it begins to

serve dominant and profitable uses of space as a sanctioned urban aesthetic and practice. It is the use of graffiti by business owners and local governments that highlights the need for, as Mitchell (2002) suggests, a dialectical reading of the urban landscape.

Similar to Mitchell's understanding of the always-changing dialectical landscape as both a container for and barrier to capital accumulation, Cresswell (2003, 280) understands the landscape as "lived, embodied, practiced... never finished or complete, and not easily framed or read." For Cresswell, landscape is not merely a product of the visual, but must be thought of as constantly practiced and theorized as a producer of normativity. This perspective acknowledges that landscapes are lived phenomena. Whereas cultural geographers have focused on representation and landscape as ideology, studying landscape as lived allows researchers to go further and implicate it as a form of active material culture.

Landscape as material culture, according to Cresswell (2003, 278), is seen as "part of the process of social reproduction which involves the interconnectivity between materiality, consciousness, action and thought." From this phenomenological perspective, research on graffiti becomes less about individual and group representation, which has been the focus of numerous texts on graffiti and graffiti writers, and more about using graffiti as the lens through which to study "place as appearance" and "place as used and lived in," not simply "place as looked at" (ibid.).

Theories and Practices of Public Art

Public art possesses legitimacy, in part, because it has been used successfully to bolster local economies. However, most people are loath to extrapolate the success of sanctioned art to unsanctioned graffiti. As an unsanctioned aesthetic and practice, graffiti produces a lived space through acts of transgression that defy legal and legitimate conceptualization by those in power—property and business owners, local government, etc. Conversely, and regardless of its subjective surface aesthetic, public art acts as a place maker and signifier of vitality and productivity because it is conceptualized, for better or worse, as an aspect of economic development, especially in the most recent literature on arts, culture and the economy (Stern and Seifert, 2007; Cherbo, et al. 2008;

Ivey, 2008; Markusen and Schrock, 2006; Markusen, 2008; for a critical challenge to this axiom see Hall and Robertson, 2001).

As part of my research I will apply theories of cultural and economic development to graffiti-murals, arguing that graffiti-murals—a conflation of traditional murals, street art, and graffiti—as they are conceptualized and perceived in areas in search of economic vitality, will fit definitions for public art as opposed to definitions for vandalism and blight. To make these arguments, graffiti-murals must be theorized as public art and illicit street graffiti simultaneously. This need for such a theorization calls on works by public art theorists as well as literatures produced by graffiti scholars, which I address in chapter 2. The combination of public art theory and theories of the production of graffiti are part of a dialectical understanding of the capitalist city wherein even subversive urban aesthetics, like mainstream public art, provide visual distinction used to help sell places and place-identity to investors, developers, and consumers. The shift from subversive or alternative aesthetics to legitimate and culturally profitable aesthetics is part of the larger cultural response to changes in place identity.

While the notion of place has been well-studied in the academic literature in humanistic geography, urban sociology, and urban studies (for example Tuan, 1977; Buttimer and Seamon, 1980; Zukin, 1991, Massey, 1994), it is the writings by public art scholars Rosalyn Deutsche, Lucy Lippard and Brenda Jo Bright, public artist Suzanne Lacy, and muralist Judith Baca that inform my understanding of and approach to aestheticized public wall space. Deutsche, Lippard, Bright, Lacy, and Baca, has each offered homologous perspectives on the placement, motivation, and affect of sanctioned public art. Where they overlap is in their recognition that art produced in public spaces constitutes sites of public memory and contributes to the production of place.

For Deutsche (1996, xi) art in public places can be conceived of as part of the larger “urban-aesthetic” and “spatial-cultural” milieu that includes “ideas about art, architecture, and urban design, on the one hand, with theories of the city, social space, and public space, on the other.” Deutsche’s and other contemporary critical art historians such as Miwon Kwon’s (2004) conceptualization of public art informs my own thinking about critical urban theory, identity formation, expression, representation, and larger

socio-cultural, political, and economic processes that organize public life and urban space through art as practice as well as product. I am able to concretize these theories of space and urban process by situating my own work in specific places that conjure layers of public memory. Unlike landscape theory, which can memorialize place in the past tense, contemporary theories of public art insist that art and artists constantly negotiate with an always-changing landscape. Memory is therefore constantly building upon itself. Unlike a romantic depiction of a landscape frozen in time, public art is part and parcel of a living narrative about a place's use-value and character (Baudrillard, 1981b).

Coming from the same school of thought, Lippard too understands public art as a contemporary producer of place and public memory. Like urban theorist Dolores Hayden (1995) whose work informs much of my thinking of Los Angeles as a site of contested historical landscape, Lippard sees public art as crucial to evoking memory and making place as art is constantly “written *in* the landscape or place by the people who live or lived there” (1997, emphasis in original, 7). Therefore, public art helps define “the local” by continuously commemorating the activity of its inhabitants and actors. Lippard's (1990) work on public art produced in a multicultural, multinational, and multicentered society has also influenced how Brenda Jo Bright (1995) sees “low art” such as Low Rider aesthetics and graffiti as “contextualized socio-spatial processes” which, like “high art,” constitutes “cultural creativity and representation” (4).

For Lacy public art is, like the notion of place, simultaneously personal and public. And as Hayden (1995) has argued in her work for a greater recognition of the power of place and what she calls “urban place memory” (44), Lacy understands our connection to the landscapes around us as part of a complex and formative expression of memory. These expressions of memory posit public artists in particular as simultaneously assuming the roles of “experiencer, reporter, analyst, and activist” (Lacy, 1995, 174). I see these roles as being descriptive of muralists, graffiti writers, as well as pertaining to myself as a researcher.

The role of the artist as simultaneously private and public is particularly important to muralists in the *Chicano* tradition.⁵ As I discuss in this dissertation, collaboration and collectivity is one of the hallmarks of the Chicano muralist movement according to mural historians Shifra Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (1985). As Arturo Rosette (2009, 3) puts it, much like other public artists, Chicano muralists assume the role of “community-artist-activist-educator-leader”: a five-hyphen term he shortens to “critical muralist” in his doctoral dissertation of the same name.

Chicano muralist and UCLA professor Judith Baca personifies these distinctions in both the production of her murals and in her writings, both of which I address at length in this dissertation, and on whose painting of the mural *Evolution of a Gang Member* on the Sunset Boulevard retaining wall in 1975 I provide a case study in chapter 4. As Baca argues in much of her work, murals visually depict the struggles and triumphs of otherwise hidden communities. Because murals articulate a collective voice in the public sphere, they should be collaboratively produced. For example, her half-mile-long *Great Wall of Los Angeles* was painted in the Tujunga Wash in Van Nuys California with assistance from 400 youths—the original 80 of whom were recruited through the juvenile-justice system—40 historians, 40 artists, and as she put it “hundreds of historical witnesses and thousands of residents” (Baca, 2001, 15), all working to create what she calls a site of public memory.

For Baca, the founder of the non-profit Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Venice, California in 1976, “the beginnings of muralism in Los Angeles are rooted in the need for public space and public expression. In a city where neighborhoods were uprooted through corporatization (as with the Chavez Ravine sports stadium) or the construction of freeways through low-income barrios or ghettos, or the destruction of rivers, the need to create sites of public memory became increasingly important” (ibid.). As part of this dissertation I address the places and corresponding public histories that

⁵ Those who identify themselves as Chicano are Americans of Mexican decent. Before he was killed by an L.A. County Sherriff during a Chicano-led anti-Vietnam War demonstration in East los Angeles in 1970, journalist Ruben Salazar famously defined a Chicano as “a Mexican-American who does not have an Anglo image of himself.”

Baca mentions. Based on these histories I show how the site for the creation of a Chicano mural, is, as Erika Suderberg (2000, 4) puts it, is “in and of itself is part of the experience of the work of art.” And as Guisela Latorre (2008, 141) contends, “the site specificity of murals implies that the space was a critical component of the artwork to the degree that the mural would be incomplete without it”

Throughout this dissertation I elaborate on the writings of these public artists and others—geographers, sociologists, urban theorists, and art theorists—who see public art as necessarily political, participatory, and place-based. Relying on this understanding of public art, I contend that graffiti-muralists are actively producing a new and democratic aesthetic for the changing urban landscape.

Accessing the Field: a review of ethnographic research methodologies on graffiti.

As is the case with most research on urban-based subcultures, scholars conducting research on graffiti have preferred ethnographic research methods: a practice-based approach to fieldwork whereby researchers rely on the data generated by participant observation, interviews, field notes, and photographs (Till, 2009). But because graffiti writers are generally suspicious of outsiders, ethnographers are often given only superficial access to the cryptic world of wall writing. As a result, many researchers present a view of graffiti not unlike those found in cursory newspaper articles and simplistic police reports that focus on the basic motivations of “fame,” “respect,” “personal expression,” and “rebellion.”

Without being placed in a more encompassing social and spatial context, these expressed motivations mean very little, regardless of the fact that they are often perpetuated by graffiti writers themselves. Therefore, gaining a better understanding of how and why graffiti is done where it is done is not simply a matter of “making contact” with graffiti writers and asking the “right questions” in a controlled environment, but by gaining full access to where graffiti is being done, and then making personal observations of the subculture and its members’ actions. Full access and unfettered observation enables ethnographers to tell a deeper, more nuanced story about people’s activities over time and in the context of their respective lived spaces.

Several researchers have accessed the graffiti communities in New York (Baudrillard, 1976; Castleman, 1982; Austin, 2001; Snyder, 2009), London (Cresswell, 1996; Macdonald, 2001), Denver (Ferrell, 1993, 2001), Los Angeles (Phillips, 1999; Latorre, 2008), and a particularly large and recent literature coming out of Melbourne (MacDowell, 2006; Halsey and Young, 2006; Young, 2010; Halsey and Pederik, 2011; McAuliffe and Iveson, 2011; Dovey, Wollen, and Woodcock, 2012; Rowe and Hutton, 2012). While some have even achieved some degree of what feminist scholars call “insider status”—recognition that the researcher has a personal affiliation or role to play with the group being studied (Staheli and Lawson, 1994)—few, if any, can rightfully be considered what Adler and Adler (1987) call “complete member researchers.” According to Adler and Adler (1987, 67), the complete membership role entails “the greatest commitment on the part of the researcher. Rather than experiencing mere participatory involvement, complete-member-researchers (CMRs) immerse themselves fully in the group as ‘natives.’ They and their subjects relate to each other as status equals, dedicated to sharing in a common set of experiences, feelings, and goals.”

As a long-time graffiti writer myself, I am recognized as a “complete member” of the graffiti community. While this status enables me to engage in what I call “deep ethnography”—an intensive, visceral, protracted, and socially engaged form of fieldwork—it comes with its own challenges. Claiming insider status raises, above all else, a concern for objectivity. As Michael Ferber (2006, 176) points out however, the label “objective” itself is posited in an attempt to create an “artificial detachment in order to construct an illusive objectivity and in turn generate authority.” Concerns for attaining objectivity—the holly grail for some researchers, particularly during the quantitative revolution in the social sciences—are part of establishing reliability and truth in scholarship. But as an ethnographer I am far more concerned with multiple and sometimes-contradictory perspectives than I am in finding generalizable scientific truths. Additionally, while the production of theory is also vital to what we do as scholars,

“being there” to record the intricacies of everyday phenomena should play an equally important role in our work.⁶

Although scholars have argued that the insider/outsider dichotomy is false, or at least complicated as it is possible to be both at the same time (Headland, Pike, and Harris, 1990; Pettinger, 2005), complete member status can in fact make a significant difference in terms of generating data, thanks to access gained to research subjects and their activities. Gaining greater access to an elusive subculture can lead to new findings and perspectives that have hitherto not been articulated in the academic literature — problems of positionality and poststructural challenges to objectivity, identity politics, and reflexivity notwithstanding.

Given the illegality of their work, graffiti writers are typically secretive and suspicious of outsiders, while simultaneously being social and self-promoting. Graffiti writers will often sit down for interviews as part of their desire to “get fame,” but will provide only superficial answers to even politically nuanced questions. And because interviews are often conducted in mutually agreed upon, neutral locations—a café, bar, youth center, art gallery, etc.—the wider social and spatial context for graffiti—i.e. the neighborhood—becomes an abstract and distant background for the story of graffiti.

Before providing a much-needed socio-spatial context for graffiti at the scale of the neighborhood, I will provide a review of how graffiti scholars have traditionally

⁶ Like research conducted on other subcultures—punks (Lull, 1987), skinheads (Blazak, 1995), homeless youth (Ruddick, 1996), youth culture and gangs (Skelton and Valentine, 1998), skateboarders (Borden, 2001), and critical mass bike riders (Ferrell, 2001)—“being there” and being deeply embedded is of vital importance to ethnographers. But in being there as a complete member lie the difficulties associated with being, perhaps, too well connected emotionally and socially. Along with the traditional criticisms that qualitative methods lack objective verifiability, there may be those who would argue that “being there” does not necessarily produce anything more than idiosyncratic findings and may even harm one’s findings as a result of “contamination.” Also, problems arise when by “being there” research subjects are wrongly credited with being “pure, transparent, and knowable carriers of uncontested cultural codes” (Crang and Cook, 1995, see also Geertz, 1988 on “being here” and “being there”).

entered the field and gained access. I follow this with a description of my own research methods, which begins with a reflection about being a complete member researcher.

Trust issues

Earning and possessing trust has long been an ethical issue and potential barrier between ethnographers and their respondents, particularly in the field of cultural anthropology (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). In conducting what Raymond Lee (1995) calls “dangerous fieldwork” among vulnerable populations, trust can be fleeting if not impossible to achieve. Likewise, geographers have been confronted with issues of trust as obstacles to conducting fieldwork among people in positions of authority (Herbert, 2001a). Among members of the graffiti community, a loss of trust has resulted not from a history of unethical research, but as a result of fear of punitive actions taken by law enforcement.

Before the 1980s in New York and the early 1990s in L.A. when inquisitive outsiders often turned out to be undercover members of the N.Y.P.D. Vandals Squad or the L.A.P.D.’s Graffiti Habitual Offenders Suppression Team (GHOST), graffiti writers were far less suspicious of curious interlocutors. This early openness allowed photographers Mervyn Kurlansky and Jon Naar (Mailer, 1974) to document the burgeoning graffiti phenomenon during the 1970s. In a now-iconic image captured by Naar, nine young graffiti writers smile directly into the camera lens. Not only are the boys standing in a stairwell that is completely tagged, presumably, by them, but four of the boys (one white, one Latino, one black, and one possibly Asian) are holding small pieces of paper with their tag names written out. One of the boys even appears to be either in the act of writing, or gesturing as such, against the wall in the background. Their naiveté is not just apparent on their young pudgy faces, but in the way these early graffiti writers guilelessly pose for the shot.



Figure 1.1. “Subway Kids,” c. 1974. Photo by Jon Naar.

At this point in time writing on a wall was still just seen and treated as writing on a wall. In the ensuing years however, writing on a wall was seen by many as tantamount to structural violence and general social decline thanks to the popularity of the Broken Windows theory (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). The theory posited that neighborhoods left in a state of decline may signal to others that residents do not care, which may result in the commission of further and potentially more severe crimes. However, since the rampant criminalization of graffiti writers was still over a decade away, Kurlansky and Naar were given unfettered access to their subjects. Later, it would take more than curiosity and a camera to win access to the underground community of graffiti writers who eventually became the target of law enforcement and citizen “heroes”—vigilantes—alike.

The importance of having to garner trust did not escape Norman Mailer who provided the text accompanying Kurlansky and Naar’s photographs. Mailer (1974, 3) begins his *The Faith of Graffiti* by alluding to his own status as a journalist, an “aesthetic Investigator,” and a “private eye inquiring into the mysteries of a new phenomenon.” During the same year that Mailer was employing his investigative reporting tactics in the subways of New York, geographers David Ley and Roman Cybriwsky (1974) were

conducting research on the graffiti phenomenon in Philadelphia—graffiti’s birthplace (Reiss, 2007) and at that time considered the “graffiti capital of the world” (Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974). It was the increasing news coverage of the graffiti “epidemic” that inspired their research. As they point out, the number of articles in popular magazines and the *New York Times* dedicated to contemporary urban graffiti rose from only five over the twenty-year period from 1950-1970, to forty by 1972 (Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974, 491). Most popular among those early articles was a short *New York Times* editorial on Taki 183, the most prolific graffiti writer up until that point, and still a folk hero in graffiti lore today (*New York Times* editorial, 1971).

Ley and Cybriwsky’s research focused on the territoriality of graffiti. Theirs is a neighborhood-based study showing an “explicitly methodological interest” in the then emerging geographical sub-field of “man-environment interaction” (505). However, unlike Mailer who sought out individual graffiti writers as part of his exposé, Ley and Cybriwsky, who like Mailer were self-avowed humanists, were more interested in the spatial dynamics and patterning of the graffiti left behind (492). In the article published in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Ley and Cybriwsky point out that social scientists seemed to have had little interest in graffiti. And judging by the response to the piece in terms of citations, not much seems to have piqued academic interest in the explicitly spatial dimension of graffiti for over a decade. It was not until Craig Castleman published *Getting Up: Subway graffiti in New York* in 1982 that there was another significant mention of the graffiti movement that was by then taking place in cities across the United States and much of Western Europe.⁷

Yet again the status of the researcher became important because, like Mailer, Castleman had to rely on gaining access to members of the graffiti community. Since interviewing consisted of the bulk of his fieldwork, his need to get close to his respondents—Lee of the Fabulous Five Crew, Stan 153, Bama, Tracy 168, and others—

⁷ Most research on graffiti, even after the arrival of Taki 183 in 1971, focused on political, personal, satirical, and even “homosexual” bathroom writings and musings. Such articles appeared in sociological, anthropological, art, and folklorist journals during the 1970s (Gonos, Mulkern, and Poushinsky, 1976).

was crucial. However, what Castleman did with his access was far different from what Mailer accomplished. As Castleman points out, most of the information in this book “derived from tape-recorded personal interviews with graffiti writers” (1982, x), but unlike Mailer’s more reflective piece, Castleman objectively recorded the slang, the tools, the tactics, the social configuration of crews, and the personal motivations expressed in the interviews.

Castleman writes that the suggestions made by his academic advisors Margaret Mead and Louis Forsdale at Columbia University were to compose a “strictly descriptive study, not an analysis of the overall meanings or social significance of graffiti writing” (1982, x). Therefore, how he gained trust is unclear since his book is almost completely devoid of self-reference, but as per his advisors’ advice, *Getting Up* is strictly descriptive. Nevertheless, his ability to gain trust as an outsider is evident in his in-depth interviews and knowledge—albeit second-hand knowledge—of insider history and perspective. Castleman’s note pad was apparently met with the same openness as Naar’s camera.

All of that openness would change in the next several years. Not only did graffiti writers become increasingly suspicious of “researchers” given the mounting arrests, but anyone asking questions about graffiti would be met with skepticism once the graffiti phenomenon began receiving widespread attention. In the early 1990s I remember being suspicious of over-eager graffiti enthusiasts, particularly right after the arrest of the infamous graffiti writer Chaka in 1989. As part of the graffiti sting to catch him, undercover police officers posed as tourists on Hollywood Boulevard. Surveillance recordings from the police sting were used as part of Fox Television’s “Front Page” report. The footage shows Daniel Ramos openly explaining to the inquisitive “tourist” why he had just written “Chaka” above a phone booth with a black marker. The result of this well-publicized arrest was an increased public awareness of, and hatred for, graffiti. Coincidentally or not, it is also the year that the Mexican Mafia reportedly issued a “green light” on taggers. The green light allowed for the killing of any graffiti writer caught writing in a gang’s ‘hood. Soon after the increased hostilities toward taggers from law enforcement and gangs alike, the phenomena known as “tag-banging” began (Gastman

and Neelon, 2011).⁸ The heightened hostility surrounding graffiti made conducting ethnographic research on the subject increasingly dangerous.

Perhaps it is the result of this hostile and suspicious climate that what was published on graffiti for the decade following Castleman's in-depth study consisted primarily of graffiti's contribution to the art world. Such research could be conducted in the safety of the gallery and among the most entrepreneurial—and therefore presumably least violent—members of the graffiti scene. The first and most influential of these gallery studies was Richard Lachmann's (1988) account of graffiti as both a “career and ideology.”

For his study of graffiti writers in New York City between 1983 and 1984, Richard Lachmann (1988) relies on interviews with 25 young men, most of whom “were found by asking art dealers and collectors for the names of ‘graffiti artists’” (233). While his interview pool did eventually broaden out into two sections of Brooklyn, he initially went through the gallery system as a sampling method. This provided Lachmann with access to those who possessed a particular perspective of the graffiti scene. Typically, writers found in the mainstream art world also possess a different relationship to law enforcement and the general public, therefore Lachmann's study is perhaps safer than it would have been had he gained access to less-institutionalized street and subway bombers who resided far from SoHo galleries and art shows in Manhattan.

By 1981 collectors and curators including Annina Nosei, Mel Neulander, Joyce Towbin, and Richard Flood of the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York attempted to make mainstream art celebrities in the vein of Basquiat and Keith Haring out of subway bombers and street taggers such as Lady Pink, Zepher, Dondi, and Futura 2000 (Tschinkel, 1984; Austin, 2001). However, these “giants of graffiti art” (Austin, 2001) are hardly representative of the many writers whose work and personalities were never on display in show rooms, or whose work could or even would be consumed by collectors.

⁸ “Tag-banging” is the conflation of otherwise non-violent graffiti writing tactics and style and violent gang behavior and identity. The term coined by *Fox News* is a combination of “tagging” and “gang banging.”

While Lachmann's (1988) ethnographic study reveals graffiti writers' general associated activities at the time—tagging, painting murals, forming crews, and attending art shows—his article is most important for its discussion of the organizational and ideological underpinnings, and eventual failures, of the gallerized graffiti art scene. He cites a little-known exhibition catalog entitled *Post-graffiti* (Janis, 1983) that accompanied a graffiti art exhibit at the Janis Galley in New York City. As with the *Post-graffiti* catalogue and a later documentary by the same name, Lachmann draws a distinction between what was being painted on the subways and streets, and what was being painted on canvas. However, unlike the catalogue and documentary, he sees value in the unsanctioned and spontaneous side of graffiti, and argues that the gallerization and commodification of graffiti, along with the accompanying destruction of the writers' corners,⁹ simply “subverted individuals' faith in the value of pursuing artistic, deviant, or any activity with others” (Lachmann, 1988, 249).

He presents this radical argument as a counter to the “post-graffiti” epithet. For many people—gallerized graffiti artists and galley owners alike—the term post-graffiti was used to show disdain for what they perceived as “scribble-scrabble” (in Lachmann, 248) that appeared out on the streets. As the prefix implied, graffiti was believed to have made way for a new form of legal and profitable brand of “post-graffiti street art.” The exhibit at the Janis Gallery signified to many the death of graffiti despite the fact that, as Lachmann points out, it was the graffiti writers' romanticized identities as “poor, ignorant blacks and Puerto Ricans” (246) that was on display and being sold, not the aesthetic quality or symbolic importance of the actual works.

As I discuss in chapter 2, the debate over the use of the “post” prefix is still taking place. As Luke Dickens (2007) points out, many graffiti writers are uncomfortable with the notion that traditional street graffiti has died and made way for a new, more enlightened and sophisticated “post-graffiti” in which spray paint, tags, and street

⁹ “Writers' corners” (also called “writers' benches”) are spaces where graffiti writers gather to talk, hang-out, exchange stories, and trade black books. In New York City, graffiti writers would meet at various subway platforms, whereas in Los Angeles writers' corners were located at bus stops, in shopping malls, and at parks.

writing have been replaced by paint brushes, mixed media canvases, and sanctioned hip hop-themed art shows. Many graffiti writers still insist that “graffiti and the art world have incompatible and irreconcilable ideological strategies, and that they should exist as separate spheres” (Dickens, 7). According to Dickens who harks back to Lachmann (1988), for many graffiti writers today the term “post-graffiti” is a reminder of “the damage that fickle art world attention and money can bring to a vulnerable underground scene” (2007, 7).

In addition to being the first to critically analyze the graffiti/post-graffiti debate, Lachmann has also inspired scholars to examine the practice of graffiti as part of a “career” for subversive artists (McAuliffe and Iveson, 2011). For this Lachmann relied heavily on art theorist Howard Becker’s writings on the art world (1982) and his discussion of deviance (1963) in addition to theories of subcultural practice by Stuart Hall (1975) and Dick Hebdige (1979). Now, as more time has passed since graffiti began as an urban phenomenon, fuller biographies telling of graffiti writers’ careers are possible.

Gregory Snyder (2009, 172), a proponent of the “new ethnography” which I discuss below, focuses on what he calls a “subcultural career.” He writes that “the subcultural career counters the common perception of graffiti writers as vandals bent on a life of crime, and instead focuses on the ways that people turn experiences into something positive.” He provides examples of successful graffiti writers who have gone on to “do big things” (172). He points out how his own respondents’ work has been purchased by museums and private collectors, and their talents have even carried over into successful careers in the fields of “tattooing, studio art, magazine production, journalism, and guerilla marketing” (10). Ronald Kramer (2010) provides the same litany of career opportunities available for graffiti writers. He points out that “the producers of legal graffiti lead lifestyles and hold values that many people would consider ‘conventional’” (249).

Because scholars seem to gain access to the graffiti community through the same small group of outspoken gatekeepers, there may be a tendency to repeat the same perspectives and sing the same praises when writing about graffiti. Although Snyder sees

himself as an insider—having gained such distinction after gaining trust as an interlocutor, eager fan, and participant trying his own hand at writing graffiti—much of his perspective of graffiti seems to derive from his respondents such as Los Angeles and New York-based graffiti writer Colt .45 (Colt .45, 2010). Scholars such as Snyder typically make first contact with those graffiti writers who share similar perspectives and are often socially connected to galleries and non-profit art centers where many scholars begin their fieldwork. In Ronald Kramer’s case, he gained access to graffiti artists in New York City by simply, as he put it, calling the telephone number written on sanctioned graffiti murals by the respective artist, and by meeting graffiti artists at a warehouse in Queens where people are given permission to congregate and paint (2010, 241-242).

As a result of the tight-knit community of graffiti gatekeepers and spokespersons, certain names appear in much of the academic literature, newspaper articles, and popular media. In Los Angeles the members of the graffiti community who are repeatedly interviewed are those who rely on mainstream channels such as the internet to self-promote, those who own a business or clothing line, have graduated from art school or university, or have published a graffiti art book. The prevalence of educated, business savvy, and socially connected graffiti writers in academic publications and popular media provides a narrow view of the otherwise diverse community.¹⁰

Admittedly, outsiders securing access to a socially active member of the graffiti community is much more feasible than, for example, tracking down a graffiti writer like Oiler. Oiler, considered by many to be the most prolific street bomber in L.A. history, does not have an email account, business card, or history of rapport with those seeking interviews or carrying cameras. However, my own personal communication with him produced some of the most vivid and original depictions of life as a graffiti writer on the

¹⁰ The list of oft-cited graffiti artists includes Man One, Posh, Revok, Saber, Unit, Colt .45 in Los Angeles, and Espo, Zepher, and Claw out of New York. From my own knowledge of the graffiti community, several of the writers on this list have “turned professional.” As such they do not offer a diverse sample of perspectives. Many of these writers repeat the same narrative regarding the lifespan of an artist and the goal of moving from illicit tagger to paid professional.

streets of Los Angeles. It took running into him—being at the right place at the right time— and already possessing trust and notoriety within the graffiti community to secure my interview.



Figure 1.2. Oiler. Photo by Gabe the Saint.

The standard sampling methods and social channels used to access the graffiti community have provided many ethnographers with a particularly safe, and perhaps overly romantic, view of graffiti. Like war correspondents who never leave the international hotel, urban ethnographers must get closer to their subjects by moving beyond the roads well-travelled and further from members of the in-crowd. There are in fact ethnographers who avoid what they perceive as “safe ethnography,” choosing particularly dangerous fieldwork sites and less-than-secure access to their respondents. Ethnographers Jeff Ferrell and Chris Hamm (1998) call this type of “front line fieldwork” in potentially hostile environments “ethnography at the edge.”

Contemporary Ethnographies and “Ethnography at the Edge”

“Ethnography at the edge” (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998) connotes a scholar’s access, deeply embedded position of danger, and exposure to risk in the field. Like Burawoy’s (1998) “extended case study method,” ethnography at the edge is also often conducted

over extended periods of time. The danger associated with conducting intensive and long-term field research on, for example, crime and deviance is not just in exposure to risk from research subjects or their activities, but from the threats posed by those in positions of power. As Jeff Ferrell and Mark Hamm (1998) point out, much of the risk associated with conducting research on illegal activities stems from police questioning, harassing, and arresting researchers in the field. Likewise, some of the danger associated with conducting ethnography at the edge involves roadblocks to research by institutional review boards (Martin and Inwood, 2012), fear of legal repercussions (Scarce, 1995; Leo, 1995), a distaste for dismissive and disparaging remarks from colleagues (Mattley, 1998), possessing emotionally dangerous data (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young, 2008), and a lack of financial support and validation from funding agencies, doctoral and tenure committees, publishers, and other academic gatekeepers (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998). As Ferrell and Hamm (1998, 4) argue, ethnographers also traditionally run the risk of having their work “denigrated on the grounds of bias, subjectivity, over-involvement, and ‘overrapport.’”

Many of the risks associated with conducting “edgy” fieldwork is nothing new to feminist geographers argues Staeheli and Martin (2000). They point out that feminist scholars in geography have traditionally been kept from conducting fieldwork in places deemed too “remote and dangerous” (137) by their male counterparts. Moreover, women were altogether kept from entering some graduate programs in geography—namely UCLA’s—because they were not deemed capable of completing the fieldwork requirement. Staeheli and Martin do point out that since the 1990s there has been a more inclusive environment at the university-level, with females obtaining doctorates at higher rates than their male counterparts in many cases, holding leadership positions in major departments in the U.S. and Canada, as well as occupying gate-keeping posts at funding agencies and on acceptance and hiring committees, and holding editorial positions with major academic journals.

Despite increased gender equity in the academy and the gains won by feminist scholars in the field, as Ferrell and Hamm (1998) point out, ethnographers—both men and women—still suffer from the perception that knowledge must be generated through

codified, value-free, systematic, and generalizable research generated under safe research conditions. Today, perceptions of skeptical internal review boards, decreased rates of federal spending on academic research, a growing number of faculty searches specifying a competitive candidate's GIS skills, and increasingly competitive National Science Foundation grants have kept social scientists who employ qualitative methods on the defensive.

Nevertheless, ethnographers see their work contributing to knowledge by uncovering diverse lifeworlds,¹¹ and have therefore defended their methodological and theoretical framework since the qualitative revolution of the early 1970s.¹² The quest for observable everyday phenomena continues to inspire scholars to rely on personal reflection, lived experience, and what Jeff Ferrell (1995) calls a "methodology of attentiveness."

"Attentiveness," to use Ferrell's term, does not simply apply to one's regard for what is happen in front of them, but also applies to the attention researchers must pay to their own role in the data. Whereas all ethnographic fieldwork adheres to the tenets of participant observation, writing field notes, and conducting interviews, there are differences as to what role the researcher's own identity plays in the research and to what degree a researcher may be concerned with the balance of power between researcher and respondent (Rose 1993 and 1995). As reflexive researchers in the field, many of whom have learned from feminist theory (England, 1994; Katz, 1994; Nast, 1994; McDowell, 1999), ethnographers take great care to identify how their relative position of power, *in situ*, affects their data. This recognition of the self as a critical data

¹¹ According to Buttimer and Seamon (1976), the term "lifeworld" refers to "the culturally defined spatio-temporal setting or horizon of everyday life." Most important for my own research, the lifeworld is the setting which encompasses "the totality of an individual person's direct involvement with places and environments experienced in ordinary life" (Cosgrove in Johnston et al., 2000, 449).

¹² The so-called qualitative revolution in the social sciences, initiated in geography by David Harvey's publication of *Social Justice and the City* (1973), helped make a space in academia for civic humanists who were interested in observing and discussing cultural phenomena and socio-spatial practices in mostly urban environments. See Ley and Duncan (1993) *Place/Culture/Representation* and Ley's (1974) *The Black Inner City as Frontier Outpost*.

point—revealed through the use of autoethnography—can be acutely evocative and emotional (Spry, 2001).

In light of the institutional politics and biases, many ethnographers place themselves at the center of their research in order to provide their fieldwork with methodological rigor. As part of advocating for ethnographic and autoethnographic fieldwork as reliable praxis, H.L. Goodall (2000, 90) argues that good ethnographies should in fact be “narratives shaped out of a writer’s personal experience within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences” (9). Such a position can indeed produce a fuller ethnographic account, but it can also lead to over-identification whereby a researcher’s etic accounts—or “outsider observations” that are value-free accounts based on the implementation of scientific knowledge—become confused with emic observations—or “insider knowledge” that is value-laden information derived from one’s cultural perspective (Headland, Pike, and Harris, 1990). Furthermore, such a focus on the self has at times resulted in scholars’ over-identification with their subjects.

Gregory Snyder (2009, 22), a proponent of the new ethnography, boasts that he was generally treated as an insider and was confused for a graffiti writer due to his interest in “the latest hip hop fashions in dressing and speaking.” In another example of over-identification, criminologist Jeff Ferrell explicitly identifies himself as having “spent 5 years as an active graffiti writer” (2010, 49) and goes so far as to print a copy of his citation for “destruction of private property” in his text in an attempt to position himself as an insider with complete member status (2001, 184). However, those scholars who see themselves as anything more than temporary participant outsiders should, as Sandra Harding (1987, 185) points out, distinguish between *standpoint* and *perspective*. Whereas *perspective* is universally accessible, a *standpoint* is “not something anyone can have by claiming it, but [is] an achievement.”¹³

Susan Philips’ (1999) research on graffiti in L.A. provides an excellent example of the success and research benefits associated with establishing complete outsider

¹³ In a recent issue of *City* complete-member graffiti writers Zepher, Colt .45 and London-based Eine were invited to reflect on their graffiti careers in the journal’s special section “Scenes and Sounds” (*City*, 14(1-2), 2010).

status. In deep ethnographic fashion, Philips personally and perilously penetrated the world of contemporary gang and graffiti writing. The self-described “stupid white Girl with a camera” (98) conducted her research in some of the most violent neighborhoods in one of the nation’s most violent cities—and did so during one of the city’s most violent eras. But she did so with an enthusiasm and curiosity that allowed her the access needed to produce one of the foremost works on graffiti to date. In fact, as she explains in her doctoral dissertation and subsequently published book based on her fieldwork, part of what afforded her the ability to conduct her work was her outsider status. Nevertheless, she writes that she was often afraid, but not of the gang members—she was afraid of her advisors “losing faith in me and my ability to do fieldwork” (227).

Methods and Methodology

My analysis of wall space was inspired by my personal interest in interacting with walls as a graffiti writer. Given my particular, and some may say peculiar, interest in walls, I had to be careful in writing this dissertation not to let my views of appropriate spatial behavior inform my understanding of wall space in general. While I maintain a highly reflexive relationship with walls in which my actions are validated by others in my peer group, I had to remain open to others’ perspectives of the role of walls in a diverse neighborhood setting—their appearance, their social role, their history, the laws that govern them, etc. The result is a dissertation that is as much about the history of the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls from multiple perspectives as it is about the role of murals and graffiti in shaping peoples’ impressions of it. What emerged in the writing of this dissertation is a fascination with the historical uses for and impressions of walls in general—a topic for research I plan to further develop in my academic career.

While conducting fieldwork for this dissertation it was not only my topic that broadened, but also the ways in which I collected data. At several points in my fieldwork I was surprised to see how the best-laid plans gave way to even richer and unforeseen methods of data collection. As a standing member of the graffiti community and member of the City Bomb Squad/Can’t Be Stopped (CBS) crew, I was at times forced to take on the role of a participant observer while conducting fieldwork. At one point, while

conducting preliminary research, I was writing in my notepad when Anger, the “head”—ranking member—of CBS, told me to put my pen and paper down and help paint the wall to prepare it for a graffiti-mural others in the crew were about to begin. I felt that my day of collecting data had been interrupted, but after returning to my notes and systematically coding them hours later I realized I had actually collected more data by standing at the wall with my peers than I would have as an “ethnographer authority” (Clifford, 1983) or “objective, modest witness” (Haraway, 1991).



Figure 1.3. Me (right) and Mear One (left) in front of our giant CBS letters on one of the concrete banks of the L.A. River near Downtown, 2001. Photo by Kalen Ockerman.

As a recognized member of the graffiti community in Los Angeles, I have been able to rely on my unfettered access to other members of the graffiti community. But as I conducted open-ended and informal interviews with some of L.A.’s most prolific graffiti writers, my insider status often became problematic as I was given information regarding the illegal production of future graffiti-murals. Many of my respondents also routinely confided in me regarding their personal views and feelings about others in their own community. While protecting my respondents and adhering to all ethical codes of

conduct as mandated by personal conviction as well as IRB protocol, I refrained from altering the normal course of events taking place around me. But I have also not included information in this dissertation that would result in increased hostilities between graffiti writers, muralists, and others vying for or policing wall space.

I maintained my ethical responsibility to do no harm as I made contact with muralists Ernesto De La Loza and Judith Baca through mutual friends and colleagues. Being introduced to these famed muralists through mutual friends helped my interviews flow with a greater degree of openness and ease than if I would have approached them as an outside academic researcher. Likewise, as I found out while conducting interviews with residents and business owners in and around the Echo Park and Silver Lake neighborhoods, my status as a community member afforded me greater access than if I had been perceived as an inquisitive outsider.

In terms of analyzing my data, I have been careful in how I implement theory in my writing about very real people, places, and processes. I have thus relied on theory as a means of articulating specificity so that my findings may apply to a larger audience and inform a general understanding of similar subjects. Ideally this dissertation can be read as much as a specific case study on the production of murals on the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls in the Echo Park district of Los Angeles as it can be read as a generalizable approach to the study of the shifting appearance of wall space in the context of neighborhood change. Ultimately, it is my hope that my research can be used as an example of urban-based ethnographic research for students looking to conduct their own research on the social and aesthetic history of public space in general.

In addition to providing students with an example of urban-based ethnographic and historical research, I hope I can offer an example of how complete members of groups and subgroups can use their own experiences as primary data while conducting academic fieldwork. However, despite having a close personal connection to members of the graffiti subculture, my goal has not been to implicate or exonerate any participants. Neither has my goal been to romanticize or demonize individuals on either side of the graffiti debate. But in true ethnographic fashion such as that which is advocated for by

sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2002), my goal is to elucidate the activities of people across time and space.

In addition to my position as a participant-researcher, conducting research on Chicano murals for this dissertation has allowed me to play the role of an outsider as well. Not having participated in the painting of a mural, and not identifying myself as a Chicano, I was able to personally step back and let others' practice and research educate me about an aesthetic I knew very well, but only as a spectator. For example, Judith Baca's *Great Wall of L.A.* mural has had as much of an effect on me aesthetically, intellectually, politically, and emotionally as any piece of graffiti and any experience producing graffiti myself.

In addition to the graduate seminars I took at the University of Minnesota and UCLA and the long period of pre-dissertation work which included familiarizing myself with the literatures, arguments, and movements that inform my theoretical framework and intellectual point of departure, as part of performing empirical research for this dissertation, I spent much time on the streets of L.A. gathering data in the form of field notes, interviews, photographs, and observations as a trained ethnographer between 2006 and 2010. During this time I also conducted formal interviews at the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Venice, CA., the offices of the Department of Cultural Affairs in Los Angeles, and with various shop owners and with community activist at meetings in Echo Park and Silver Lake. Between 2008 and 2011, with assistance from graffiti writers Relax and Wisk, I also transcribed audio interviews recorded with more than 50 graffiti writers at various locations around L.A., including at my home, on the telephone, at writers' hangouts, at the homes of graffiti writers, and in public places. I provide several extended excerpts from these interviews. Many of these respondents have played a major role in the aestheticization of Los Angeles wall space over the past three decades. However crucial their role in both painting graffiti-murals and/or destroying traditional murals, many of them have yet to have their voice heard or represented in the literature on murals, graffiti, or neighborhood change until now.

The extensive photographic data for this dissertation consisted of hundreds of hours spent combing through the image archives at SPARC, the Los Feliz offices and

online gallery of www.50mmlosangeles.com, and the photo collections of the Los Angeles Public Library Department of History and Genealogy, the offices of the Los Angeles City Clerk, the USC Digital Photo Archives, the Los Angeles Mural Conservancy, as well as through my own personal photo collection.

My hope is that the images included in this dissertation do not merely provide a purely aesthetic backdrop for the text, but are read as data which help illustrate the history of development in and around Echo Park and tell the story of the murals, graffiti, and graffiti-murals that have been painted on the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls. The work that went into collecting these images, the stories they help tell, and the data they produce make them as crucial an element of my research as the theories I apply and words printed onto each page.¹⁴



Figure 1.4. Detail, Judith Baca's *Hitting the Wall: Women in Marathon* with graffiti. Photo by José Tchopourian, 2012.

¹⁴ A note on my sources bibliography, and formatting: I have made efforts to cite student theses and dissertations that relate to my research. I have also tried to balance my use of traditional and oft-cited works with new and recently published articles by emerging scholars in the fields related to me research. In addition to my use of photography and interview excerpts, I have also relied on local websites, blogs, 'zines, magazines, and daily newspaper articles when possible. My in-text citations, use of quotations, and bibliography are formatted using a variation of the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines. This body of this dissertation is typed using Times New Roman 12-point font. Extended excerpts from texts are double-spaced, whereas extended excerpts from personal interviews are single-spaced.

Chapter 2. Graffiti in L.A.

In this chapter I introduce the Los Angeles graffiti community in their own words with a series of excerpts from recorded interviews with some of the community's most prolific, though otherwise elusive, members. I go on to define what I mean by "graffiti," followed by a discussion of graffiti in the context of street art and post-graffiti's rise in popularity and mainstream acceptance. Within this discussion I introduce local graffiti-muralist Eye One, followed by a literature review of traditional academic approaches to the study of graffiti. I then provide the theoretical framework for my own approach to graffiti, followed by a discussion of Los Angeles and the capitalist urban environment in which graffiti is produced. Finally, I show how West Coast graffiti is stylistically related to, yet substantively distinct in purpose from, traditional gang writing.

"When most people think of Los Angeles... they think 'oooh, Hollywood!' And then meanwhile they think that you're superficial. And of course that's true. But what they don't know about us is that we're deeply superficial."

—political street artist Robbie Conal in *Bomb It* (Reiss, 2007)

An Introduction to the Graffiti Community in L.A.

Over the course of five years (2006-2011) I, with assistance from graffiti writers Wisk One and Relax in Los Angeles in addition to several undergraduates at the University of Minnesota, recorded and transcribed over 75 interviews with many of the most well-known graffiti writers in L.A. Each of these graffiti writers was most active when graffiti, as I define it below, became a ubiquitous urban phenomena in Los Angeles beginning in the 1980s. While the reflections total over 400 pages of transcribed text,¹⁵ for this section I excerpted some of the most representative answers to the basic question "how did you start writing." I begin this chapter with such personal accounts and corresponding photos from the 50mm Los Angeles archives to introduce and orient academic audiences to the graffiti community as well as entice those already familiar with it. As the statements below illustrate, the reasons for getting started in graffiti highlight the diversity of the tight-knit subculture in terms of each members' personal perspective of and approach to wall writing.

¹⁵ The full text from many of the original 15-to-60-minute recorded interviews will appear in the forthcoming *History of Los Angeles Graffiti Art, vol. 2* (Robert "Wisk" Alva and Robert "Relax" Reiling, edited by Stefano Bloch).

Bruin



Figure 2.1 Bruin with Chico 1994. 50mmlosangeles

I really started writing around 1990. The graffiti around my neighborhood at that time was mostly gang-related, but there were several writers who were getting up and had style in my

immediate neighborhood of Watts and the Florence District. And South Central during this time was going through the crack epidemic and gang banging. Most youth in my area were joining gangs, as it was the thing to do. Having a brother that was heavily involved in gang banging, the lifestyle was alluring, but I didn't want my mother to go through the drama my brother was putting her through: drug dealing, deadly violence, incarceration. So I chose to do graffiti.

As a writer, I appreciated being able to travel to different areas in L.A. without having to worry about being sweated. Before becoming a writer, I hardly ever left my immediate neighborhood. As a writer, though, I traveled to all kinds of areas from the San Fernando Valley to the South Bay and met writers from various cultures and social backgrounds. This exposure was inspiring and stimulated me by making me aware of different perspectives.

Power



Figure 2.2. Power c.1989. 50mm

I came up watching and reading gang tags around L.A. As I started getting hooked on getting up I took graffiti's in-your-face, street level self promotion and used it to push my punk rock world. By 1980 I began marker-tagging the names and symbols of bands on city walls, in clubs, at school, and on buses.

Volt



Figure 2.3.
Volt c.1997.
50mm

I was 13 when "Beat Street" first came out in 1984. Obviously there were much better writers in NY

than Beat Street made it seem, but the fact was that I had never seen anything like it. I remember stepping out of that movie theater and seeing all the graffiti around me become alive and it was fresh! So just like everyone from those days, I began to travel on the RTD bus looking for graffiti. You could even say that the RTD was our subways.

Chaka



Figure 2.4. Chaka, 1989. Source: *Los Angeles Times*

I got into graffiti when I started skating. I was going to school between Palisades and Brentwood. It was a super rich school and I was from the projects, so I would bus it all the way out there, get out there and there was skating. I got really deep into that. I got pretty good at it and that is when I met Cab, Tyron, and Spence. I was skating with them back in the day and I got to a point where I was kind of pursued into the professional arena because whatever I get into, I get into it pretty extreme. But my eye kept going to the walls where people made names for themselves, and that is what stuck with me. I started writing Chaka after the character from a show called "Land of the Lost." He was a funny looking character, little, dark, short, and hairy with long hair. I kind of fit into that description back then because I had long hair. It was kind of bushy back in the day.

Skill



Figure 2.5. Skill c.1998. 50mm

I was kind of reluctant a little bit getting into graffiti because the way I was first exposed to it was through an old school cat named Jay-Skee in Burbank who was all about hip-hop. We lived in these poor ass apartments in Burbank and we used to just smoke pot, listen to Jimi Hendrix, do acid, and party, just do the stoner thing. I was more into metal, but then when Jay-Skee moved into the place it was all about writing and the lifestyle that took us everywhere in the city. Me and Snap kept our stoner approach to graffiti ever since.

Else



Figure 2.6. Else, detail, c. 2005. 50mm

I was born in New York, so I grew up with graffiti being around me. When I came out to L.A., it was funny, I had been drawing graffiti for years in New York, but I had never written on a wall or done anything. But, moving out from New York to Los Angeles, and having kids see that I drew graffiti, and my being from New York, it was like it gave me instant credibility. They were like, “Oh, you’re a graffiti artist?” I kind of just ran with it, I didn’t tell anyone that I had never touched a wall.

Omega



Figure 2.7. Omega character 1990. 50mm

When I started off as a skater in high school, most skaters were getting into, tagging. I liked the disguise, the idea of getting over. I kept it to myself. I never even told my friends. Before they caught on I had bombed the halls, the stairs, wherever. The school was seriously looking for me! But I got away with murder as a little innocent-looking white girl. Still do.

Eye One



Figure 2.8. Eye One Zapatista character, 2006. 50mm

The first time that I was drawn to graffiti was through the movies. That's pretty cliché but that's how it happened. My family used to go to catch movies in downtown on Broadway at all the old theaters. I saw "Beat Street." I used to draw since I was a little kid, but seeing that, I really connected with it. I just was blown away. Later on I found out how fake it was, but at the moment I had no idea. Until then I was always seeing gang stuff, but the gang stuff kind of turned me off. I liked how it looked but it was something mysterious, and I felt this instinct to stay away from it. Seeing all the colors on the trains in the movies I was like "Whoa! You can spray paint stuff that's more fun, more vibrant."



Figure 2.9. 125 tag, 1997. 50mm

Graffiti crossed my path around while I was a break-dancer. I saw *Beat Street* and it really influenced me. There was nobody big in the graffiti world at that time. I was staying in my little area in Highland Park and my homeboy Frosty gave me that name because that's how much I weighed at the time. I was a pretty chubby kid back in the day. Then in 1988-'89 I was in downtown with my homeboy Korse. I was bumming it, racking paint, and getting up. I always admired downtown more than any other part of Los Angeles because downtown was the shit. Back then there were very few cats that hit downtown, because very few cats weren't scared to go downtown because of the climate, the drugs, and the all the people around them late at night.

Tempt



Figure 2.10. Tempt c.1995. 50mm

I was born in South Central L.A. and moved to the eastside of L.A. in the mid '70s, so I was already well familiar with L.A. gangs when I first picked up a can in '78 and got my *placa* up. When hip hop came along, I was a lousy b-boy, but seeing *Style Wars* just naturally drew me further into writing. In 1984

I got together with my homeboy Space who lived down the street and together with Ceaz we formed SOD - Symptoms of Destruction. We mostly just caught tags on the bus or around the Eastside, but would do pieces now and then. On New Year's '85, we did our first piece at Belmont, "Nuclear Dekay." I came up with the name Tempt in '86. At that time I was into punk and hardcore, skateboarding and playing in bands. I was really into the Doors and Joy Division, and I wanted a name that reflected something dark, intangible, unknown and alluring, sorta like the music I listened to. I also liked the name because I deliberately didn't want to reflect the typical writer mentality. That is how it has always been.

Dove



Figure 2.11. Dove on freight train 1996. 50mm

Graffiti fell into my lap when I was in the 6th grade. I saw this older fool drawing and I stopped to look, and this guy looks at me and says “What,” and I’m stuck on stupid, and the next thing I remember is him saying “You’ll never be better than me.” I just walked away not saying a thing, but I remember making a conscious effort, thinking “fuck that, watch.” I think back on that now and it seems funny because I had no idea what he was talking about. I was an artist then, like drawing and shit, but I had no concept of graffiti, but I did it to show him up.

Duce



Figure 2.12. Duce with Gin 1993. 50mm

I became an artist during junior high school. I had run into a couple of guys that were from NTS. The three letters, NTS, just kind of stayed in my head. I remember seeing like a really fresh piece book with intricate lettering and coloring. And you know, that was

the first time that I ever saw anything like that besides all the gang writing in my neighborhood. I had a teacher that was, you know, my ceramics art teacher and he happened to have a copy of *Subway Art* and he loaned me that book. He saw that I liked to draw. He showed it to me and that just kind of piqued my interest. *Subway Art* was the *Bible* for me. It taught me everything: what graffiti was, what a crew was, what racking was, and you know, what the whole concept of getting up was. That’s where I learned everything initially about the whole graffiti world, or at least the concept of it.

Eskape



Figure 2.13. Eskape c.1998. 50mm

It was either gang banging, drugs, and then there was this. It kind of kept me from fucking with the real fucked up shit. Then growing up in Pico-Union you got to be something or you're just going to have a hard time. So honestly it was out of just survival. I'm not saying it's not hardcore, but it is just survival. It's like "Dude, leave me alone I'm a writer."

Feevo



Figure 2.14. Feevo, 2007. 50mm

Surrounded by gang warfare and violent crimes on the rise. I chose to pave a highway of beautiful crimes. I instantly had a passion for scrawling letters over walls especially federal owned. It gave me a rush that I could not easily explain to a normal person in this society of puppets. Other than skateboarding, the thrill of going out and destroyin' our city gave me reason to live. It made me understand why I wanted to live. It was the idea of seeking for action that build an exciting feeling inside.

Haze



Figure 2.15. Haze with Phable c. 1992. 50mm

I think graffiti was a natural progression from my skateboarding and being on the street and around the walls, in the tunnels, and in the ditches. And you just start seeing this stuff and for some reason you just start doing it. This was early, when I was twelve years old basically. I don't know about graffiti as a tightly knit subculture. I do not even really know what I was doing, I just did it. I don't even know why. I just had to write on shit. My neighborhood was so fucking boring that I had to do something to be entertained.

Hex



Figure 2.16. Hex c. 1990. 50mm

As a child I would see myriads of street demonstrations, union alley strikes, racial riots, MacArthur Park drama, and public marches where the community at large would directly get involved, but my very first experience with the art on the walls was with a full blown mural was on the Broadway Victor Clothing Co. It was a Mexican bride and groom painted in all blues by Kent Twitchell. It was amazing. I stood there with my mouth open, 5 years old, staring straight up at what looked like a 30 story painting that went up forever. I was yanked away by my mom as she walked through the lot to our bus stop terminal. I looked back almost tripping and asked her: "Quien pinto esto!!! y como?" This was it. Bringing this giant imagery and new-found potential to paint the tallest of industrial buildings back down to earth and to East and South L.A. The *Pachuco*, *cholo* lettering, drawings, figures and characters from *Q-Vo* magazine were where I began experimenting with graffiti, L.A. graffiti.

Nuke



Figure 2.17. Nuke, “This is my City,” 2011. 50mm

My big influences have to be just my folks. My dad, both my folks are grouped in the union. They are hardcore radical organizers at that time but they also made it a point for me to go to Mexico a lot when my mom would take me to the place where she was born. Back to the country next to the volcano next to what they call *Mojerdo Armida*, which is the sleeping woman and it is one of the volcanoes that is predominant there second to *Popo Katepit* and so early on I would go there and see the art and understand how it reflected the people’s lives and histories. So I continued that here in L.A. as part of the UTI crew.

Pranks



Figure 2.18. Pranks with Crae, c.1999. 50mm

Way before the Olympics in like '82 or '83. We were cutting through the alley and I see this wall like burnt. You know what I mean? Like colors and bubbles and some New York shit, some early New York shit. And I was like, “Wow.” I was amazed man. So,

ever since then... you know what I mean? That was it. That was the introduction to graffiti. It was straight up from New York City mode into South Central which translated that shit over to me. I copped it. I've seen it. I studied it. And I, you know what I mean? And I took it all from there. You know what I'm sayin'?

So, automatically, I just start absorbing this shit and studying from then on. You know what I mean? I would say you have a few options out here, not many. You know what I'm sayin'? There are only few options out there. You either you're banging, back then during the crack era of the '80s, you're slanging your rocks or that alternative that came in with the arts. You're either killing or bustin'. You know what I'm saying? So, it was either one. Pick the choice. Me, being an artist from the get, I choice the latter. You know what I'm saying? I started developing my skills. I started seeing that all the cats that I know were into graffiti. So, yo, that was the place to be. Fuck banging. You know what I'm saying? Fuck getting set. And fuck getting into trouble for some dumb shit. I'd rather get into trouble trying to cut some landmarks and getting my art up and my name known, you know what I'm sayin'?

Vyal



Figure 2.19 Vyal with Kofie and Retna c.2001. 50mm

Early on when I was a kid I would see neighborhood graffiti and stuff like that, and I saw some dudes getting out of the car and hitting up a spot in East L.A. and they were in the neighborhood, Little Valley 13. They were using spray paint to get up, and I thought that that was so sick when I

saw it because it just got me so high. Years and years later, when I started seeing that people were writing graffiti but were not belonging to any gang or any thing like that, that got me more excited. The rebellious aspect of it got me excited, and I was always into art, but then I would see color pieces going down towards Brooklyn Yard, and I would see pictures, like friends of mine had pictures of stuff. Once I saw a subway it was over. I wanted to do that. I was into like death metal and doom and shit, so for me graffiti was a way to express that side of me.

Eklips



Figure 2.20. Eklips piece c. 1993. 50mm

I got into graffiti in the pretty well-off West Los Angeles neighborhood I grow up in. It was skating, BMX'ing, breaking and then graffiti. I wasn't sure about the larger community or sub-culture because I was stuck in this pristine area, but I think most of the things my friends and I did were different then the regular stuff kids do. Graffiti was one of those things that set me apart I guess.

Swan



Figure 2.21. Swan 2003. 50mm

I used to write my name, which is David, but I used to use like the stoner letters, like straight letters, like Kiss letters. I was tagging buses and stuff after I saw this graffiti stuff that was not just gang related like in Mid-City where I lived. A lot of people get it confused, because, even on the East Coast, a lot of the kids that were always involved with graffiti weren't really into hip hop. I believe the graffiti art culture really came from punk rock and everything that surrounded all that. Cause we're just kind of like "runner kids." Basically, to me, the graffiti art guys that were doing it were, like, outcasts, just didn't fit in. We were the kind of like the kids who were like, "Hey let's do our own thing." And I'm just out here bombing on that. I lived in a group home and writing my name made me less of an outcaste with the other outcastes at least.

Axis



Figure 2.22. “CBS” in Melrose Alley by Axis, 2005. 50mm

When I first moved to America from London, we lived in a project out in San Bernadino just for like two years and I remember I would see these gang blocks, by gangs called Mount Vernon and Meadowbrook. This was in the ‘70s, but I remember it was a “MB” and I didn’t know nothing about gangs and shit, I was from fucking England dude. So I used to write that shit on my pee-chee folder. I would write MB and Mount Vernon—two rival gangs on my pee-chee.

Then when we moved to L.A. in ‘81, ‘82, I was out-and-about, my mom to this day doesn’t have a car, can’t drive a car, won’t ever drive a car, so anywhere we went was on a bus. Well, at that time, like shit, I was maybe 12, right. I started getting embarrassed sitting in the front of the bus with my mom and my twin sister. So I’m like “Fuck this,” like I got to sit in the back. And I remember my mom, or “mum” I used to say, she would be like “Don’t sit back there. There’s crazy people, drunk people.” And I’m like, “No!” I would run. I would walk ahead of her and just run back there. What’s she gonna do, come get me? So I kick it back there, and this is like maybe ‘84, ‘85, something like that. And I started seeing tags, I started seeing like legitimate just crazy colorful shit, and I had seen gang graffiti and stuff like that, but I’d never really seen anything like this, and I was already drawing when I was a kid, so I was really drawn into it. I was really pulled in, sucked into it. And then I started seeing more names, more and more, certain people: Minor, Triax, Wisk. I would start seeing the same shit all the time, and I’d be like “Whoa man, this shit’s fucking cool. I got to get on this shit,” you know.

Unit



Figure 2.23. Unit (left) on the Toluca Station outside the Belmont tunnel, c. 2002. 50mm

Graffiti fell on my lap because of my friend Jest. He was a childhood friend of mine. We were actually skaters, we used to just tag on different skate spots. Our little crew was called HSO for Hollywood Skate Organization. At that point I didn't know anything about the graffiti culture. I just kind of learned as I went and eventually started running into other writers.

Each of the writers included above made their mark on the graffiti scene as well as the city between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. This was a period of time when graffiti in L.A. was transitioning from being produced by members of a tight-knit community influenced by the hip hop culture, to a large community of brazen street bombers — prolific graffiti writers—whose work would come to be associated with gang activity. The difference between hip hop graffiti and gang writing was a matter of differing tactics, motivations, and influences, but it was also a matter of geography.

Mostly affluent westside L.A. teenagers became inspired early on by the hip hop and break dancing scenes on the East Coast. Although modern urban-based graffiti predates hip hop by over a decade, graffiti was included as part of what was considered general hip hop culture. Westside teenagers, many of whom had been members of the Venice and Santa Monica Beach skate and surf scenes began producing elaborate graffiti pieces and tagging in black books—artist sketch books and portfolios used by graffiti

writers—and promoting the graffiti subculture through art, music, fashion, and dance. Much of their graffiti and activities, however, were done in washes, on walls in empty lots, along train tracks, in private backyards, and in empty swimming pools where skaters practiced their tricks (Peralta, 2001).

Across town in the barrios of the Eastside, young, mostly men, were incorporating traditional gang aesthetics and methods of high-profile placement with the hip hop sensibility¹⁶ in terms of motivation and purpose. By the time the Olympic Games arrived in L.A. in the summer of 1984, Eastside graffiti writers were taking their gang-influenced tagging to the streets of L.A. by way of public transit, while Westside graffiti artists were producing traditional New York-style pieces along freeway routes. Although different in terms of race and class, both groups were looking, and painstakingly working, to gain widespread recognition and respect in a sprawling, alienating, and socially divided city.

By the late 1980s tags and pieces by the first generation of prolific “all city” L.A. bombers such as Wisk, Risk, Rage, Sleez, Chaka, Geso, Triax, Gin, Duce, and Skate incorporated both the Eastside and Westside styles.¹⁷ They possessed as much of a gang-writing style as a hip hop flair. Because L.A. contained a freeway system and an extensive gridded boulevard system instead of a subway system, bombers looked to street infrastructure and freeway signs on which to do graffiti just as writers in New York looked to the subway cars to produce their work. But instead of producing traditional

¹⁶ A “hip hop sensibility” is one’s proclivity for music, fashion, and forms of dance and art that subscribe to the particulars of an “urban”—inner-city, street-based—aesthetic developed primarily in New York City during the early 1980s. In terms of hip hop graffiti in particular, there is an expressed desire to elevate street writing so that it can be perceived as positive, purposeful, and driven by one’s desire for notoriety and respect in the community.

¹⁷ “All city” is the act of writing one’s name across many districts and neighborhoods throughout an entire city. Achieving all city recognition earns a graffiti writer “bomber” status.

pieces, these bombers were producing burners that shared the shape of traditional gang letters—or *placas*—but utilized the color schemes of New York City subway graffiti.¹⁸

By the early 1990s, the L.A. graffiti scene was in full swing and the L.A. graffiti aesthetic of legible large-scale lettering styles became a global standard that began to appear in Mexico City, France, London, and in the recently reunified Berlin.

Furthermore, it was out of L.A. that the first graffiti websites www.50mmlosangeles.com and www.artcrimes.com launched in 1996 and 1994 respectively. These websites replaced graffiti ‘zines such as *Ghetto Art* and *Can Control*, showcasing L.A.’s style of writing, piecing, and bombing to graffiti writers around the world. It was also during this time that the destruction of the freeway murals in L.A. took place: a significant point in the history of muralism in L.A., which I discuss at length in the next chapter. Before moving on to a discussion of murals and the battle for wall space that took place in L.A., I will provide some clarification about a hitherto largely misunderstood subcultural practice and aesthetic.

What is graffiti?

By graffiti I mean the systematically produced, stylized markings of monikers, images, and symbols written on infrastructure by self-acknowledged members of the graffiti community with implements such as markers and spray paint. Graffiti adheres to the conventions for style, form, and placement established by the socially cohesive, though geographically dispersed, graffiti community. The stylistic conventions for graffiti are in contrast to individual, political, and profane writings and markings on public and private spaces. The stylistic conventions for lettering and color, and social mores regarding placement, are well-defined despite ongoing innovation in terms of graffiti writers’ use of typography, technique, and deployment.

In terms of intent, the motivations for doing graffiti vary between a quest for fame and adventure, to a concern for artistic expression, to territorial demarcation and

¹⁸ A “burner” is typically a skillfully produced, colorful, intricately lettered graffiti piece with complete backgrounds, characters, and a general theme. On the west coast a burner also refers to large letters that are filled in with a drop shadow, filling an entire wall.

competition. The inspiration for producing graffiti also often blurs the boundaries with profit-motivated commercial art or design. For example, some graffiti plays a dual role, as fame as well as profit are the motivations for producing images in public space as it does for The Seventh Letter Crew—a prolific graffiti crew whose members own and produce a clothing line. Graffiti is also the medium of expression used by those with an explicitly political message. For example, self-proclaimed “guerrilla artist” Robbie Conal’s political postering is done both for the sake of artistic expression and political statement (Conal, 1992, 2003). Street artist and graphic designer Shepard Fairey’s profitable and political “Obey Giant” sticker, stencil, and poster campaign exemplifies each of these motivations as it is equally part of his “study in phenomenology” and attempted “urban interventionism,” as well as tied to his merchandising of Obey clothing, political and pop-art screen-prints, and books (Fairey, 2006, 2008, 2010).

In addition to engaging in a nation-wide illegal postering of public space campaign, in 2009 Fairey was named one of *GQ Magazine*’s “men of the year” for his screen-printed image of Barack Obama placed above the word “Hope.” The print, which started out as illegal wheatpastings¹⁹ placed in and around the Echo Park neighborhood showing early support for Obama’s candidacy, went on to become the unofficial and widely used image of the Obama presidential campaign. In addition to appearing on infrastructure across the U.S., it even appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* to mark President Obama as “Person of the Year” in 2008.

¹⁹ A wheatpasting is a poster or illustration affixed to a surface with a glue-like paste made from a mixture of wheat and water.



Figures 2.24. Shepard Fairey’s Hope and Obey images.

In the case of painting graffiti on sanctioned walls, payment may be exchanged for the production of graffiti pieces and murals, but the motivation for soliciting permission from shop owners or the city must first and foremost be for the sake of producing graffiti or graffiti art, not for profit. The systematic placement of graffiti on infrastructure is important to a writer as part of garnering recognition and fame from the graffiti community as well as from the general public. Writing on freeway bridges, high on telephone poles, on frontal rooftops, or on curbs along freeway exits provides mass exposure as well as added recognition for “hitting” daredevil “spots” (Bloch, 2000, 2005; Ferrell and Weide, 2010). When graffiti is written on street-level walls and easily accessible infrastructure, fame and recognition is gained by producing large-scale, and therefore risky in terms of getting caught, “throw-ups” and “burners.” On legal walls the same recognition can be gained by producing innovative letter styles and characters in addition to producing a “clean” piece. But in general, “getting up” in as many spots as possible is the primary source of respect, fame and adventure. The more one’s name or “work” is seen—typically in the form of a “tag” or “throw-up” which are the most basic and most practiced forms of graffiti—the greater the reputation of the writer.

Spatial conventions for how graffiti is framed on telephone poles, curbs, or the back of a freeway signs distinguishes systematic graffiti from spontaneous and sporadic wall writing practiced by sports fans, protestors, kids, homeless men, or gang members. I include legal pieces and sanctioned large-scale wall productions, as well as the so-called “post-graffiti” (Cresswell, 1992; Dickens, 2007, 2008) practices of stenciling, stickering, and wheatpasting as graffiti as long as it is placed on infrastructure and the primary motivation is to acquire fame and respect from either other members of the graffiti community or from the public at large. While graffiti placed in galleries, produced on canvas, t-shirts, or used in advertising replicates graffiti style, is not graffiti as I define it here.

As opposed to graffiti, the term post-graffiti describes stencils, stickers, and posters, as well as art galley pieces and consumable products adorned with graffiti-style images, that may or may not be illegally placed in public space, and are produced using a diversity of media for a number of personal and artistic reasons. The most well-known piece of post-graffiti was a mock replica of stone-age “wall art” illegally hung in the British Museum by the internationally-known and notorious street artists Banksy. As geographer Luke Dickens (2008) discusses, the piece of post-graffiti entitled Peckum Rock hung in the museum undetected for several days in 2005. It depicts an early representation of a human hunter pushing a modern day shopping cart toward a speared mammoth.

As Dickens (2008) shows in his discussion of the placement of post-graffiti and the rock’s journey, this new breed of “graffiti” is controversial in terms of its practice as well as in the use of the appellation “post-graffiti.” Despite purportedly sharing the same public space of the streets (McAuliffe and Iveson, 2011, 137), post-graffiti possesses few of the defining characters of graffiti. I see the terms and practices of “street art” and “post-graffiti” as acquiescing, if not contributing, to the intolerance and criminalization of traditional graffiti as people come to interpret “real” graffiti as unrestrained, and therefore threatening.

The prefix “post” suggests that “graffiti” is in fact an outdated and unwanted urban aesthetic and spatial practice that has been appropriately replaced by a new form of

more controllable, containable, and perhaps aesthetically pleasing urban street art. Post-graffiti and street art conform to the norms of advertising, traditional art, and graphic design in terms of its aesthetic, potential for profitability, placement, motivation, and the implements and mediums used to produce it. As Heitor Alvelos (2004) writes, “graffiti as an advertising medium is primarily *advertising*, and thus reinforces the late capitalist status quo” (emphasis in original, 201). Tristin Manco (2004), author of *Street Logos*, has called post-graffiti “a revolt against generic styles” of graffiti. He asserts that the traditional graffiti “tag” is being replaced by the street logo—an argument that goes back to the controversial gallerization of graffiti in the 1980s.

After the prefix “post” was applied to graffiti in 1983 when the Janis gallery in New York hosted its post-graffiti art show, writers such as Futura 2000 lamented the loss of graffiti’s sub- and countercultural status as result of the sudden fame and superficial interest in graffiti exhibitions (Cooper, 2004). It became fashionable to point out graffiti’s cooptation on one hand, and to distinguish “graffiti as art” from “graffiti as vandalism,” on the other. Most people still perpetuate this false distinction and dualism when discussing graffiti. Typically post-graffiti is applied to that which is perceived as the most aesthetically pleasing and appropriately—read “legally”—placed forms of street art. But as Luke Dickens (2008, 473) points out, the use of post-graffiti may be more open than this. As he puts it, post-graffiti may be less about announcing the death of “real graffiti” than it is about indicating the increasingly diverse and complex graffiti subculture. Regardless of this more open use of the term, some street artists and graffiti writers remain ambivalent about its usage, whereas others are loath to use the term at all.

A recent exhibit at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art tracing the history of American graffiti reignited the graffiti/post-graffiti debate. The hugely popular exhibition entitled “Art in the Streets” showcased work by some of the most prolific graffiti writers and street artists side by side. However, since the exhibition was located indoors and was sanctioned, even the showcased “real” graffiti can be interpreted as part of the post-graffiti assemblage. Nearing the completion of this dissertation I asked long-time L.A. bomber and prolific street artist Yem One what he thought about the exhibit. After pointing out that he had not been invited to showcase his work in the exhibit despite

his legendary status in the graffiti and street art communities, he replied simply, “graffiti is a monster that can’t be caged. Once you cage it it becomes a bunny rabbit. And bunny rabbits multiply and are eventually only sold at pet stores” (personal interview, Yem, 2011).

Also notably absent from the “Art in the Streets” show were streets artists who rose to fame before the term could be used to categorize their work. Such a distinction applies most accurately to the street artist The Phantom whose ghostly outlines and political statements could be seen for decades on walls around Los Angeles and eventually on the cover of Rage Against the Machine’s album “Battle for Los Angeles” in 1999 (Figure 2.26).

Although the distinction between post-graffiti and traditional graffiti is largely a matter of the artist’s motivation, the materials he or she uses, and the final aesthetic of the piece, I see the distinction as being above all about the site of production—street versus studio—and the space of exhibition—*in* a galley, museum, or shop versus *on* public and private infrastructure. Graffiti as I define it also relies on the acknowledgement of place-specificity as it applies to public art theorist Lucy Lippard’s (1997, 263) definition of public art—that is, art that exists in the daily environment, outside of the confines of conventional art venues, and reveals ““new depths of a place.””



Figure 2.25. Obey wheatpaste collage with graffiti artist Saber in Echo Park, 2008.
Photo by Mark Mauer.



Figure 2.26. "Lost Angeles" by The Phantom, 1987.
Courtesy of the Herald-Examiner Collection / Los Angeles Public Library.

Another local graffiti writer/artist not included in the “Art in the Streets” exhibition—what the *L.A. Weekly* called “the biggest ever street art show and landmark retrospective of graffiti” (Leopold, 2011)—was Eye One. Before painting his graffiti-murals on the Sunset walls, which I discuss in chapter 6, Eye One was best known in the graffiti community for self-publishing the local graffiti ‘zine *LOST*.

Eye One, Seeking Heaven

LOST is uncharacteristic of most other graffiti ‘zines in terms of its production quality, size, and the regularity of publication given Eye One’s access to printing equipment and materials through his position as a graphic designer working for the City of Los Angeles.²⁰ The ‘zine showcases active and prolific graffiti writers with full-color multi-page spreads, pages of social and political commentary, a section of photography, sketches, and innovative computer-generated letter designs, all printed on heavy stock paper and spiral bound. Eye sells his ‘zines at local skate shops, bookstores, through his website, and by direct sale at graffiti art shows and gallery openings around Los Angeles.

Being active in the graffiti community both on and off the wall is typical of many graffiti writers, but has been a trademark of Eye One’s crew, SH (“Seeking Heaven”), since the early 1990s. Starting in 1989, SH, consisting of 15 graffiti writers/artists, was among the first graffiti crews in Los Angeles to begin hosting art shows and to establish a website as a way of expanding its artistic reach. This diversity of activities and platforms for showcasing art has since become standard in the global graffiti scene. Along with other multi-dimensional graffiti crews in Berlin, Melbourne, Cape Town, Tokyo, and Rio de Janeiro, SH earned a section representing Los Angeles in Nicholas Ganz’s (2004) *Graffiti World: street art from five continents*. Given the popularity of the global graffiti and street-art scenes, Ganz’s coffee table-style book has a large international readership

²⁰ See Austin, 2001 for a discussion of graffiti ‘zines. See Snyder, 2006 for a discussion of graffiti magazines as promoters of the subculture. Keeping up with media innovation, see Griffiths, Light, and Lincoln’s (2012) discussion of the role of social media and youtbue.com in promoting graffiti.

and is sold everywhere from museum gift shops to trendy clothing stores such as Urban Outfitters.

As part of their goal to professionalize the graffiti scene without “selling out” or loose control of their own work, SH recently celebrated its 20th anniversary with an art show and installation for which Eye was one of the main curators. SH has been able to maintain control over their shows and reap most of the profits from the sale of their art pieces by dealing with galleries that specialize in graffiti and street art and by hosting art parties without help from outside promoters, curators, or mainstream gallery owners. As McAuliffe and Iveson (2011, 135) contend, “‘keep it real’... it’s hard to over-state the centrality of this phrase. In the face of the rampant commercialisation of culture, ‘keep it real’ is an incitement not to ‘sell out’ the culture for a quick buck.” However, since SH has produced art for sale in addition to producing legal and illegal street art, their reach and notoriety have expanded, but without sacrificing either street credibility within the graffiti community or respect in the local art scene. Their relative independence has even contributed to the success of galleries such as graffiti artist Man One’s CrewWest Gallery in the downtown L.A. Arts District.

As Man One said during a crowded downtown L.A. art crawl in 2009, “when we opened a few years ago there were 13 struggling galleries in the neighborhood. There are now 48 and we are one of the most popular, with people from all over the world coming in to check out our shows” (personal interview, 2009). As we talked I saw several people in the crowded gallery wearing t-shirts with graffiti-style lettering and holding signed prints by still-active graffiti writers such as SH crew members Panic, Asyln, and Size. “Selling out” or being co-opted is not a concern for these graffiti writers who, like Eye One, publish their own ‘zines, design and print their own shirts, and curate their own shows.

With the cooperation of gallery owners like Man One, members of SH feel that they are making the graffiti art scene work for them, as opposed to working in and for an already established art world. This is possible with personal websites, shared gallery spaces, as well as the notoriety and fame generated by doing illegal graffiti on the streets. Given the ways in which they control the making and distribution of their own work, the

term “post-graffiti” does not so neatly apply. As Panic, a long-time member of SH, put it, “as a graff writer my goal is to get up and make a life out of my graffiti, legal or not, and whether or not I am getting paid. So I’ll hit t-shirts, walls, skate decks, whatever” (personal interview, 2007).

Unlike self-identified “street artists” who hypothesize that “the classic practice of graffiti and tags has been replaced” (Dickens, 8), Panic and other SH members do not see their gallery shows as a replacement for, or incommensurate with, traditional graffiti aesthetics and practices. Furthermore, SH does not seem to be, nor do they see themselves as, a “vulnerable underground scene” pushed off the streets and into galleries by stringent anti-graffiti policies, nor do they see themselves as susceptible to the “fickle art world’s attention and money” (Dickens, 6). Rather, members of SH still consider themselves traditional street graffiti writers, but with an expanded and sometimes profitable repertoire.



Figure 2.27. Flowers in spray can by Eye One.
Courtesy Eye One.

SH are not alone in their perspective or activities. Since the 1990s many graffiti writer/artists have maintained a double identity in the art world and on the streets. Mear One, whose contribution to the Sunset wall I discuss in chapter 6, was among the first to garner as much attention for his commercial and fine art as for his street writing and piecing. With commissions throughout the 1990s to paint legal murals, produce album covers, and design clothing logos, Mear added to his already legendary status in the graffiti scene. In an interview published in *Find Art Magazine* (Adamson and Fellowes, 2010), graffiti writer, artist, and muralist Mear One reflects on the notion of selling out, saying:

Graffiti art is all about Hustling! I'm from a hustling state-of-mind where you're not privileged. You don't have doctor or lawyer parents to support you; you're from a blue collar or welfare background. So I think that the point of doing it was never to make money, although you have to eat and survive, so you have to get creative about selling your work and representing yourself.

You have to find a way to fit into the picture and be creative with it. I've never created art for money; I create art for my feelings and my life. And I know that its good art and someone will like it. Although I don't believe in capitalism, I'm not anti-materialist either. I don't mind selling my work, hustling my work and showing my work at art shows. I like that reality.

Creating street art means that you don't necessarily have to subscribe to the whole system or go about things in the same ways that other people do. I think that's also part of it – finding a unique way of coexisting in this crazy scene.

More recently members of the Seventh Letter Crew, including Revok whose work is showcased in the “Art in the Streets” show at the MOCA have profited from a successful clothing line, the publication of coffee table graffiti art books (Grody, 2006; Gastman, 2007), sponsorship by European spray paint makers Belton and Montana, and have been commissioned to do numerous design and advertising jobs including the *L.A. Weekly*'s recent “Speak Freely” ad campaign.



Figure 2.28. *L.A. Weekly* newsstand with “Speak Freely” placard by Revok, 2007.



Figure 2.29. Illegal Revok rooftop burner near downtown Los Angeles, 2008.



Figure 2.30. Revok throw-up over anti-graffiti mural, Mid-City, L.A., 2008.

While examples of graffiti writers crossing over into the legitimate and profitable art world are numerous and well known (Snyder, 2009), there is a misconception that mainstream acceptance and success signifies a “turning point,” part of an “evolution” or the end of a graffiti writer’s illegal wall writing career. While some graffiti writers have retired from doing graffiti as part of pursuing a fine- or commercial art career, many other graffiti artists, like Revok, combine success in the art world with illegal writing and unsanctioned art productions. Barry McGee—Twist—has since his prolific career as a San Francisco writer throughout the 1990s gone on to hold one-person shows at reputable art institutions all over the world, with a recent showing in the 2009-2010 Biennale de Lyon in France. Yet new Twist tags are not uncommon on the street in cities where McGee is showing his latest works.

Like McGee, Mear One has not stopped tagging walls even after being invited to showcase his work at the Museum of Contemporary Art and being featured in a live art performance at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in addition to other mainstream art venues. In 2009 Revok made international headlines when he was arrested while boarding a flight back home to L.A. after his illegal bombing spree in Victoria, Australia (<http://vimeo.com/7388068>, last accessed August 2011). Revok was in the country for “Clash of the Titans”—a sanctioned international graffiti show.

In 2006 London-based street artist Banksy hit a series of walls and billboards in Echo Park the very night he is reported to have pulled in over \$1m from the sale of his prints, paintings, and stencils in a sanctioned solo show in Downtown L.A. that included a fully painted live elephant (Wyatt, 2006). While these cases are extreme, the same double life as vandal and artist is a reality for local writers such as Eye One who have smaller art followings. What is clear is that success in the art world does not limit a graffiti writer’s ability, opportunity, or desire to write illegally.

The notion that maturity, success, and illegal wall writing are incompatible is still prevalent even among those who are sympathetic to graffiti. In his *Graffiti Lives*, Gregory Snyder (2009, 44) borrows a term from the field of cultural criminology, arguing that graffiti writers follow a “life course.” The fact that they eventually desist from committing “petty crimes like binge drinking, illicit drug use, and shoplifting is indeed,

along with finding a job, a marker of adulthood” (ibid.). He writes that graffiti writers will “moderate their deviance as they approach adulthood even though success [in the legitimate worlds of art, advertising, design, etc.] is directly dependent upon their participation in an illegal subculture” (ibid.). But just as there is no data that shows that graffiti is a “gateway” crime, or that it can accurately be conflated with other forms of deviance or criminal activity, there is likewise no data that shows a typical “life course” for graffiti writers.



Figure 2.31. “If graffiti changed anything it would be illegal,” Banksy.

Literature on Graffiti: Academic Approaches to Analyzing Graffiti

There is an extensive literature on graffiti available for popular consumption. Books on graffiti range from classic photojournalistic exposés of the graffiti subculture (Mailer, 1974; Cooper and Chalfant, 1984; Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987; Naar, 2007), to biographies, autobiographies, and collections of interviews and reflections by graffiti writers themselves (Powers, 1999; Witten and White, 2001; Gastman, 2007; Alva and Reiling, 2006, forthcoming). In addition to the myriad locally published ‘zines and photo books, over the past few years there has been an influx of high quality mass-market coffee-table books coming mainly out of the U.S. as well as England, France, Germany, Japan, Australia, and Brazil that document traditional graffiti, street art, and post-graffiti.²¹

In many of these works, including much of the English-language graffiti filmography (Silver, 1983; Tschinkel, 1986; Bryan, 1995; Hansen, 2005; Pray, 2005; Hill, 2006; Reiss, 2007; Good, 2011) graffiti is loosely understood first as a particular “urban” or “hip hop” style of writing, and second, as any repeated unsanctioned marking on infrastructure that possesses what is understood as an aesthetic of stylized writing. Ultimately, I argue that it is the spatial context in which graffiti is placed—not merely the graffiti aesthetic—that influences how people identify it, perceive it, accept it, and how it gets defined. As I argued above, within the graffiti community there are those who employ the graffiti aesthetic as part of legal design work, and those who produce the graffiti aesthetic as part of producing illegal, personalized tags, pieces, and characters. By adhering to a narrower definition of what constitutes graffiti, I am able to focus on a particular type of graffiti to analyze how business owners’, residents’, and local government agencies’ perceptions of graffiti have changed over time and in different socio-economic contexts.

²¹ See for example: Gastman, 2001; Manco, 2002, 2004; Labonté, 2003; Hundertmark, 2003, 2006; Ganz, 2004; Banksy, 2005a, 2005b; Zimmermann, 2005; Camerota, Gastman and Teri, 2006; Ganz and Macdonald, 2006; Gastman, Rowland, and Slatter, 2006; Grody, 2006; MacNaughton, 2006; Mangler, 2006; Dew, 2007; Gastman, 2007; Mariduna, 2007; Sanada, 2007; Albin and Kamler, 2008; Grevy, 2008; Murray and Murray, 2009; Gastman and Neelon, 2011; Deitch, Gastman, Rose, 2011.

In the academic literature graffiti has been interpreted and discussed from one of five major perspectives. Scholars in the social sciences in particular traditionally focus on graffiti in terms of, and in the context of, criminality, identity, territoriality, textuality, and performativity. Very recently however, scholars have focused on the wars waged on graffiti (Iveson, 2010; Young, 2010) in addition to the social and cultural politics of its erasure (Halsey and Pederick, 2010; Moreau and Alderman, 2011; Rowe and Hutton, 2012).

Scholars in policy studies and the sociology of urban youth cultures typically focus on graffiti as a criminal act committed against authoritative forms of social control. Scholars look at anti-graffiti policies and hostile public perception in addition to motivations behind urban rebellion and social anarchy as the primary data for such studies. In traditional sociology and anthropology the focus is on the inner workings of the graffiti subculture and graffiti as a particular form of representation and expression for disenfranchised urban youth cultures. The social aims, drives, and perspectives of its members are documented through analyses of personal observation, film, and photojournalism. In geography, the focus is on the ways in which graffiti writers demarcate territory as well as move through space signaling individual status with the use of widespread personalized tags.

During the 1980s and early 1990s graffiti was also discussed as a form of writing comparable in terms of placement and motivation to other forms of inscriptions on urban space such as advertising. Richard Lachman (1988) distinguishes graffiti from traditional wall inscriptions in the form of advertising, saying “[taggers] purchase space with their boldness and style rather than with money.” Susan Stewart (1987), on the other hand, does not note such a distinction between graffiti and advertising. According to Stewart, graffiti borrows from advertising in terms of tactics, placement, and the goal of the message—to brand a name. However, she also sees graffiti’s ability to socially subvert advertising’s goal to promote false individuality. Graffiti, then, is both emulative as well as subversive of advertising.

These discussions indicate another approach, that of performativity. Sociologist Anne Cronin (2006) writes that analyzing graffiti as a signifying system, as Stewart does,

demonstrates that graffiti writing is “fluent and pervasive, and raises important points about textuality and inscription” of and on the urban landscape (4). But she warns that scholars should not assume that graffiti writers’ intentions are so ambiguous as to simply interpret their actions and markings as little more than interpretive text. She cites Australian social-criminologists Mark Halsey and Alison Young (2002) who write that graffiti writers possess a range of different motivations for doing graffiti. Therefore, interpreting their writings from a textual or semiotic perspective may oversimplify graffiti. Furthermore, even advertising cannot be “read” only in terms of its overt message, but should be interpreted and analyzed in social and spatial context.

According to Sonja Neef (2007), interpreting graffiti as a form of text or semiotic device reduces graffiti to what Jean Baudrillard calls the “empty signifier” (1976, 80). In his seminal chapter on graffiti, Baudrillard writes that “graffiti has no content and no message: this emptiness gives it strength” in the context of a homogenizing postmodern city (*ibid.*). He makes such a claim as a way of showing graffiti’s power to “function against the symbolic order... of the city’s ‘official’ semiotics” (*ibid.*). But Neef challenges this claim on the grounds that such a model reduces graffiti’s power to, in Cronin’s (2006) words, stand as a form of subversion and as “an ideal, and aesthetic, and a potential” (9). Instead, Neef, relying on the work of cultural theorist Mieke Bal (1996), writes that we should not discuss graffiti as symbolically active or inactive, but as literally performative, akin to a ‘speech act’” (418).

Public policy writings tend to focus on best practices for graffiti abatement, youth programs to curb vandalism, and tactics—such as the painting of civic murals (Craw, et al., 2006, Taylor and Marais, 2009)—employed to ameliorate the effects and proliferation of illegal graffiti. On the other hand, others tend to romanticize graffiti as a rebellious but otherwise innocuous form of cultural expression and reaction to social control and criminalization (White, 2001; Halsey and Young, 2006). This approach has the counterintuitive effect of reducing the importance of graffiti as a social and spatial act of import. In these literatures, the issue of territorial demarcation is treated merely as an epiphenomena of contestation and transgression, therefore, the graffiti writer is seen as contesting authoritative spatial and aesthetic codes regardless of whether or not defiance

is intended. However, cultural Criminologist Jeff Ferrell (1996) argues that perhaps all acts of deviance such as vandalism signifies an act of “politically conscious resistance” (172).

Ferrell defends graffiti against aggressive anti-graffiti policies and hostile public perception by referring to it as a “crime of style” and an act of creative criminal activity and “urban anarchy.” Graffiti is a “crime of style” (166) in that it is the aesthetic of graffiti, not the physical act or intent, that is seen as criminal. Therefore, graffiti possesses the aesthetic of criminality and deviance as defined by politicians and property owners for whom all deviation from order is seen as “ugly” (178). He also sees the complex social networks and graffiti writers’ often-illicit lifestyles as part of a larger culture of resistance and counter-cultural behavior in the face of mainstream dominance.

Like Ferrell, Joe Austin (2001) addresses the social and political construction behind the criminalization of graffiti. He argues that the public’s hostility toward graffiti is actually a reaction to what is believed to accompany its appearance: a loss of control, social and economic decline, rebellion, and violence. But whereas Ferrell explores the intricacies of how graffiti writers develop their identity as part of their rebellion, Austin focuses on how law enforcement and public officials manufactured a fear of graffiti and a culture of criminalization during the 1980s and ‘90s—in effect redefining graffiti as deviant and malicious as part of the city’s crack down against writing on the New York City subway trains and as part of public policy informed by the Broken Windows theory.

Similar to sociological approaches to urban behavior, but with the necessary spatial component added, scholars have also discussed how members of urban subcultures such as youth gangs (Skelton and Valentine, 1998), skateboarders (Borden, 2001), and critical mass bike riders (Ferrell, 2001) occupy public space and reinterpret and re-use infrastructure. Furthermore, personal and group identity is produced and practiced as part of establishing a place within a subculture. Often the subculture enforces masculine understandings of identity and gender roles, as Iain Borden (2001) shows among skateboarders and Linda MacDonald (2001) shows among British graffiti writers.

MacDonald (2001) argues that in the American context graffiti is seen as a basic social drive and young urban men’s right of passage. While she interprets the placement

and style of graffiti as masculinist—writing on top of and larger than other writers—she, relying on the work of Greg Castleman (1984), says that the graffiti writer’s primary stated goal is to “get up” and “get respect.” Doing graffiti, for MacDonald, constructs adolescent male identity as she sees the basic motivation for all aspects of graffiti as bound up in the construction of masculine social status and competition. Like Castleman (1984) who conducted his fieldwork in the early years of the graffiti movement when it was more homogeneous in terms of gender, Macdonald neglects women’s formative role in the graffiti subculture despite major contributions by female writers such as Lady Pink in New York (Cooper and Chalfant, 1984), Miss Van in Paris, and Tribe (Bryan, 1995, Reiss, 2007) and Chalk (Alva and Reiling, forthcoming) in Los Angeles—each of which are well-known and respected within the graffiti community.

Castleman’s (1984) classic study focuses on the social makeup of the graffiti community, its tools of the trade, and the lexicon it employs. Through his academic fieldwork within the graffiti community, Castleman makes a strong argument for recognizing contemporary graffiti as an intricately coded system of tagging and piecing. He writes, “getting up... is dependant on [graffiti writers] writing their names prolifically... [and is] one of the more significant factors differentiating New York’s subway writers from the creators of traditional forms of wall writing” (19). While Castleman is right to distinguish modern urban graffiti from singular and traditional wall markings, he does not interpret those who “get up” as being concerned with aesthetic quality, spatial norms, or stylistic rules adhered to by others in the graffiti community. For Castleman graffiti writers are primarily concerned with establishing identity and gaining notoriety by any means necessary.

Within geography, Ley and Cybriwsky (1974) were the first to note the importance of territory and infrastructure in their study of urban graffiti. They distinguish urban graffiti produced as a form of territorial marking from earlier forms of desultory wall markings. By mapping and analyzing one neighborhood in Philadelphia, Ley and Cybriwsky were able to distinguish gang graffiti used to demarcate a particular block to visibly deter outsiders from entering from graffiti used by an individual to make a name for himself—such the “graffiti king” Cornbread. While Ley and Cybriwsky interpret

graffiti as epiphenomenal of urban exclusion and socio-economic alienation, their attention to space and place was a new perspective that would later be elaborated on by many scholars including anthropologist Susan Phillips (1999).

Phillips (1999) analyzes the social and racial composition of street gangs in an effort to decode L.A. graffiti. Her work is contextualized within Los Angeles' most impoverished, violent, and segregated neighborhoods where graffiti is one of the few mediums of local representation and expression. As Phillips shows, producing graffiti is part of redefining social space and making claims on territory. She also examines how racial and personal identity is asserted in an otherwise hostile urban environment, showing how graffiti acts as a boundary-marker between rival gangs, and as an indication of race that is evident in particular writing styles, the color of paint used, and the painted images constructed.

When addressing non-gang graffiti, or what Ley and Cybriwsky (1974) call "loner graffiti," Phillips again discusses how spatial context is crucial for understanding how and why graffiti writers write in industrial districts to avoid confrontation, and on freeways where fame can be gained through high exposure (also see Ferrel and Weide's 2010 discussion of "spot theory"). But unlike gang graffiti that is used to establish place identity and distinction, Phillips argues that "loner" and "hip hop" graffiti writers embrace risk, challenge, and visibility as they seek out and embrace an antagonistic relationship to mainstream society. Part of their drive for fame and recognition from the graffiti community for the value of their work is dependant on ubiquity, illegality, and as Ferrell (1993, 311) similarly points out in more explicitly political terms, maintaining an "antirelationship to society."

Framing Graffiti as Social and Spatial

In addition to Phillips, most influential to my own scholarly approach to understanding graffiti have been Tim Cresswell's (1992, 1996) discussion of graffiti as an act of spatial transgression, Jeff Ferrell's (1993) discussion of graffiti as a form of urban anarchy and as a "crime of style," Joe Austin's (2001) study of graffiti in the context of anti-graffiti policy making, and Iain's Borden's (2001) comments about how

graffiti writers reinterpret and “perform architecture” and utilitarian infrastructure. Each of these contributes directly to my theoretical framework as each of these scholars combines notions of identity, criminality, and territoriality with concepts of social and spatial control and justice.

Joe Austin (2001) discusses the drastic and often belligerent measures taken by the New York City Policy Department under the auspices of the Koch and Giuliani mayoral administrations during the 1980s and 1990s to eradicate the graffiti “epidemic.” As part of the socio-political and cultural constructions used in the criminalization of graffiti, it is Austin’s contention that the public’s hostility toward graffiti is actually a reaction to what is believed to accompany its appearance—that is, a loss of control, social decline, rebellion, and violence. He focuses on how law enforcement and public officials manufactured a fear of graffiti and perpetuated a culture of criminalization during this time, thus redefining graffiti as a deviant and malicious act. This attack on graffiti writers and the removal of graffiti from public space was part of the well-documented economic restructuring that was taking place in New York City at the time. The restructuring in New York resulted, most famously, in the implementation of the Broken Windows theory as policy (Austin, 2001), the “Disneyfication” of Times Square (Zukin, 1991), and the gentrification of the Lower East Side (Mele, 2001).

An under-acknowledged part of this restructuring process were the actions taken by local governments and law enforcement in response to “daredevil graffiti”—brazen acts of graffiti in which writers face great risk in climbing on precipitous spots in an effort to have their work seen by a wide audience (Ferrlee and Weide, 2011). The response to daredevil acts of writing resulted in the chaining of rooftop access ladders, encircling freeway signs and bridges with barbed-wire, and placing roaming guard dogs in train-yards to keep potential trespassers away. The back and forth antagonisms between the graffiti community and local governments is what led, according to Austin (2001), to the innovative ways in which both sides attempted to outdo the other.

He shows how stringent anti-graffiti policies literally elevated graffiti to new heights. In response to the physical and social barriers erected to prevent graffiti writers from entering certain spaces to write their names—train yards, wealthy neighborhoods,

high profile tourist destinations such as Times Square—graffiti writers began engaging in this brand of dangerous writing in order to thwart arrest while still having their work seen.

Similar to the efforts in places like New York City to limit graffiti writers' ability to access space, architects, designers, building managers, and urban engineers began installing anti-skateboarding devices in the form of small metal plates screwed into low concrete walls and along concrete benches to keep skaters from "grinding" on, or "re-using," infrastructure in ways that people perceive as dangerous, threatening, or simply non-normative (Borden, 2001). Relying heavily on the work of Henri Lefebvre, Borden sees the attack on alternative uses of space as an attempt by property owners and city governments to remove undesirable—read unprofitable—activities from the public sphere.

While Austin and Borden provide a useful analysis of how policy and design result in subcultures' reduced access to space and spatial practices, what is lacking is a greater emphasis on the role played in exclusion and criminalization through the formation of subjective social and cultural perceptions of space and aesthetics. Cresswell (1992, 1996) addresses the appearance as well as the practice and placement of graffiti in terms of cultural perception and the making of place. Cresswell argues that graffiti is criminalized for its transgression against official appearances, thereby signaling "inappropriate geographical behavior." Graffiti as transgression is determined in part by whether the graffiti is considered *in place* versus perceived of as *out of place*. He points out that the urban environment is imbued with particular appearances deemed appropriate by dominant groups in society, therefore, normativity and dominant ideologies are not only manifested spatially, but they are manifested aesthetically as well.

In his study of the appearance and placement of graffiti, Cresswell (1992) relies on the notion of "ideological landscapes" that dictate ideas about "what is right, just, and appropriately transmitted through space and place" (329). He shows that people's negative perceptions of graffiti and similar spatial acts are not "natural" value judgments, but are a part of how normative geographies get defined. As with landscape and place, particular ideologies belonging to those who hold economic, political, social, and cultural

power become normalized through the reproduction of particular activities and appearances. Furthermore, in addition to studying graffiti as something which is perceived of as out of place and improper, and similar to the studies mentioned above that focus on the semiotics of graffiti writing, Cresswell frames his discussion of graffiti within official and popular discourses that associate graffiti with “dirt,” “obscenity,” “filth,” and “garbage.” Ultimately, Cresswell asserts, “graffiti is not a crime that actually hurts anyone,” rather the source of graffiti’s criminality “lies in its being seen... and in the subversion of the authority or urban space” (58).

It is the assertion that graffiti is a crime of spatial transgression, which, as Ferrell (1993) agrees, establishes graffiti as a political spatial practice regardless of the intent of the graffiti writer him or herself. I add that it is crucial to situate graffiti within the context of neighborhood restructuring when “authoritative spatialization” (Edensor, 2005)—the social and spatial controls that accompany redevelopment—and “aesthetic encoding” (ibid.)—the normative conventions for the appropriate appearance of space—are being most intensely negotiated. Such negotiations take place in neighborhoods undergoing gentrification and engaged in a larger struggle over establishing the identity of place, as Christopher Mele (2000) shows.

While not dealing with urban aesthetics exclusively or addressing graffiti explicitly, Mele’s (2000) work on neighborhood change provides an appropriate model for my own research. Drawing on readings in “new urban sociology” (Gottdiener and Feagin, 1988) and poststructuralist theory, Mele looks at the connection between neighborhood restructuring and cultural images, symbols, and rhetoric. Similar to Leitner et al.’s (2007) discussion of neoliberalism, Mele argues that authoritative place-makers once derided certain activities and aesthetics as counterproductive to middle-class lifestyles, and therefore anathema to effective and profitable neighborhood change. However, the traditional definitions of appropriate taste and style have changed in an effort to meet the demands of new middle class consumption patterns and urban inhabitants’ desire for the appearance of “urban authenticity.”

What were once scorned as threatening aesthetics and activities such as graffiti have been repackaged and redistributed in a sterilized form by boosters as consumable

and desirable indicators of urban lifestyles. The “inner city” and its signs of decline have been reframed as “city-center” aesthetics. These perspectives are informed in part by what Mele calls “non-development strategies” which are used as part of neighborhood restructuring to enforce quality of life measures. These changes and their accompanying quality of life measures, according to Mele, are coded in images, discourse, and symbols used to influence public perception of place identity. As a corollary to neighborhood change, new cultural codes and aesthetics are spuriously articulated in idealized social terms instead of economic terms, thereby signaling a non-profit motivated, non-partisan, classless interest in producing a “livable neighborhood for all.” Therefore, neighborhoods once perceived as being rough, dangerous, and crime-ridden become “style providers” as their boosters co-opt and sell notions of “difference” (23). Desirable representations of place are used to transform the class, ethnic, racial, and cultural composition of neighborhoods, but without having to rely on tangible and hotly contested development tactics such as those implemented under last century’s urban renewal programs.

Graffiti in this scenario becomes a device used to help attract, not repel, a new class of residents, shoppers, and investors. Furthermore, as business owners and various neighborhood boosters attempt to co-opt the graffiti aesthetic at one end, law enforcement, policy makers, and some residents rely on the rhetoric and implementation of quality-of-life policing that threatens the very same aesthetic that may be needed to distinguish and promote place at the other end. It is within these disparate visions of the city that graffiti writers operate and wherein lies the graffiti paradox whereby graffiti writers navigate co-optation and romanticization as well as criminalization.

Graffiti in the Capitalist Urban Environment

The primary social and spatial context for graffiti is the city. Before using graffiti as a lens through which to study urban processes and change, it is necessary to identify the characteristics of, and approaches to, the contemporary urban environment.

Traditional Marxist geographers posit that the appearance and function of the built urban environment are determined in large part by economic factors. As Neil Smith (1996) and other Marxist urban geographers show, “it is the complexity of capital mobility in and out

of the built environment [that] lies at the core of [urban change]” (51). This is particularly evident during times of neighborhood restructuring, redevelopment, revitalization, and gentrification. While the Marxist argument does not dispute the potentially powerful effect of cultural input and the complexity of socio-political factors in causing change and determining a neighborhood’s character and appearance, it acknowledges that cyclical, uneven, and pervasive neighborhood change is a “resolutely economic creation” (ibid.).

This perspective is supported by economic and demographic data and the literatures that map the morphology of urban areas since the 1960s. Urban geographers such as Harvey (1984, 1989, 2001) and Jackle and Wilson (1992)—like Smith (1996)—show that a form of circular migration of capital and wealthy white populations has resulted in the de- and re-population and de- and re-investment in urban infrastructure and place-making. Human migrations and eras of sporadic neglect and revitalization are concocted and controlled by lenders, investors, speculators, and those who possess economic power. They treat the city as a repository for capital in which existing tastes and norms can be shaped to correspond to new demographic and spatial realities. Because neighborhoods are treated as commodities, neglect, waste, and impermanence are built into the system of “planned obsolescence” suited for eventual profit extraction, not human permanency (Jackle and Wilson, 1992). With sporadic shifts come differing approaches to how the urban landscape is to be regarded. From this perspective it is largely the logic of profiteering and the tastes of investors and their clients that determine the appearance of the city and amenities offered therein.

While this view appears cynical or even defeatist, it is a realistic alternative to the socio-technological and neo-classical traditions which over-value the power of individualism in determining consumption patterns, the direction of migration, and the appropriate use and appearance of the built-environment. It is also far too simple to downplay or neglect the determinants of, for example, the 1956 Highway Act, the disinvestment in social programs and public transit infrastructure, and the general conservative culture of fear and paranoia that has pervaded the country for over a

generation, leading to the dereliction of urban spaces and their subsequent and often-problematic revitalization.

However, case studies such as the ones provided in this dissertation illustrate how the study of the production of space and attitudes about its appearance necessitate, for example, both a structuralist and humanist approach simultaneously. In my work I seek to understand the relationship between top-down development and resulting forms of expression in terms of muralists' and graffiti-muralists' individual contributions to the appearance of public space. As I show in my case studies, urban restructuring provides the physical realm, and neoliberal logic provides the socio-political climate, in which individual muralists and graffiti-muralists can express themselves and promote a particular use for urban space.

Paradoxical alliances between graffiti writers and business owners, and the simultaneous romanticization and criminalization of graffiti, most often occur during times of local neighborhood restructuring and revitalization. The process of revitalization is an invigoration of the economic productivity and social vitality in a part of the urban landscape. With change to and in an urban landscape come moments of uncertainty and upheaval in which livelihoods, and even lives, are at stake. While the plight of the graffiti community seems trivial given other potential consequences of change, I argue that as members of a subculture that systematically interacts with the built environment, reinterprets the use-value of infrastructure, and consciously aestheticizes space as part of their cultural survival, such a focus on graffiti is appropriate as it is such sub- and countercultural acts that are indicative of the socio-spatial character and composition of the neoliberal city.

People's understanding of graffiti's role in the neoliberal city is often contradictory. In addition to being interpreted as contesting the neoliberalization of cities, graffiti is also often described as co-opted by neoliberalism and used for its benefit. Therefore, a study of the practice and aesthetics of graffiti illustrate the diversity of perspectives of the appearance of the built environment that exist despite the supposed homogenizing effects of neoliberal policies. Furthermore, as scholars have shown,

neoliberalization is in general a contradictory process (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2005).

The logic of neoliberalism includes “individualism and entrepreneurialism, equating individual freedom with self-interested choices, making individuals responsible for their own well-being, and redefining citizens as consumers and clients” (Leitner et al., 2007, 2). To ensure the survival of such a liberalization of civil society, residents are expected to “behave responsibly, entrepreneurially, and prudently” (ibid.). Unprofitable forms of disorder, deviance, transgression, and contestation must be restrained in order to meet economic goals and general social well-being. Urban regimes that pursue social well-being through top-down neoliberal guidelines and seek to control deviance and instill entrepreneurship span the political spectrum. For example, “socially progressive cities” promote economically viable urban centers that compete with other places in ways that generate economic growth through social and cultural tolerance and progressive innovation (Florida, 2002, Scott, 2000, 2006; Yudice, 2003).

However, contrary to efforts to create progressive cities, the negative effects of neoliberalization are well-documented and range from rampant privatization and demolition of the welfare state at the global scale, a weakening of state powers at the national scale, inter-urban competition at the regional scale, to gentrification at the urban scale, and a lessened sense of social responsibility at the scale of the individual (Harvey, 2005). Each of these effects, while occurring at different scales, is most pronounced in cities that act as the proving ground, or “crucible” as Helga Leitner et al. (2007) describe it, for a neoliberal agenda.

Following Gibson-Graham (1996), Leitner et al. (2007) pay particular attention to alternative practices and local visions not simply as “reactions” or “resistance” to the neoliberal city, but as an indistinguishable aspect of neoliberalization. As they argue, contestation and local practices frame views and understandings of the contemporary neoliberal city; therefore, instead of focusing on the top-down effects of neoliberalization, scholars and activists can focus on the bottom-up processes of urban contestation to avoid reifying neoliberalism’s hegemonic hold on the city. Scholars and activists can identify differences and distinctions between places to refute claims of the

insurmountability of global cultural homogeneity. As Leitner et al. (2007, 2) put it, through “close empirically grounded analysis,” the “interdependence of neoliberalism and contestation” can be studied.

Just as the interactions between neoliberalism and contestation should not signal simple cooptation, neither should acts of contestation necessarily signal the weakening of neoliberalization. Rather, neoliberalism and contestation reshape each other through a mutually constitutive relationship. This relationship is articulated through sociocultural imaginaries, practices, and spaces. That is, while dominant urban cultures and policies undoubtedly resonate with “neoliberal imaginaries” (Leitner et al. 2007, 11), contestation often takes advantage of the technologies, tactics, and, in the case of graffiti, the spaces of neoliberalism.

More relevant to my own research, Leitner et al. argue that space is organized according to “sociocultural and spatiotemporal imaginaries (i.e., ideals, norms, discourses, ethics)” engendered by neoliberalism through which notions of behavioral normativity are established (Leitner et al. 2007, 2). When people see spatial disorder and acts of contestation as “normative,” they adhere to a logic of authoritarian control over the public realm that includes respect for a system of private property ownership, and profitable uses of space where people are expected to “behave properly” (ibid) according to the dominant understanding of land use. For example, street protests, while fundamentally acts of contestation, are understood as acceptable and are tenuously tolerated in a city as long as the demonstrations take place within predetermined spatial and temporal limits (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2005; Herbert, 2007; Clough, 2012). Peck (2005) even notes that the creation of “protest free zones” have now become prevalent within the spaces of the “tolerant” and “creative city” within the “*new new economy*.”

Business owners, residents, and members of local government agencies within the spaces of the *new new economy* provide something similar to “protest free zones” for graffiti, whereby graffiti, as an aestheticized object, is perceived as contributing to an area’s cultural capital and distinction by creating an “authentic” visual environment. As is the case of public/private partnerships in securing private space for public art, the practice of setting aside space for the production of urban graffiti demonstrates that neoliberalism

tolerates even “subversive” aesthetics and practices as part of a larger policy of intra-urban competition over who possess greater tolerance for “deviance.” While graffiti may be at times a co-opted urban aesthetic, it remains an act of both conscious and unconscious contestation against the normative appearance and profitable use of space. Because of graffiti’s resilience, there remains in cities what Steve Herbert (2007) calls neoliberal-inspired approaches to policing and “order maintenance.”

According to Herbert (2007, 447), “order maintenance” or “quality of life” policing that became the *modus operandi* during the 1980s and 1990s is based directly on the neoliberal approach to law enforcement. The best example of this form of policing is the implementation of Broken Windows theory-inspired policing—a form of crime control that “fits discursively with a wider embrace of neo-liberalism” (2007, 460). This emphasis on containment, control, and the systematic ostracization of disorderliness is anathema to progressive versions of “community” according to Herbert. Ferrell (1996, 172) goes even further, seeing this form of policing as part of state and economic hegemony, therefore all forms of resistance — potentially even every broken window — are necessarily political in nature.

Ferrell (1996, 172) explains that it is plausible to attribute political consciousness to every form of petty crime, including the motivation behind every “Krylon-tagged alley wall,” if we acknowledge the embeddedness of “power, control, subordination, and insubordination... within political-economic structures.” The “political act” inherent in breaking a window or writing on a wall is political inasmuch as the participants can be seen as acknowledging or reacting to the political “contradictions in which they are caught” (ibid.). Ferrell’s argument is directly inspired by Guérin’s (1970, 13) anarchic notion that resistance and contestation is first a form a “visceral revolt.” While Ferrell’s assertion may be problematic in that it speaks for those who act, it nevertheless blurs the distinction between unconsciousness and consciousness in terms of contesting and transgressing the neoliberal city and its forms of social, cultural, political, economic, and aesthetic control.

With Ferrell’s assertions in mind, my approach differs from studies of contestation in that I do not look explicitly at grassroots political organizations and

notions of “political good” (Leitner et al., 2007). However, similar to activist scholars, I do understand everyday urban space as “simultaneously an object of contestation and part and parcel of political strategy” (ibid.). While the expressed goals and organization of the graffiti subculture may be different from urban grassroots organizations in terms of their political aims, the spatial context in which they are operating is the same. As with the protests in Seattle during the 1999 World Trade Organization summit, and various other street battles around the world in direct protest of neoliberalization (Herbert, 2007; Wainwright, 2007), graffiti also “entails resignifying space: the strategic manipulation, subversion and transgression of everyday spaces, and the social relations they stand for” (Leitner et al., 2007, 20) regardless of an expressed or concerted intent to disrupt or actively contest neoliberalism.

To reiterate, placed within the “creative city” and the “*new new economy*,” some forms of graffiti may play a far different role than was the case within the post-Fordist city of the 1970s, ‘80s and into the ‘90s. If the creative city, as Florida (2002, 12) insists, is to embrace the “three T’s of technology, talent, and tolerance” to gain a competitive economic edge, then alternative forms of visual expression—even unsanctioned ones—may be perceived by boosters and investors as positively contributing to a city’s urban image and edge. But place marketing is of course nothing new. For example, Baudrillard (1976) has argued that graffiti, as a form of play and symbolic markings on non-functional spaces, provides symbolic capital to otherwise homogeneous cities within a late stage of advanced capitalism. As Baudrillard (1976, 77) argues, and Florida would agree, “the city is no longer the politico-industrial zone that it was in the nineteenth century, it is the zone of signs, the media and the code.”

But to even begin a conversation about the merits of graffiti’s potential contribution to the economic and social vitality of neighborhoods should also know what we are *not* talking about when we talk about graffiti. As I have shown above, however opinionated or well-versed one may now be in distinguishing so-called hip hop graffiti from street art and post-graffiti, not to mention from personal or political wall writings and witticisms, scholars have been hard-pressed to accurately identify and contextualize gang-graffiti in their writings.

The Geography of L.A. Gang Writing

Los Angeles' urban form and complex spatialities have provided urban scholars with ample fodder for investigation over the past few decades (Lynch, 1960; Banham, 1971). L.A.'s history of what Edward W. Soja (1996b) calls "crisis generated restructuring" has resulted in two urban riots since 1965, as well as a long history of institutional segregation, class conflict, and systematic methods of exclusion paradoxically placed against a backdrop of progressive and innovative culture industries (Storper and Christopherson, 1986; Scott, 1988, 1996, 2000; Hayden, 1995; Davis, 1989; Hise, 1997; Flusty, 1997; Klein, 1997; Abu-Lughod, 1999). Because of the complexities, paradoxes, and ironies inherent in studying Los Angeles' "real and imaged places" (Soja, 1996a), a postmodern approach has been the most effective method of analysis for the "Los Angeles School" of urbanism (Soja, 1989; Jameson, 1991; Dear, Schockman, and Hise, 1996; Dear and Flusty, 1997; Dear, 2000, 2002; for a critique of exclusionary, carceral, themed, and designed urban environments in Los Angeles and elsewhere see Davis, 1990; Sorkin, 1992; Harvey, 1993; Sibley, 1995; Zukin, 1995; Flusty, 1997; and for an alternative view see Chase, Crawford, and Kaliski, 1999[2008]).

The County of Los Angeles is comprised of 88 incorporated cities and dozens of districts, and unincorporated areas. The "sixty mile city" of Los Angeles is generally divided between "the Eastside" and "the Westside," with Fairfax Avenue often acting as a common, though not geographically accurate, middle point. The division between "the Eastside" and "the Westside" is largely informed by a long list of often-hostile generalities and stereotypes based on race and class.²² More accurately, and as demarcated by political designations, East L.A. is an unincorporated area in the region colloquially referred to as "East L.A." The region of East L.A. is located east of the L.A. River and Downtown L.A. and is comprised of districts including Boyle Heights and several unincorporated areas and independent cities such as Pico Rivera, Whittier, and Montebello. On the "Westside," West Los Angeles and Westwood lie just inland from

²² For a discussion of Angelinos' cognitive maps of Los Angeles see Hayden (1997).

the costal districts of Pacific Palisades, Venice, and the independent City of Santa Monica.

The far north and far south of L.A. County present much of the same complex picture that results from a blend of political and cognitive boundaries. The San Fernando Valley (known as “the Valley”) on the north side of L.A. County includes the City of San Fernando, the City of Burbank, and several districts including North Hollywood, Van Nuys, Pacoima, and Northridge. However, the Valley lies south of the northern-most incorporated parts of Los Angeles County including the City of Santa Clarita, Lancaster, and Palmdale. “South L.A.” includes the official district of South L.A. (in an area formerly, infamously, and unofficially known as “South-Central L.A.”) which lies just north of the L.A. Harbor and L.A.’s southern-most districts of Wilmington, San Pedro, and the City of Long Beach.

My dissertation research sites of Echo Park and Silver Lake are located at the eastern-most side of what residents of East L.A. call the “Westside,” and what Westsiders insist is part of the “Eastside.” But residents of Echo Park and the surrounding neighborhoods generally refer to themselves as “Eastsiders.” Like many of the other cities, districts, and unincorporated areas listed above, Echo Park—which I refer to as a “neighborhood” but is technically a “district”—is occupied by a local gang and namesake, *Echo Park 13*.

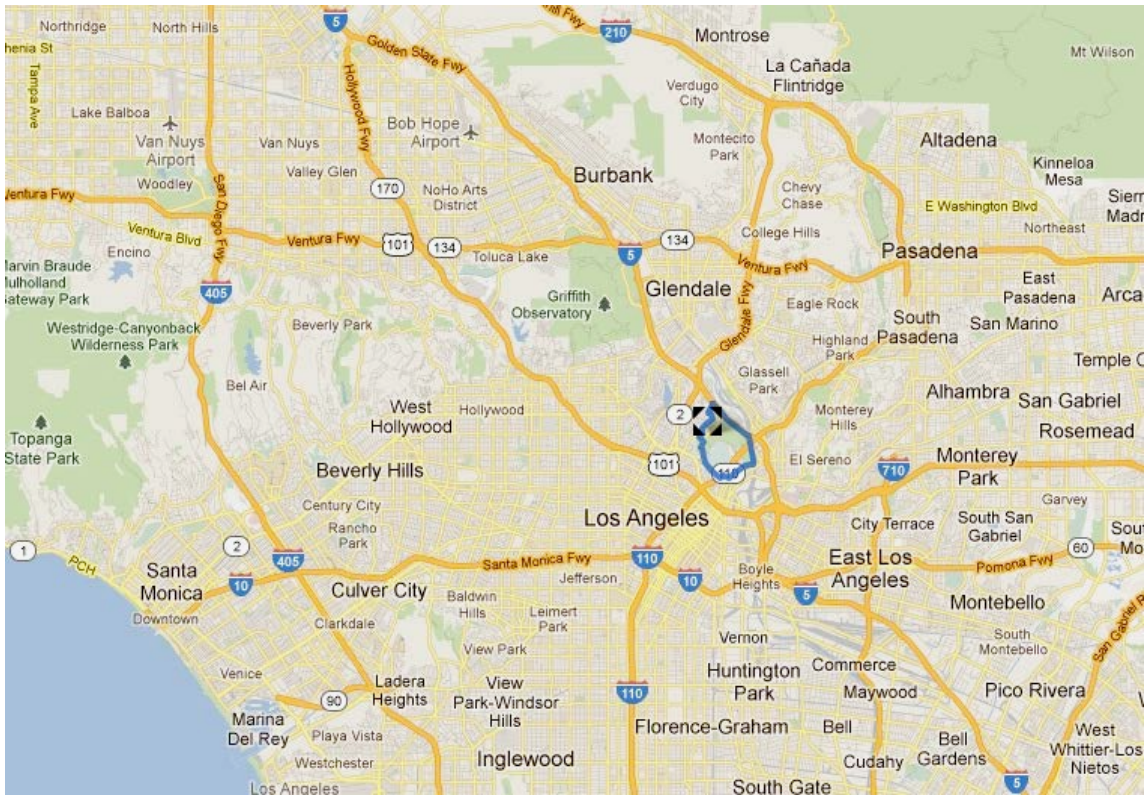


Figure 2.32. The Echo Park district is indicated with a small box at the center of the map of Los Angeles. This map shows the majority of L.A.—from Northridge at the north-west corner, to East L.A. at the south-west portion of the map, to the 101 Freeway between Hollywood and Downtown at center. The outlined area just above the “Los Angeles” label near the center of the map includes most of the areas discussed in this dissertation, including Echo Park, the Arroyo Seco Freeway, Dodger Stadium, and Chávez Ravine.



Figure 2.33. In this map the Echo Park district is shaded-in. The Sunset Boulevard retaining walls are located at the left edge of the shaded area between Silver Lake Blvd. and Alvarado Street, just north of the 101/Hollywood Freeway. Other areas I discuss in this dissertation include the Belmont Tunnel and Toluca Yard located just beyond the bottom-most shaded area on this map, just south of Beverly Blvd. Dodger Stadium is located in Elysian Park/Chávez Ravine just east of the shaded area, adjacent to the Los Angeles River and 110/Arroyo Seco Freeway.

Gang affiliations and claims laid to space, like governmental bureaucracy and real estate manipulation, are part and parcel of the apparent fragmentation of Los Angeles. To omit gang territoriality in a theorization of Los Angeles is to ignore a vital aspect of place-making. Conflict between rival gangs—or “beef”—such as the one between Echo Park and Happy Valley 13, which I address in the context of neighborhood restructuring in chapter 4, is typically represented on wall space. Susan Phillips (1999) refers to such visual representations of hostilities in the form of antagonistic gang writing as “wall

bangin’.” Wall bangin’ is a form of gang writing in the form of lines spray painted across rival gang names—“cross outs” or “slashes”—written words and symbols such as “c/o” for “con safos”—roughly translated as “strength in togetherness”—the use of arrows to indicate territory, and use of the term “barrio” or “varrio”—Spanish for neighborhood, or ‘hood—to express a claim laid and control over a particular area.

The conflict between gangs such as Echo Park and Happy Valley as expressed on wall space is an example of community identity resulting in what geographer David Harvey (1996) calls “militant localism.” As Harvey points out in his *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*, notions of the “local” and “community” are already unstable configurations made more so by the radical redevelopment and destruction of neighborhoods such as Chavez Ravine in Echo Park. Attempts by local gang members to provide stability in the form of neighborhood gang identity often manifests itself as an “exclusionary and oppressive social form that can be as much at the root of urban conflict and urban degeneration” (437). Whereas Harvey also sees the progressive possibilities inherent in the formation of “community,” he understands the potential pitfalls associated with group identity based on territorial solidarity.

The fragmentation of the Los Angeles metropolis is most famously described by poet and satirist Dorothy Parker as “72 suburbs in search of a city,” but Soja attempts to bring all the wandering pieces of such a metropolis into conversation with each other as part of his project to “write the city spatially” (2003). Instead of an assortment of disparate suburbs—or independent cities, districts and unincorporated areas as I describe above—Los Angeles can more accurately be seen as an agglomeration of “proximate communities, neighborhoods, villages, towns into a single urban political unit” (273). Although Soja looks to uncover the radically positive and politically triumphant possibilities inherent in geographical proximity, I also see it, perhaps pessimistically, as the point at which conflict arises in the spaces produced by redevelopment in the barrios around Echo Park. Nowhere is such conflict so readily available for academic scrutiny as it is expressed on walls in the form of gang graffiti.

Gang-writing: a primer

Gang-graffiti—which I will refer to as “gang-writing” in order to distinguish it from graffiti as I define it above—is a style of writing used to mark territory. Gang writing places Los Angeles squarely in the middle of a discussion on graffiti that has to date been narrowly centered around the basketball courts, turn-tables, and block-parties in New York’s five boroughs.

In his *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the tag in New York’s urban underground* (2009), Gregory Snyder narrowly defines gang-writing as “boxy line signatures” (28). Such a description is typical of the New York City-centric view of graffiti which asserts that graffiti was born and matured in its five burrows. This prevalent conflation of graffiti with New York City is likely the reason that the appellation “hip hop” is often applied when describing graffiti art and non-gang graffiti. However, as Ley and Cybriwsky’s (1974) landmark article shows, “loner” graffiti such as that produced by the graffiti “king” Cornbread in Philadelphia beginning in the late 1960s, predates hip hop by several years.²³

Since “boxy line signatures” are often regarded as a less-advanced form of wall writing, scholars have missed the opportunity to highlight the importance of gang-writing in terms of its influence on an otherwise romanticized subculture of graffiti.²⁴ Although gangs are an example of one of the most territorially protective and spatially conscious sub-cultures operating in what is described as the already fragmented post-modern metropolis of Los Angeles, they have most often been discussed from the perspective of their “personal and communal fashions” (Phillips, 1999)—style of dress (Ferrell, 1995) and low-riding (Bright, 1995)—in addition to their social networks and violent

²³ See also the graffiti documentary *Bomb It* (Reiss, 2007) for a recent interview with Corn Bread.

²⁴ A notable exception is the work done by Susan Phillips (1999). In her work she fully develops the distinction as well as the connection between gang writing and graffiti through the use of extensive ethnographic fieldwork. She was one of the first scholars to suggest a stylistic link between the two forms of wall writing. See also Robert D. Weide’s (2008) definition of gang graffiti in Kontos and Brotherton (2008) *Encyclopedia of Gangs*.

contribution to the socio-spatial and racial bifurcation of Los Angeles (Vigil, 1988; Herbert, 1997; Umemoto, 2006). Given the large volume of work produced by a number of L.A.-based geographers, it is surprising that gang-writing has not been discussed in terms of its geographically-based stylistic structure.²⁵ An exception to the silence coming from geography concerning gang-writing is the pioneering work done by David Ley and Roman Cybriwski.

As Ley and Cybriwski (1974) have pointed out, gang-writing acts as system of territorial demarcation for the sake of the aggressive appropriation of space. In their study of a Philadelphia neighborhood, it was the explicit statements written on the walls—i.e. “Do Not Enter”—as well as the concentration of graffiti painted along neighborhood boundaries that signaled such exclusion. For Ley and Cybriwski, evidence that graffiti is a territorial marker lies in the content of its message as well as in the sheer amount produced in particular locations—along main boulevards, at busy intersections, and facing expressways.

But given a more detailed and informed decoding of what is being written—even in the absence of the occasional explicit and generally legible statement—it becomes clear that gang-writing is almost always comprised of numbers, words, abbreviations, and symbols that are inherently geographical and are part of conveying territorial delineation (Chastanet and Gribble, 2009). Given the nature of turf identity and the motivation for doing graffiti, gang writing is nothing if not geographical, and rarely does a gang name written on a wall express anything other than a claim to space.²⁶

In addition to the ubiquitous “13” that accompanies gang names written on walls in L.A.,²⁷ gang members also indicate the location of their territory with the use of

²⁵ Mike Davis (1989) and Steven Flusty (2002) make passing comments about graffiti and other visual indicators of sub-cultural activity.

²⁶ This claim to space is not only made through the act of marking territory, but as expressed in the name of the actual gang and neighborhood namesake— for example 18th Street, Temple Street, North Hollywood Boys, etc. An exception to this includes gangs such as Crazy Riders, *Los Magos*, and Orphans whose names are not derived from the location of their barrio, but rather refer to the gang as a social unit.

²⁷ As Susan Phillips (1999) points out in her extensive ethnographic study of L.A. gang graffiti, the number 13 that often accompanies Chicano gang names written on walls is

abbreviations for the cardinal points of the compass: N, S, E, and W. These cardinal points may change in the course of a block, distinguishing one “click”—or inter-gang subgroup—from another depending on where they “kick it”—or congregate. For example, “WS EXP” (Figure 2.33) distinguishes those members from Echo Park—or EXP—who congregate west of Echo Park Boulevard from those who kick it east of the boulevard. Where members of particular clicks kick it depends on where they live and is done in part for the sake of spreading out drug sales, protecting the boundaries of a neighborhood, as well as avoiding police sweeps and group arrest.



Figure 2.34. “Sur” (Spanish for “south”) and the number “13” (indicating Southern California). Photos by Christian Guzman.



Figure 2.35. WS (West Side) EchoXParque LS (*parque* is Spanish for park, *locos* is Spanish for “crazies”). The C is crossed out to indicate beef with Crazy Riders—a rival gang.

believed to correspond to the letter M in the alphabet—the 13 standing in for “Mexican,” “Marijuana” (*Mota* in Spanish), or the “Mexican Mafia” (*La Eme* in Spanish). The 13 is also a geographical indicator, representing “South Siders”—or *Sureños*—hailing from Southern California.

In addition to directional and territorial cues written on walls, gang writing is also stylistically distinguishable from other forms of street graffiti. In Los Angeles, Chicano gang members adopted Old English as their font of choice around the 1940s according to Susan Phillips (1999) and as discussed by graffiti writer Chaz Bojóquez and photographers Gusmano Cesaretti and Estavan Oriol in conversation with actor and art collector Cheech Marin (Deitch, Gastman, Rose, 2011). Phillips writes that she can find “no definitive explanation for the use of Old English letters by Chicano gangs, but some relate it to domestic architecture in Los Angeles (Sanchez-Tranquilino, 1991) or to traditional Mexican religious imagery” (1999).

Chaz Boróquez, a longtime member of the *Avenues* gang whose ‘hood runs along the Arroyo Seco north of Downtown (see chapter 4) and is known for his “Senor Suerte”—“Mr. Lucky”—character (figure 2.35.), elaborates on Phillips’ observations, saying:

Graffiti started in L.A. in the 1920’s down on Olvera Street. The shoeshine boys, they would take their dabbers and mark with their name on the corners to make that corner their own. The Zoot Suit era came in the early ‘40’s and that’s when they, *placas*, first brought the using of Old English and the writing of roll calls first happened—every body’s name, all rolled up. Old English was used in the most prestigious places, the most important places; military induction for Vietnam, would be on our graduation certificates, it would be in the headlines of the *Los Angeles Times*. It was an announcement of who we were, and how many strong, and what streets that we controlled, and this is the border, and this is our culture. And then around the ‘50’s with the spray can the *placas* throughout the whole neighborhoods exploded. (in Reiss, 2007).



Figure 2.36. Chaz with his *Señor Suerte* character and Old English-style *placas* on a concrete bank of the Arroyo Seco, 1975. Photo by Kathy Boróquez.

Many of the styles and writing tactics used by west coast gang members have influenced graffiti writers. Graffiti writers have tried to distinguish themselves from gang members, while also incorporating gang script in their non-gang-affiliated writing. The use of a traditional “E” or gang-style “S” provided graffiti with a certain West Coast edge that was not seen in New York during the 1980s and 1990s. As recent scholars of *cholo* writing have pointed out, Los Angeles-based gang writing predates all other forms of urban-based street graffiti (Chastanet, 2009; Deitch, Gastman, Rose, 2011), but the explicit link between cholo fonts and graffiti styles has been less explored.²⁸

²⁸ The term *cholo* refers to a Chicano gang member. The term comes from the Aztec word *xolotl*, meaning “dog.” Cholo is also a modern vernacular form of *pachuco*, or one who dresses in the Zoot Suit or Chicano street-youth clothing popular in the barrios of Los Angeles beginning in the 1940s. “Cholo” did not come into common usage until the 1960s when local groups of pachucos began to be identified as gang members.

By way of a primer on the evolution of writing styles, a good comparison between Old English and subsequent graffiti fonts can be made in observing the evolution of the letters E and S. Here in figure 2.36 is the English alphabet depicted in the most basic Old English style discussed by Chaz.



Figure 2.37. Old English alphabet. <http://www.fonts.com>

Compared to the traditional Old English style above, the typical gang style graffiti lettering in figure 2.36 shows a greater degree of simplicity. Such an adaptation makes for faster and more legible writing on walls with the use of spray paint. Notice also how the E and S possess a more aggressive aesthetic in the way the heads of the letters are formed. It is a common practice among gang members to make the appearance of gang writing as aggressive and formidable as that which is being expressed. Furthermore, as Chaz explains, gang writing is “written with care to make sure they are flushed left and right, or words are stacked and centered. Rarely are they ever done in lower-case script, or other than in black letters. This tradition of type, names, and language rarely deviates and is handed down from generation to generation (interview by Rosette, 2009, 80 and in Chastanet and Gribble, 2009, 6).

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	0	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	!	@	#	\$	%	^
&	*												

Figure 2.38. L.A. gang writing alphabet. <http://www.fonts.com>

The next font in figure 2.37 is representative of one of the first graffiti styles in Los Angeles and was used widely in the late '80s to early '90s. While maintaining the bold attitude of gang-adapted Old English, these letters are less aggressive and possess more style in terms of sloped heads and tapered ends. The tilt of the letters is also indicative of graffiti as opposed to gang *placas*.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	0	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	!					

Figure 2.39. Old-School L.A. graffiti alphabet. <http://www.fonts.com>

By the mid-1990s letters become slightly more stylized and flamboyant as graffiti writers were becoming less influenced by traditional *cholo placas* and more aware of global trends in graffiti writing thanks to the increased publication of graffiti magazines

and coffee table books. While “wild style”—intricate and highly stylized forms of graffiti writing that is often indecipherable to outside audiences—has existed since the 1970s in Los Angeles, such forms of writing have most often been used in “yards”—secluded areas where graffiti artist go to practice their art on walls along train tracks and in industrial areas—and in sketch books as opposed to on public walls and other types of infrastructure. Still though, the basic emulation of Old English is evident in the style of the letter E.



Figure 2.40. Typical “wildstyle” graffiti alphabet. <http://www.fonts.com>

In addition to influences in writing style, the large, frontal, and mostly readable block letters used by gang members to boldly announce the boundaries of their respective ‘hood became staples of West Coast graffiti styles. This boldness of style in terms of both legibility and placement may have as much to do with the infrastructure on which graffiti was written as much as it has to do with the stylistic and personal influences Chicano gang members have on graffiti writers.

Unlike in New York where one could sit on the 5-train from SoHo to the Bronx deciphering, admiring, and later emulating an intricate tag on a window, in L.A. much of the graffiti was only seen from cars travelling along six-lane freeways at 60mph. Not only where graffiti writers taking cues from the styles used by gangs such as HAZARD and WHITE FENCE when painting their own large-scale letters along the 10 Freeway in East Los Angeles, but, as the reflections at the beginning of this chapter illustrate, many

graffiti writers hailed from the very same neighborhoods controlled by these gangs. Therefore the stylistic influences took place on and off the walls between friends, cousins, brothers, and enemies.

While graffiti writers attempted to distinguish themselves from gang members during the 1980s to avoid undue run-ins with police and actual gang members, the public and the media were not successful in deciphering the writing on the walls in order to distinguish the two groups from each other. Mistakenly, that which was simply illegible to the common person was read as gang graffiti. Therefore, graffiti has often been interpreted as part of a hostile “take over” of neighborhoods despite the fact that, as opposed to gang members, graffiti writers quickly moved through space, undetected aside from the cryptic markings they leave behind.

The distinction between graffiti and gang writing is often stylistically subtle and necessitates a trained eye. Although the motivations behind the production of each kind of graffiti is most often extremely distinct, the general public has typically maintained complete ignorance in regards to parsing out which is which. So uninformed are the general public, policy makers, and even academics in separating completely different forms of wall writing, that any discussion of one or the other in isolation is almost impossible. The two forms of wall marking that are more easily juxtaposed due their obvious differences in style and aesthetic are graffiti and murals. However, the struggle between those who write graffiti and those who paint murals is no less fierce or any less misunderstood. The next sections attempt to shed light on the long struggle for wall space between producers of the two forms of marking public walls.

Chapter 3. Graffiti/Murals: a Battle for Wall Space.

This chapter serves as a general introduction to the battle for wall space waged by muralists and graffiti writers. I begin with a typology of murals painted in Los Angeles from 1932 to 2004. I then provide a history of the L.A. freeway murals and how they became covered with graffiti beginning in the mid-to-late-1990s. This was a period that marks the turning point for when traditional murals reluctantly made way for a proliferation of graffiti and later “graffiti-murals”—a coalescence of traditional murals and graffiti art. The data for this chapter comes from archival research conducted in the 50mm Los Angeles Photo Galley and the Los Angeles Public Library Department of History and Genealogy Photo Collection, through participant observations, and open-ended and formal interviews with many of the very graffiti writers who were responsible for the destruction of the freeway murals in L.A.

“Los Angeles was destined to be the world center for contemporary murals. It has a long tradition of painting its dreams in images and setting them out for the world to see.”

—Stanley Young (Levick and Young, 1988, 1).

Murals in L.A.: a brief history and typology

The “Save L.A. Murals” campaign initiated by the Social And Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) seeks to combat the destruction of murals by graffiti writers, sign companies, the city, and even natural weathering. Members of Save L.A. Murals including muralist Judith Baca—the founder and director of SPARC and Professor of the Department of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA—advocate for a three-part plan for the preservation of L.A.’s murals which includes, first:

- 1). 1% allocation of public billboards for public good, not products
- 2). Redirect 10% of \$7.5 million annual graffiti abatement contacting by City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works to fund Mural Rescue Program and operate mural graffiti hot line.
- 3). Redirect 10% of \$15 million graffiti abatement cost by Los Angeles Unified School District to implementation of Mural Rescue Program (MRP) graffiti prevention/intervention public art education and school-based cultural events.

4). Redirect 10% of \$12 million graffiti abatement cost from the Metropolitan Transit Authority to MRP graffiti prevention media campaign (www.savelamurals.org, 2011).

Second, in addition to lobbying local and State government for a reallocation of funding, the Save L.A. Murals campaign also calls for the enforcement of the Visual Artists Rights Act [VARA], which I discuss at greater length in chapter 5 of this dissertation. Specifically and as it relates to the destruction of murals by graffiti writers, Save L.A. Murals argues that:

[VARA] recognizes the moral rights of an artist and protects work from future alteration or destruction after having been sold/donated. This includes both intentional destruction and grossly negligent destruction of work. On a mural, graffiti is an example of both. The tagger is intentionally destructive when he marks on the work. The city is grossly negligent when it fails to remove graffiti from the work. (ibid.)

Third, Save L.A. Murals also calls for “alternative” incarceration measure for caught taggers:

For the \$250,000 cost of incarcerating one convicted graffiti tagger for one year SPARC will operate one Mural Rescue Crew for one year, which will result in a potential savings of \$2 million per each crew of 10 apprehended tagger assigned to community service at SPARC. This is a potential savings of \$20 million for L.A. County per 100 community service workers sentenced to remove graffiti from murals. (ibid.)

A desire to work with even convicted graffiti writers is part of their larger outreach efforts. In addition to being active in hands-on mural restoration through L.A. County, Save L.A. Murals has also established mentoring programs for artists and graffiti writers, advocates for legal “yards” for graffiti writers, and has hosted graffiti mural block parties at their facility in Venice.

On a visit to SPARC to interview Baca for this dissertation she asked me a deliberately guileless question that largely precipitated this chapter. She asked me “why does the new generation of graffiti writers write on the murals.” Judging by her question

and her comments in numerous articles and interviews about the destruction of murals at the hands of graffiti writers, Baca's fight has been, understandably, largely reactive and uninformed regarding who writes on the murals and why. Like others involved in the Save L.A. Murals campaign and enraged by the apparent destructive nature of graffiti, Baca is operating on suppositions regarding what she calls "the worse moment in the history of mural production in terms of the destructiveness to L.A. murals" (Olney, 2008). Given the elusive nature of the graffiti subculture, and the cryptic marking they leave behind, it is no wonder that graffiti writers operate in a way that is difficult to prognosticate, let alone understand. But before going on to explain the actions of graffiti writers in defacing the freeway murals, relying largely on their own words, I provide some historical background to the production of murals in L.A.

Los Tres Grandes

Despite the fact that Los Angeles had maintained a uniquely close relationship to Mexico after generations of cross boarder migration and cultural exchange, Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros—collectively known as *Los Tres Grandes* (the three big ones)—were actually more active in other U.S. cities during the 1930's, namely in Detroit, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. As an ardent Communist, Diego Rivera may have favored these cities over an "open shop" Los Angeles because of these places' support of organized labor and industrial manufacturing (Davis, 1990; Stevens, 2009).

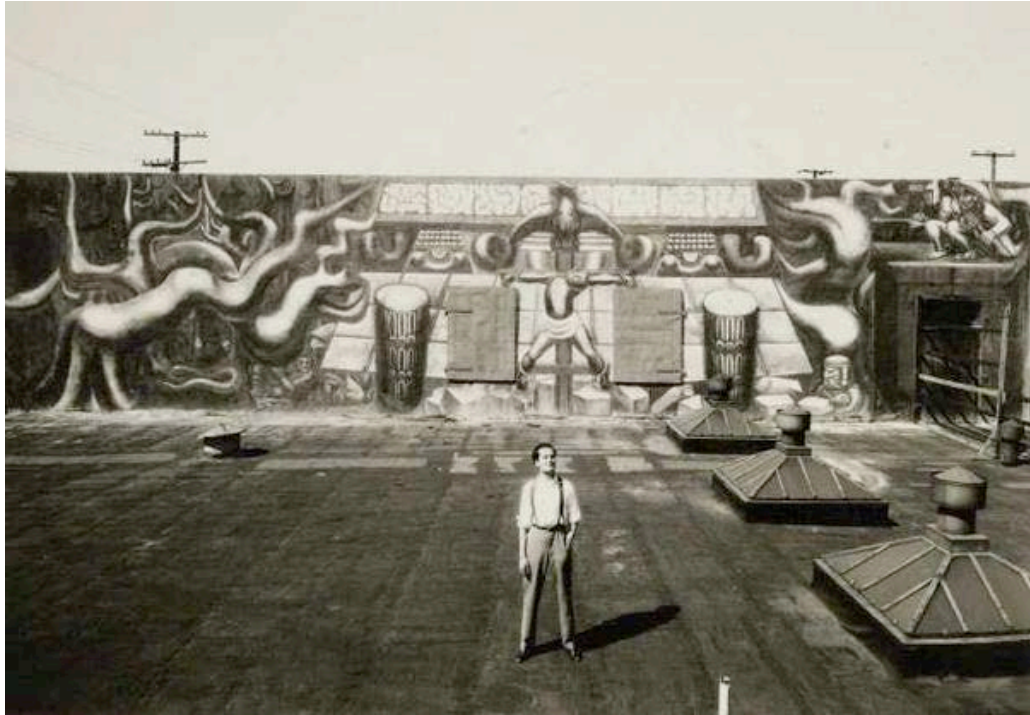


Figure 3.1. Siqueiros in front of his completed *América Tropical*, 1932. Source: *L.A. Times*.

Rivera's work in New York City provides a special case. It was in the progressive city that he received the most generous invitations, fanfare, and high-profile commissions from the Museum of Modern Art in 1931 and Nelson Rockefeller in 1933, but it was also there that his work was most quickly removed for what was perceived as anti-American imagery. Rivera's work often depicts nationalist Mexican heroes of the Left such as Emiliano Zapata and Father Miguel Hidalgo, and imperialist villains such as Hernán Cortés and Christopher Columbus, in addition to social-realist images of Karl Marx and his own contemporaries and comrades in the Bolshevik Revolution in Russian such as Leon Trotsky and Vladimir Lenin.

The work of José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, the other two *Grandes*, is often more illustrative of pre-conquest civilizations and tropical landscapes representative of Aztlán—the mythical ancestral homeland of the Aztec people. All three, however, are noteworthy for the sheer scale of their murals produced most often in public places. While Rivera was in the Midwest painting the inner courtyard of the Detroit Institute of Art in 1932, David Alfaro Siqueiros was finishing his large-scale *América*

Tropical on a rooftop wall above L.A.'s *La Placita Olvera*. Boosters have long tried to promote and market the city's "Mexican" aesthetic in and around Los Angeles's original central plaza at "Olvera Street," while simultaneously being hostile to actual Mexican social and political influences (Estrada, 2008). Siqueiros's mural therefore provided a major conundrum in that it was "authentically Mexican," but apparently authentically anti-American as well.

Despite the almost immediate whitewashing of one its first and most famous murals, Los Angeles continued to strive to be recognized as the mural capital of the world.²⁹ But it would not be Mexican nationals or *Chicano* muralists—American muralists of Mexican descent—to further that distinction for some time. Whatever the causes of the hiatus,³⁰ more than thirty years would pass before the birth of the *Chicano* mural movement and return to Mexican-inspired wall aesthetics.

The WPA/PWAP in L.A.

Despite the common misconception that muralism in L.A. had died between the whitewashing of Siqueiros' *América Tropical* and the rise of the *Chicano* mural movement, there was the effort by muralists as part of President Roosevelt's federally funded Work Projects Administration (WPA), Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), and Federal Arts Project (FAP) to continue painting walls to represent and inspire social change. As historian Richard McKinzie's (1973, 47) puts it, there was indeed an effort to "attend to people's cerebral needs as much as their material ones" as part of New Deal efforts to re-build and re-brand America after the Great Depression. The new WPA murals would soon prove to be as didactic as those produced by the more overtly ideological Mexican muralists (Conrad, 1995; Folgarait, 1998).

²⁹ According to Adolfo V. Nodal, former General Manager of the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, the first murals in Los Angeles were produced in Downtown in 1912 by Scandinavian immigrant Einar Petersen (in Dunitz, 1998). As Edward Soja (1996) points out, the very first mural actually depicted the first urban agglomeration of Çatal Hüyük in modern day Turkey.

³⁰ The temporary cessation of mural painting activity is no doubt partially the result of the rampant xenophobia resulting from the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 and the black listing of artists during the Red Scare of the 1950s.

Between 1933 and 1943 muralists working under the auspices of the WPA, PWAP, and FAP painted over 200 post offices, libraries, schools, and other public spaces (Dunitz, 1993; Living New Deal Project, 2012). Like New Deal-era public works construction projects that sought to create jobs for laborers during a struggling post-Depression wartime economy (Davis, 1996), mural projects were seen as a means to “cultivate national pride in a shared culture, while buttressing belief in a faltered economy” (Knight, 2008, 5). As the Federal Government got involved in mural projects, the socialist influence of Los Tres Grandes appeared to fade from a red-scared American consciousness despite the close connection (Goldman, 1977). In fact, muralists as part of the WPA were producing the very same type of populist and socialist-realist imagery in public places that the Mexicans had done a few years earlier (Goldman, 1982, 1995; Senie and Webster, 1989). The difference was that WPA murals subtly celebrated the nation-state and Anglo-culture whereas Los Tres Grandes criticized American conquest and imperialism while overtly celebrating the oppressed. Notwithstanding their undeniable influence, Stanton Macdonald-Wright—FAP regional director from 1935-1940—personally painted out those symbols he deemed too political (Schrank, 2009).



Figure 3.2. Works Progress Administration logo with cityscape in background.



Figure 3.3. Most of the WPA murals, such as this one from the Los Angeles Central Library rotunda painted in 1937 by Dean Cornwell (left), were painted indoors and depicted Anglo-American power and military prestige. Eyre Powell Press Services, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

Figure 3.4. *California History* depicts scenes from the settlement of the California missions, the Gold Rush, the new California Aqueduct, and heavy industry. Painted by WPA muralist Lucile Lloyd (at right) in 1936 in the California State Building in the L.A. Civic Center. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

WPA/PWAP activities were followed by a largely ignored African-American mural movement most active south of the 10 Freeway in South L.A. and in the incorporated and predominantly black cities of Compton and Watts (Prigof and Dunitz, 2000). In 1949 muralists Hale Woodruff and Charles Alston collaborated on their *The Negro in California History* in the lobby of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Co. *The Negro in California History* bookended L.A.'s own mural history to that point as Woodruff studied with Diego Rivera in 1934 and Alston was the first African-American supervisor of the WPA. These muralists also provided an alternative message focusing on the contributions of non-Anglo Americans in building and and protecting the American Dream. As mural catalogist Robin J. Dunitz (1994) writes:

‘The Negro in California History’ stands in stark contrast to L.A.'s other pre-1950 murals. In the 1920s, banks, hotels, theaters and major insurance

companies hired successful artists to decorate their marble lobbies and offices with classical landscapes and glorifications of capitalist progress, and the local legacy of the federally sponsored New Deal murals is largely one of idealism - scenes of happy European-American suburbanites at leisure and sanitized versions of early California history.

But in general it was the mostly working-class Anglo WPA/PWAP muralists that would also be credited with changing Americans' perceptions of murals and public art. As a break from the romanticization (or demonization, depending on one's perspective) of the modern artist as an aloof, self-interested, genius recluse, public artists and muralists were beginning to be seen as "'productive workers' and 'good citizens,' loyal to the nation" (Knight, 2008, 5). However radical in terms of changing American consciousness about the social and political role of murals painted in public places, New Deal murals were in terms of style and content a far cry from what was to be painted beginning in the early 1970s by *Chicano* muralists. According to historian Sarah Schrank (2009, 44), the Depression and post-WPA era "did mark a cultural transition in Los Angeles. Whatever the tastes and civic desires of a predominantly white Protestant elite, tastes and choices of both artists and audiences had shifted from homogeneous conceptions of the 'highbrow' to a combination of socialist avant-garde aesthetics and American commercial culture... which flourished in the work of Mexican muralists and their student."

Critical Chicano Murals

Although WPA/PWAP artists shared a collective work ethic and socio-economic position with Los Angeles' Chicano population, in terms of their approach to wall art *Chicano* muralists can more accurately be seen as "retaining the spirit and power of a Los Tres Grandes" (Rosette, 2009, 3). However, as Shifra M. Goldman (1977, 127) argues, "unlike the Mexicans who spoke for an entire nation, street muralists identify more closely with a community and translate its aspirations and problems into paint."

In 1968 the Chicano mural movement began as members of *el movimiento*—the Chicano-led civil right movement—were turning to wall art to represent the political and

social causes that were important to the Hispanic population living and working in the agricultural regions of California (Goldman, 1993). The “renaissance of mural activity” (Dunitz, 1998) was also influenced by student anti-war protests at U.C. Berkeley, the teachings of liberation theology throughout Central America, and the growing anti-imperialist teachings at universities such as UCLA where *el movimiento* came to be known as MeCha (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán*, or “Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán”).

Unlike Los Tres Grandes who, despite personal adherence to socialist values, worked alone, *los muralistas*—as the mostly Chicano muralist members of *el movimiento* were known—worked collaboratively and collectively. In fact, collaboration was one of the hallmarks of the movement, and according to Chicano art historians Shifra Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (1985):

[Chicano] mural groups have been characterized by the ‘team’ approach, i.e. and art director working with a group of artists and/or community residents... The inclusion of (often untrained) community participants as partners appears to be unique to the U.S. street mural movement of the 1970s [in which] public artists work as a team and address their work to a community which, hopefully, will understand and subscribe to its message. This stance negates the individualism and elitism common to mainstream fine arts.

In his doctoral dissertation out of the University of California at Santa Cruz, Arturo Rosette (2009, 3) goes even further in his discussion of the distinction between traditional muralists and *los muralistas*. Rosette proposes the term “critical muralist” as “an abbreviated label for community-artist-activist-educator-leader whose aim in promoting critical muralism was part of a larger anti-racist, post-colonialist, liberation project.” As Rosette (2009, 3) explains, critical muralism is:

(a) based on collaborative efforts within communities, (b) integrates critical pedagogy practices and participatory action research methods, (c) has primarily local community funding sources, and (d) seeks not only to give voice to the voiceless but also to create a third space where the grassroots community can speak directly with institutional powers.

During the 1970s critical muralists would give rise to some of the major public art and mural organizations in the city including the Mechicano Art Center in 1971, the Citywide Mural Project in 1974, East Los Streetscapers in 1975, and the Social and Public Arts Resource Center (SPARC) headed by Judith Baca in 1976.

These community mural organizations brought gang members, graffiti writers, and traditional muralists together to create works of public art that were both aesthetically pleasing and socially significant. But it was not until 1978, with a series of 82 murals completed at the Estrada Courts Public Housing Complex six miles east of Echo Park that los muralistas captured the attention of the mainstream art community both locally and nationally (Simpson, 1980). It was also the Estrada Courts mural project that may have initiated the end of the Chicano mural movement's radical status.³¹



Figure 3.5. *We Are Not A Minority* painted at the Estrada Courts in East Los Angeles by San Diego's Chicano Park muralists Mario Torero, Rocky, El Lion, and Zade of El Congreso de Artistas Cosmicos de las Americas de San Diego in 1978. Photo by Dean Musgrove. Herald-Examiner Photo Collection / Los Angeles Public Library.

³¹ For a discussion of the Chicano mural movement as it was simultaneously launched in San Diego's Chicano Park in the Barrio Logan neighborhood see Rosen and Fisher (2001) and Del Castillo (2007).

Estrada Courts is a low-income public housing complex (commonly called “projects”) originally constructed in 1943 in the Boyle Heights district. They are owned and operated by the City of Los Angeles Housing Authority. Like many housing projects built in the years after WWII, they were seen as a short-term remedy for the nation’s housing shortage. By 1953 housing projects such as Estrada Courts were being used as a salve for inner-city neighborhoods that were becoming derelict as result of White flight to the suburbs and, particularly in Los Angeles, to accommodate *Braceros*—contract laborers—returning from the fields and the subsequent influx of immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

By the mid 1970s, as the U.S. underwent an economic downturn and L.A. became one of the most violent cities in the country, Estrada Courts became a symbol of the Chicano community’s growing problems with underemployment, police brutality, gang warfare, drugs, a high drop-out rate, and domestic violence. Despite all of these structural and socio-economic problems, in 1976 Estrada Courts was selected as one of the 200 locations in the “Horizons on Display” program—a federal program that recognized productive growth in ailing communities. The commendation was for the success of their mural program in suppressing graffiti and as President Gerald Ford wrote in his letter to the Courts mural director “Cat” Felix, for exemplifying how “America was founded on the conviction that individuals can join together in common purpose to resolve their differences and build a life of freedom, opportunity and achievement” (Sanchez-Tranquilino, 1995).

As Marco Sanchez-Tranquilino (1991, 1995), Guisela Latorre (2008), and most recently Sarah Schrank (2009) have suggested, and as President Ford’s comment shows, the murals at Estrada Courts could be considered the first time indigenist themes and barrio glyphs painted on walls would be relatively well-received as state-sanctioned art. But the Estrada Courts mural program also marks the point at which sanctioned and “official muralism” would be pitted against existing community-based forms of youth expression which often took the form of graffiti and more spontaneous graffiti-mural productions (Sanchez-Tranquilino 1995).

As Marco Sanchez-Tranquilino, author of the oft-cited dissertation *Mi casa no es su casa: Chicano murals and barrio calligraphy as systems of signification at Estrada Courts, 1972-1978* out of the University of California at Los Angeles, argues in his “Space, Power, and Youth Culture” (1995), when the content of the Estrada Court murals were officially approved by “community leaders”—law enforcement, business owners, and elected government officials—the murals in effect became the art of the dominant community juxtaposed against graffiti which further came to exemplify “subdominant social values.” For Sanchez-Tranquilino there was no evidence of a “graffiti problem” at Estrada Courts before the murals became seen as a solution. Rather, the painting of murals over existing graffiti, and later the painting of graffiti on and around the sanctioned murals, “visually demonstrates the very real contention between *placas*—graffiti letters—and murals for physical space and cultural representation” (1995, 61). Before the murals were celebrated and interpreted as part of a larger social fix, wall art had to coexist with other forms of wall art.

Even some muralists who painted the Estrada Courts saw the rhetoric of graffiti eradication as problematic. Willie Herrón, whose 1972 *The Wall That Cracked Open* has become an iconic mural for its integration of existing graffiti, “felt that *placas* were a viable and original cultural form developed by barrio youth to interact effectively with one another” (ibid, 64). Regardless of how violent such “symbolic interaction” often became in the form of barrio warfare, Herrón’s contention that murals often “appropriate the space that belonged by custom to *placas*” coincides with my own thinking on the graffiti/mural battle for wall space.

Even established muralists such as Judith Baca became, in retrospect, ambivalent about the use of critical murals in covering local *placas* and suspicious of what can be interpreted as the sponsorship of “official civic culture” at Estrada Courts (Schrank, 2009). Despite the general acceptance and popularity of the Estrada Courts murals, and however important a role these murals played in contributing to the official identity of the city and its “civic cultural authority” (ibid.), it was still a far more mainstreamed version of the mural aesthetic that was needed to gain full acceptance by the city and its funders a few years later.

The Olympic Festival Murals

In 1983 the City of L.A.'s Olympics Organizing Committee commissioned local artists as part of the 1984 Olympic Festival to adorn freeway sound-walls with images of outer space exploration, L.A.'s cultural landscape, female athleticism, children at play, and local car culture (Levick and Young, 1988). While many of the artists involved in the Festival came out of the muralista tradition, explicitly radical content in the new murals took a back seat to increasing professionalism in the mural community. These new, local government-funded and sanctioned murals were produced as part of celebrating Los Angeles as an Olympic host city as well as promoting the city, once again, as “the mural capital of the world.” However, according to some, the Festival was able to simultaneously breath new life into the art form while destroying its original, radical intent.



Figure 3.6. *Going to the Olympics* by Frank Romero, 1984. Courtesy www.lataco.com

Most of the commissioned murals were painted on the gray sound walls in and around the Downtown area—the densest cluster along a stretch of the 110 Harbor-Pasadena Freeway between the 10 Santa Monica-San Bernardino Freeway and the 101

Hollywood-Ventura Freeway interchanges. Among the most high-profile and aesthetically apolitical of the murals painted during and right after the Festival were Kent Twitchell's 7th *Street Altarpiece* (1983)—photo-realistic images of artists Lita Albuquerque and Jim Morphesis looking out across large expanses of concrete and blacktop at the reflective façades of Downtown skyscrapers—his monumental *L.A. Marathon* (1990), and his 11,000-sqaure-foot *Harbor Freeway Overture* (1993) depicting members of the L.A. Chamber Orchestra.



Figure 3.7. Kent Twitchell's 7th *Seventh Street Altarpiece* in Downtown L.A., 1984. Photo by Mike Sergieff. Herald-Examiner Collection / L.A. Public Library Photo Collection.

As historian Sarah Schrank (2009, 159) put it, the 47 murals commissioned by Mayor Tom Bradley in anticipation of the 1984 Olympics “officially’ resurrected an art form that the city of Los Angeles had destroyed in the 1930s as Communistic, anti-imperialist, and overly critical of racial and class inequalities.” Likewise, many took umbrage at the concept of an “official civic art” because, as Hall and Robinson (2001, 14) point out, “public art can contribute to the assembly of a unique civic ‘cultural stock’

and hence visual identity; however its broader claims to the creation of a unifying civic voice are more questionable.” But despite the fact that the city resurrected the art form and that the once-radical muralistas had now joined the ranks of mainstream mural and civic arts organizations, many of the Festival murals were, according to Judith Baca (2001, 20) still “criticized for being too bright, and subsequently ‘too violent’” (Baca, 2001, 20). According to Judith Baca (20), “a *Los Angeles Times* art critic even called for these brightly painted murals on Los Angeles’s Harbor Freeway commemorating the 1984 Olympics to be painted over or vandalized by the public.”

Away from the controversy surrounding the freeway murals for being at once too mainstream and too violent, there was still an active grassroots and unsanctioned mural scene back in the barrios surrounding Downtown. International tourists visiting the Games would bypass these neighborhoods on their way to and from Olympic venues scattered around the region, but it was in these neighborhoods that one of the most prolific of the barrio muralists operated.

Barrio muralista Peter Quezada was a community youth mentor, member of the Echo Park 13 gang, and one of the first graffiti-muralists. As Sojin Kim (1995) writes in her biographic study of Quezada, he was uncomfortable subscribing to the regulations and directives of what he saw as conformist arts organizations. Despite his frustration he continued painting, illegally, into the 1990s under the auspices of his own seemingly sanctioned yet fictitious “Neighborhoods for Peace Youth Program.”³² Quezada’s background in producing gang placas influenced the aesthetic of his pieces, the style of his lettering—traditional Old English—as well as the placement of his murals in alleys, on abandoned buildings, and along the concrete banks of the Arroyo Seco.³³ As Quezada puts it “the walls that I choose... for the most part they’re no man’s walls—retaining walls that are on abandoned property. So the walls that I take are sort of like orphan walls—walls that have been deserted by their real owners” (Kim, 1995, 32).

³² As I show in chapter 6, this tactic of claiming legitimacy in order to brazenly paint illegally without suspicion would be used years later by graffiti-muralists Cache and Eye.

³³ The Arroyo Seco is the watershed and tributary to the L.A. River along which the nation’s first freeway and namesake was constructed.

Similar to other muralists, Quezada had long used wall space to address the themes that were important to members of the Chicano communities living in marginalized neighborhoods such as Echo Park. His statements written in large Old English-style letters accompanying images of low-riders with huge mustaches, a crucified Jesus Christ, and an overtly sexualized Betty Boop included “Take Area Pride,” “Our Neighborhood Alley. Enjoy,” “Have a Safe and Happy Holiday Season,” and written on the side of an abandoned bar “Peace Brothers, It’s Thee Only Way If We’re To Survive” (ibid.).

Unlike the civic arts organizations with boards answerable to funders and local law, and unlike the critical muralists who by definition work by consensus and collaboration, Quezada was answerable only to the members of the communities in which he painted. These distinctions combined with the fact that he took stylistic cues from barrio placas posit him as the first known graffiti-muralist.

Graffiti-murals: a definition

Along with the metaphors of disease, disorder, and dirt that people use to describe text-based graffiti (Cresswell, 1996), in addition to its being perceived as “dangerous and demoralizing” (Austin, 2001), people often describe graffiti simply as “scribbling,” “childish writing,” and “wall scratching.” Pictorial renderings and images on walls, on the other hand, are often interpreted as possessing a universally attractive aesthetic and at least a gesture made toward the beautiful or the sublime (Kant, 1790 [1987]). These distinctions suggest that people allow ethical judgments to influence aesthetic considerations (Haapala, 2005, 52). Furthermore, aside from its generally perceived lack of aesthetic value or legibility, text-based graffiti—tagging—possesses the negative connotations associated with the aggressive demarcation of space as is the case with gang writing. But it is not in what is being expressed that makes graffiti appear threatening—especially given its largely indecipherable and cryptic use of letters—but that something is written at all.

In reality, the common distinction between graffiti as “tagging” and graffiti as “art” is one that is made subjectively. That which appears to follow conventions for line, form, and color is often perceived as more artistic—and therefore acceptable—than that

which appears as aesthetically alien. When asked about the difference between tagging and graffiti art, the most common refrain from people is that they like it when it is colorful and looks like effort was put into it. Put another way, “tags often are simple and stark, [whereas] graffiti art is a complex web of electrifying color, innovative calligraphy, and a kind of rhythmic chaos,” (Dunitz, 1998, 21) which appeals to peoples’ most base sensibilities.

As with the general public, much of the popular and academic literature on graffiti make the false distinction between graffiti as “art” and graffiti as “tagging”—suggesting wrongly that the two forms are produced by different individuals with different skill levels.³⁴ However, tags (writing, text) and what is often interpreted as art (pictographs, imagery) are simply two parts of a nuanced repertoire. Guisela Latorre, author of *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California* (2008), addresses the false dichotomy between writing (text) and drawing (imagery)—a dichotomy in which the former is viewed as “ugly” and the later is seen as “beautiful.” She writes:

graffiti calligraphy and indigenous glyphs explore the uncertain territory between image and text and offer alternative aesthetics to the Western canon that many Chicana/o artists seek. While Euro-American culture established clear demarcations between text and image, graffiti represents one of the first artistic movements in the Americas since the indigenous preconquest periods that took text back into the realm of the aesthetic (Latorre, 2008, 100-101).

As Latorre points out in her work, one of the ways people attempt to separate tagging from “graffiti art” is by distinguishing “illegible” text from more intricate—read “sophisticated”—painted images and scenes. This perception carries over into the way people distinguish even the more acceptable and romanticized “graffiti art” from murals. Once again that which is interpreted as being more illustrative and intelligible—i.e. most murals—is seen as preferable to that which appears to share commonalities with illegal

³⁴ I use the term “graffiti writer” to include all members of the graffiti community equally and regardless of the aesthetic content of their work. “Writer” is also the term used to define one’s self as a member of the graffiti community.

and unintelligible wall writing. There have however been attempts by academics and even members of civic arts organizations, namely SPARC, to reconsider some graffiti art as murals.

“Graffiti murals,” named as such, have been discussed in much of the academic literature on so-called hip hop graffiti. But use of the term most often denotes wall art in sanctioned or secured spaces that consists primarily of graffiti-style multi-colored, complex lettering and/or characters (Philips, 1999). In graffiti terms this type of letter-based wall art is called a “piece”—from “masterpiece”—or, when multiple graffiti artists are involved, a “production.” Others use the term graffiti mural to denote murals produced in the “graffiti style” as a deterrent to “vandalism” or other acts of generally unwanted, unsanctioned wall writing (Halsey and Young, 2002, 2006). In such cases these so-called graffiti murals are sponsored and paid for by business owners and/or local governments, and are produced by artists emulating the graffiti style.

In my own definition of graffiti-murals I do not draw a distinction between graffiti-murals and traditional murals or even graffiti pieces based on content or aesthetic. Rather, what distinguishes a graffiti-mural from other forms of wall art has to do with the artist’s own expressed identity, their goals and intent in producing their work, and the legal, social, and economic relationship the producer has to the space being painted. Like the work of Peter Quezada and that which is produced by graffiti writers Eye One and Cache which I discuss later in this dissertation, graffiti-murals are:

- 1). produced by self-described, acknowledged, and active members of the graffiti community.
- 2). painted in public view with, primarily, the use of aerosol spray paint.
- 3). visually thematic in that they cover the entire surface of a wall with a balance of letters, characters, and/or images painted against fully painted backgrounds.

Graffiti-muralists can also be negatively defined against other muralists in that:

- 4). graffiti-muralists are often motivated to produce their works for the sake of fame and personal expression in addition to critical concerns for community and artistic concerns for aesthetics.

- 5). graffiti-muralists are driven by a “do-it-yourself” ethic as opposed to traditional, Chicano, and critical muralists who rely on public and/or private funding and/or support for legal and logistical reasons.

The term graffiti-mural is admittedly an odd one particularly for those who have been at great pains to separate graffiti from murals since the destruction of the Olympic Festival freeway murals at the hands of graffiti writers beginning in the 1990s.³⁵

An Era of Mural Destruction

“Murals are getting hit by taggers. For the first time in the history of the mural movement, over 30 years, murals are being vandalized by young people.”

—Judith Baca on *Which Way L.A.* (Olney, 2008)

Despite their many shared goals and shared communities, muralists and graffiti writers have been antagonistic toward each other since the beginning of the Chicano mural movement and the painting of Estrada Courts. Part of that mutual hostility is a result of the difficulties these groups have had in competing for a finite amount of available wall space. But it was the tagging of the Olympic murals beginning in the 1990s that brought the struggle for wall space into focus for most people.

Whereas mural historian Shifra M. Goldman (1976, 75) sees graffiti as “individual and aimlessly aggressive” and murals as “collective and directional,” such rhetoric coming from the critical Chicano mural community is far from an accurate reading of the divide. The struggle between the two forms has been one over access to space and competition for exposure, not an expression of competing styles, aesthetics, identity politics, or ideology. Far from “aimlessly aggressive,” graffiti appears on spaces that provide high visibility, exposure, and ideally, lasting power.

³⁵ I come back to the discussion of graffiti-murals and their production in Los Angeles in chapter 6. I owe my use of “do-it-yourself-ethic” to Rahn, 2002. For one of the first discussions of “graffiti/murals, see Kim, 1997.

In a search for such spaces, graffiti writers do often disregard most social norms, mores, and aesthetic conventions for public and private property. Whereas writing on a church or a private home is traditionally not tolerated among members of the graffiti community, writing on a mural, like on signage, is seen by most writers as a necessary and acceptable method of having their work seen.³⁶ One of the reasons for writing on murals is that they provide a protective background for graffiti as it is difficult to paint over a tag without damaging the underlying and surrounding mural. In such cases, since the cleaning of murals is left to specialized crews and sometimes the muralist him or herself, tags last for long periods of time.³⁷ In some cases however, graffiti writers are in fact personally hostile toward the very notion of legal and funded wall art. As longtime Los Angeles-based graffiti writer and prolific mural bomber Colt 45 candidly put it:

I've hit a lot of murals and it might seem like that would be malicious, but really it's not. What happened is they stopped buffing the murals cause the mural people wanted to refurbish them, but they never had the money to paint over graffiti when new tags or whatever popped up on them. So they kinda just went to shit and we started hitting them because they already looked horrible and the murals were already destroyed so we figured 'fuck it, if they don't care why should we.' But I definitely think if they have restored a mural you shouldn't hit it. If a mural is clean then writers should let it ride just out of respect for other people. I don't want them painting over my art anymore than they want me painting over theirs. Damaging something that is undamaged hasn't really gave me kicks since I was about 16. I'm a hell of a lot older than that now.

But all respect aside, these muralists got paid five figures to paint these murals in the first place so I'm like, 'yo you got your money, what the fuck do you care.' And the art in those murals on the freeways is really pathetic. There's a whole lot of graffiti writers I can think of who are infinitely better

³⁶ These conventions are not universal. For example, in post-communist Eastern European countries as well as Germany, churches are fair game for writers, whereas in Central American countries and in the U.S. south—New Orleans in particular—writing on a private home is not seen as taboo. Likewise, writing on a school in the U.S. is seen as a means of attracting unwanted attention from law enforcement, whereas in most countries schools are prime targets for writers. See also Ferrell and Weide (2010, 54-55) for their discussion of the “moral codes of the subculture.”

³⁷ I elaborate on the many legal and logistical barriers to cleaning murals in this chapter, and in chapter 5 I discuss the legal implications of painting over graffiti on murals in my discussion of the Visual Artist Rights Act (VARA).

than any of the muralists who were paid five figures to paint that bullshit. And all of the writers I know of would have done it for free just to get the recognition from their peers for their art. But you want to arrest us and charge us with felonies and fuck up the rest of our lives because we painted on your shitty murals that were already fucked up in the first place. Sorry, but you get no love from me. (personal interview with Wisk One, 2007)

Similar to the hostility for murals expressed by Colt 45, other graffiti writers begrudgingly see murals as “city art” (personal interview, Ism, 2011)—derogatory term, like “plop art,”³⁸ for works of sanctioned public art that garners little respect from other artists. Such apparently authorless murals are often understood as little more than aesthetic attempts to abate or obscure graffiti in public places. When the artist involved in painting a particular mural is known, many graffiti writers will abstain from writing on it out of respect for the individual.³⁹

Some muralists have in fact acknowledged the importance of announcing authorship of their murals and have attempted to reach out to the graffiti community as part of a personal appeal to respect their work. But as Judith Baca argues, “outreach is difficult, first of all because we have very little funding or support, and second, what was

³⁸ A play on the term “pop art,” Plop art refers to art—usually large-scale contemporary modernist sculpture—placed in front of government buildings or in corporate plazas. Architect and environmental designer James Wines coined the term in 1969. Since then, many critical art scholars have used the term to describe art placed in—or “parachuted into” (Lacy, 1995, 24)—urban spaces that lack context or respect for local identity.

³⁹ Aside from Colt 45’s expressed hostility toward muralists and other writers’ ambivalence toward the status of murals as sanctioned public art, most graffiti writers are oblivious to the surface they are writing on. During my most active years as a prolific street bomber in the 1990s I personally wrote on at least two murals without regard for the deeper implications of my actions. In fact I once wrote on a mural that I happened to like very much—Sandra Drinning’s *Los Angeles: the Living City*. At the time I was unaware of the mural’s title or even that it was a piece of public art at all. Regardless, I did not see what I was doing as destructive. On the contrary, I was pleased with how the mural framed my tag and with how my tag contributed to the appearance of the mural. And like Colt 45 and other writers who “catch spots” on murals, I was able to justify my actions since I was not the one to initiate the destruction of the mural since it was already written on and would continue to be written on until the mural was either cleaned or completed obliterated (Figure 3.6). Regardless of any contrition I now feel, such actions on the part of graffiti writers like me are difficult to suppress because of the very irreverent attitudes we possess and countercultural nature of what we do.

once a close knit group of wall artists is now an amorphous and spread out subculture of graffiti taggers who do not subscribe to the rules and respect that were once important to the Chicano community” (personal interview, 2010).

Baca’s assertion echoes that of many who are frustrated with the perceived amorphousness of the graffiti community and the supposed lack of respect held by the younger generation Chicanos. There have been attempts to reach out to or even suppress the activities of “Chicano taggers” by law enforcement, community groups, vigilantes, and a myriad of property owners in addition to muralists and public arts organizations. The problem with this form of outreach and suppression, however, arises from the false premise that graffiti writers, or Chicanos for that matter, possess a homogeneous outlook when it comes to writing on murals.

Despite the fact that many graffiti writers do not identify themselves as “Chicano,” and historically about half of the city’s most prolific graffiti writers can be identified as “White”—based on my own observations—there have nevertheless been attempts to appeal to members of “la raza”—Chicanos and other members of “the race”—not to write on critical Chicano murals because they articulate the voice of the mutually oppressed, or in some cases depict religious iconography. But these attempts inevitably fail.⁴⁰ Whereas many Chicano graffiti writers did once maintain close ties to elders and leaders in the Chicano community, newer writers began identifying themselves as “writers” and “bombers,” not “Chicanos,” “artists,” or “activists” as the graffiti community became established by the late 1980s.

This shift in proclaimed affiliation among young Chicano graffiti writers may also have to do with larger shifts in ethnic identity formation and changes in identity politics during the 1990s. Furthermore, most new writers could not simply be considered part of what Judith Baca and other critical muralists romantically view as members of progressive subcultures who possess a liberal humanist conception of themselves. This shift in identity may be, as Liz Bondi (1993, 86) puts it, part of young Chicano graffiti

⁴⁰ I address the Chicano muralist/graffiti-muralist divide as part of my discussion of Ernesto De La Loza’s work on the Sunset retaining walls.

writers' attempt to "resist their positioning as 'others' or 'minorities', and to construct alternative identities as part of a politics of resistance or opposition."

In still other cases, Baca and other critical muralists appealed to "higher-minded" graffiti writers to "elevate their art form" by arguing how placas and murals were "an evolutionary step in the development of graffiti... [which] make a statement that is more complicated and can say many more things" (Baca quoted in Sanchez-Tranquilino, 1995, 82). In 2010 Baca rearticulated her stance on the mural/graffiti divide saying (Morrison, 2010):

the distinction [between murals and graffiti] goes back to the very roots of muralism. It's the difference between being able to speak in articulate poetry and being able to make a crude remark. Both are expressions, but the difference is the quality of expression. Either we provide the opportunity for quality expression or we simply get crude remarks everywhere.

Such condescending remarks about graffiti as an immature and crude art form fail to recognize the very reason many graffiti writers do graffiti at all. To suggest that graffiti writers acquiesce to the demands of "higher-minded" muralists and Chicano leaders who themselves use walls as canvas is to misunderstand the aims and desires of many members of the graffiti subculture—many of which I discuss as part of my longer discussion and definition of graffiti in chapter 2.⁴¹

There is also the supposition among many in the graffiti/mural debate that "higher forms of art"—such as murals—have an intrinsic right to space. Such popular arguments in defense of murals over graffiti are the same as those used by advertisers and mainstreamed public artists against Chicano and critical muralists. But I argue that the right to aestheticize space should not be established according to a hierarchy of "higher" or "lower," "better" or "worse," "collective" or "individualistic." Rather, space should be afforded to those who occupy it with their art at any given time and have earned the personal respect of those who could potentially undue that claim to space.

⁴¹ In recent years Baca has come out in support of the contribution graffiti writers have made to the public art movement.

Such a position is admittedly anarchic, but no other hierarchical system seems capable of providing equal access to wall space. As scholars from Richard Sennett (1970) to Jeffrey Hou (2010) insist, an anarchic do-it-yourself system takes the authority to determine the appearance of the city out of the hands of those who are motivated by power and profit, and puts it in the hands of those who are motivated by a sense of social responsibility, inclusiveness, and personal desires for free speech. Although critical muralists appeal to a communal notion of how wall space should look and what its message should be, there is little distinction between such culturally authoritative claims made to space and those claims to space made by property owners, the economically powerful, or the politically entrenched.



Figure 3.8 “Cisco” over a graffiti-covered mural—*Silent Prison* by Margaret Garcia, 1984—in Downtown L.A., 1996. Photo by Stefano Bloch.

Given my perspective of who has the right to aestheticize wall space, when “freeway bombers”—prolific graffiti writers who focus on writing on freeway infrastructure as a means of “getting up” and having their name seen—turned to the Olympic murals in the ‘90s I was ambivalent. I admired those murals, but I was also pleased that individual graffiti writers were still active participants in determining the

appearance of public space, even if these graffiti writers had seemingly lost all sense of respect for other artists. While the tagging and eventual buffing of the Olympic murals is part of public consciousness in L.A., how that process of destruction played out, and who the players were, is largely unknown. However, as my research shows, there were several factors—the actions of a small cohort of graffiti writers to a large extent—that led to the freeway murals’ slow expiry.



Figure 3.9. Depiction of artist Lita Albuquerque, north side of Kent Twitchell’s *7th Street Altarpiece*. Source: www.lamurals.org



Figure 3.10. Twitchell's 7th *Street Altarpiece* covered in graffiti, c. 2002.
Photo by Dave Condi.

Bombers

The freeway murals were completed in anticipation of the 1984 Summer Games. At that same time so-called hip hop graffiti—or what I identify as systematic, stylistic, street-based graffiti—had made its way to Los Angeles from New York. Inspired in part by books such as *Subway Art* (Cooper and Chalfant, 1988) and films such as *Beat Street* (Lathan, 1984), the new writers in L.A. were looking to the buses and the freeway system in the same way New York writers looked to the subway system to have their work seen (personal interviews, 2008-2011). In a turn away from traditional gang writing and graffiti confined to particular neighborhoods, which was the norm in L.A. since the shoeshine boys marked their territory at Olvera Street (Reiss, 2007), the new generation of graffiti writers were on a mission to go “all-city”—to achieve “bomber” status in the graffiti community by writing one’s name in many districts and neighborhoods across Los Angeles.

The most prolific of the first generation of all-city graffiti writers was Wisk. Wisk

grew up on the East Side, but was bused to school in the wealthy district of Pacific Palisades on the far west side of Los Angeles. As he explained to me in a personal interview (2010), “taking the bus those 25 miles everyday gave me a unique view of the city.” Inspired by what was happening in New York as well as by his own interest in moving around the city as a skateboarder, Wisk began writing his name on buses before moving on to street bombing. Like many other writers of his generation, street bombing expanded into freeway bombing and eventually into the establishment of graffiti crews. While most other writers of his generation were forming crews centered around the tenets of hip hop—MCing, breakdancing, Djing and graffiti art—Wisk was starting crews focused on “getting up, partying, and just kickin’ it” (personal interview, 2010).

Wisk established a crew for each aspect of all-city writing: RTDK for bus mobbers, LOD for street bombers, and IFK for freeway bombers.⁴² As Wisk put it, “L.A. is so huge you have to cover every aspect of transportation. If you want to go all-city you have to have the busses down, the streets, and the freeways. You can’t be caught sleepin’ on any one area” (personal interview, 2010). So prolific was Wisk at bombing freeways and writing on every available piece of ground-level infrastructure—light poles, call boxes, guard rails—by 1988 he turned his attention to the neglected backs of freeway signs high above the lanes of traffic. He and Ser, his writing partner at the time, began using belts and ropes to shimmy up the posts to reach the signs—or “heavens” as the backs of freeway signs are called among members of the graffiti community.⁴³ They would then write their names multiple times or in large block or bubble letters which would be visible to people travelling in the opposing lanes of traffic.

Wisk inspired a whole generation of graffiti writers. His numbered bubble letters could be seen in every neighborhood and along every major street in the city. His scribes—name etched into glass—could be seen on every bus in the RTD fleet, and his heavens and personalized freeway sound walls could be seen on every freeway coming

⁴² Rapid Transit District Killers (RTDK), Lok’s On Dope (LOD), Interstate Freeway Killers (IFK).

⁴³ As Wisk explains, “I coined the term ‘heavens’ after a serene night of bombing when I looked out over Downtown L.A. while standing 50 feet over a quiet freeway and said to Ser, ‘man, this is like heaven up here’” (personal interview, 2010).

out of Downtown. It was not until the emergence of fellow writer Chaka that a writer would make such an impression of the city again. And like Chaka who I discuss below, Wisk not only influenced a whole generation of would-be graffiti writers, he also raised the bar in terms of how active those graffiti writers needed to be in order to earn the all-city distinction from their peers.

Bombing freeways became a particularly quick and high profile means of getting one's name known among the loosely-knit graffiti community. By 1990, with Wisk's influence and the well-publicized arrest of Chaka, the freeway murals became prime targets for some writers trying to establish themselves literally overnight. While Wisk and Chaka rarely if ever wrote on a mural, others saw these murals as an opportunity for immediate fame. As Wisk put it, "hitting murals was just a good opportunity to stay up. Just a good spot that no one hit before. Hitting murals made them pioneers in a sense" (personal interview, 2011).

Once the graffiti scene was in full effect and the media had popularized the subculture beginning with a hugely popular Fox "Front Page" special in 1993, most writers preferred the security and anonymity of the heavens and other less conspicuous freeway spots. But all of this would change when a combination of a decrease in funding for mural preservation, an increase in funding for graffiti removal from blank walls, and an invigorated graffiti community with new mores regarding writing on murals conspired to obliterate the public art pieces.

Around the time of the L.A. riots and concomitant rise in gang-related violence in much of the city, the graffiti community endured what Wisk and fellow writer Relax call the "dark days" of graffiti (Reiling and Alva, forthcoming). During the dark days, a period lasting from about 1990-1994, gang members had issued a "green light" on "taggers"—meaning there was an informal shoot-to-kill policy issued from the Mexican Mafia against graffiti writers who were seen as interrupting neighborhood drug trades by attracting undue attention from law enforcement. This attention from police was the result of a particularly aggressive anti-graffiti campaign initiated in an attempt to "take back the streets" by neo-liberal policy makers and law enforcement who were inspired by

the implementation of the broken windows theory in New York City under Mayor Giuliani.

During this time the graffiti community was also undergoing a drastic change. What had largely been a subculture of individuals interested in the social life of tagging and artistic expression, was becoming for more diverse in terms of writers' aims, outlooks, and methods of doing graffiti. Being a "graffiti artist" had previously been an alternative to joining gangs in neighborhoods where membership was the norm, but as the city became more violent and tagging became more popular, many of the people joining tagging crews were what the aforementioned Fox "Front Page" special termed "tag bangers"—taggers-cum-gang-bangers. These tag-bangers were interested in getting up like graffiti writers, but brought the machismo, aggression, and sense of territoriality associated with gangs along with them. Along with being far more territorial and aggressive toward unknown writers in defense of their own crews, they were also far more indiscriminate in their writing habits.

Whereas "old school" writers—graffiti writers who have been members of the subculture for an extended period of time—typically adhere to the mores for not writing over another graffiti writer's work, settle disagreements—or "beef"—with other writers without resorting to violence, and abstain from writing on murals, the newer generation of tag-bangers were simply out to "get up" and "get respect" without regard for these conventions. Some writers contend that the motivation for becoming a graffiti writer changed by the 1990s. Whereas the first generation of graffiti writers were motivated by a desire for artistic expression and building community through alternative and even socially subversive means, by the time Chaka's arrest made headlines "everybody wanted to bomb everything without any idea of what the culture was all about" (personal interview, Trixter, 2009). Chaka's reported 10,000 tags (Fiore, 1990) and the media attention he attracted turned a subculture into a mainstream cultural phenomena.

Chaka

Chaka started writing in the late 1980s and quickly became the most recognized graffiti writer since Taki 183 shot to fame in New York during the 1970s as a result of writing his name on what seemed like every doorway, lamp post, mailbox, and subway entrance across the five burrows (*New York Times*, 1971). Chaka lived in the Aliso Village public housing projects just east of the L.A. River near Downtown. It was from his small apartment where he lived with his mother that he would leave by skateboard with a backpack full of Krylon Ultra Flat Black spray paint on all-night bombing missions across the city. He would not return home until the sun came up or every last can had been spent, whichever came first (personal interview, 2010).

Also like Taki, Chaka had a very legible writing style. Whereas Chaka's contemporaries Wisk and Sleez had developed a "wild style"—stylized scrawl intelligible only to other graffiti writers—Chaka took his stylistic cues from old-school barrio writing that favored legibility over ingenuity. His "clean"—legible—style and ability to traverse the city writing his name on virtually every piece of infrastructure along the way established him as the most recognize and prolific tagger of all time.



Figure 3.11 Wisk tag and "throw-up," 1992. Source: www.50mmlosangeles.com



Figure 3.12. (left): Sleez tag c. 1989. **Figure 3.13.** (right): Chaka LOD tag, c.2004.
Source: www.50mmlosangeles.com

His rise to fame can be attributed to his distinct ability to garner recognition from members of the graffiti community as well as everyday citizens who reviled, if not respected, his efforts. As Eye One recalls (personal interview, 2009):

Around '89 I started noticing Chaka. I think the magic of the Chaka phenomenon was that it showed the incredible potential of just a written name. Referencing back to my grandmother, she noticed the name and she was all over the city. She would always say, 'Hey, I always see this name everywhere you know, Chaka... Chaka... Chaka... Chaka.' I think the media noticed it because everybody noticed it. If my parents noticed it, everyone noticed it. There were names before that that were a lot harder to read that just looked like scribble to the common person. Seeing this bold writing that just said 'Chaka' I think opened everyone's eyes.

As Eye One suggests, Chaka's fame also attracted the media to the previously unacknowledged practice of writing on walls. Before Chaka, graffiti was often called "ghetto art" and believed to be practiced primarily in the barrios or 'hoods of South L.A. Chaka, on the other hand, wrote his name across Beverly Hills, Hollywood, the San Fernando Valley, as well as in South L.A. and the barrio in which he was raised. But his influence was not just in attracting outside attention to graffiti, Chaka was also able to inspire a new generation of bombers to write in a whole new way. As Skill One—the widely acknowledged "god father" of L.A. graffiti—remembers:

The other guys bombing at the time had done it more for writers' sake—more wild-style, more technical style—which the average person couldn't

understand. And now Chaka was the one who brought up this whole thing of readable. Like your mom was all, ‘Who’s Chaka?’ And so that kind of brought that whole thing which spurred a flurry of landmark artists and guys who just focused on doing flat black and getting a lot of tags up. You had that era that he started. (personal interview, 2009)

But more than just signaling a change in style and tactic, the Chaka era signifies for most writers the era of increased media attention and the same kind of exploitation of L.A. writers as that experienced by New York writers during the gallerization of graffiti art ten years earlier. Such attention had both positive and negative consequences. As Unit—a long time graffiti writer and founder of the graffiti discussion forum and on-line galley and database www.50mmlosnagels.com—recalls:

Everyone seemed to become a writer after the media’s exploitation of Chaka. I certainly did, like just seeing Chaka up and getting known in the media definitely inspired me to step to that as well, and it definitely intensified my interest in graffiti for sure. I will not lie. (personal interview, 2009)

Volt, one of Chaka’s fellow LOD crewmember concurs:

After seeing the exploitation of Chaka I saw that the game had changed, that we had to watch our backs, not just from the cops, but from the media. We had to be smarter and we had to be careful when something looked too good to be true. It was hard for the media to understand that tagging and graffiti were the same thing, Even to this day the media tries to separate the two because they think graffiti is supposed to be more artistic. The reality is that there can't be graffiti without tagging. (personal interview, 2009)

Volt interprets Chaka’s effect on the graffiti scene and popular culture in general in the way most of my respondents remember it. They see Chaka as contributing, unwittingly, to the artificial split between what some people romantically interpreted as “graffiti” and what others deemed “tagging,” which soon became synonymous with “tag-banging.”

Again, as Eye One, also a longtime member of the LOD crew, adds:

I think the media was debating whether they should treat it as an art form or as a crime. They were definitely on the fence. I saw all the Fox Undercover stuff showing people going out bombing, and even then, their editorial slant was ‘Oooh, this is forbidden, but at the same time it’s interesting.’ I think after that they just thought, ‘Okay, we’re going to

decide that it's bad and vilify it in everyone's eyes.' After the Chaka exposure graffiti just became wide open. Obviously a lot of kids saw that and were like, 'Yes, I want to be like Chaka too!' (personal interview, 2009)

In an extended excerpt from a personal interview (2009) with Chaka, he reflects on his own rise to fame and eventual arrest:

Everybody in the neighborhood and over in the Village Housing Projects in Eastlake called me [Chaka]. I was also kind of nice and got along with everybody just like the character [in the television show *Land of the Lost*]. I would sign my name up. I was like, 'oh, this is me and this is me.' So my admiration was for me and I wanted just to become me. And it was also like an escape from the environment that you were living in. I mean, at least in the Village. I turned to myself since everything around me was so violent.

From that first time walking down that street I would strategically map out and highlight areas that I have not hit yet. Then I would map out areas that I already hit, I would mark them out as complete. It was a total battle plan, by myself. I would walk on foot, on a solo mission, several, several miles at a time. But even the very first time that I did it I was like, "This is it. This is what I am going to do." And like I said, it is like everything that I put my hands to, I pursue it with all my heart, by being an extremist. So it was no rest, seven nights a week. I would start as soon as it would get dark and go up to sunlight. So it would be anywhere from like 9 p.m. to 5:00 in the morning. I wound up dropping out of school because of that. I actually dropped out of school just for that because it was taking almost all my time. I could not make it in school. I would sleep in after being out all night.

I used bold lettering and I would find the highest spot of all the writings that would be on the wall. I would find the highest spot above everybody else and put it really, really bold so it can stand out more than anybody else that got a tag on the wall. And buses were not really my field, so walls, highways, freeways, bridges, and trains were my objectives. And freeways to me were more of an adventure. Freeways are like if you are painting your name on the Hollywood Sign. It is more like you are getting in the limelight for everyone to read it. There would be nobody out there, just me. To me, that was a pretty big adrenaline rush. It was just me, a wall, and the excitement of just doing what I had to do. I had some big spots on freeways like on the 110 over in South Central and on the 710, but I didn't even plan them out, I just did it, I was just flowing.

So the media got a hold of it after I got caught. They were following me in unmarked cars for a long time before they caught me

red handed at like 7:00 in the morning, right across from my house on my way to a job training program I had to do. From what I have heard, they were making an example out of me since graffiti was already on the rise. And graffiti was actually turning over on a new leaf, a different generation of writers. A whole new generation of writers started actually coming out from '89 and '90s. In the early '90s I was the closing part of 'hip hop graffiti' and in '92 the tag-banging thing happened, so I was not part of that. I am not part of that at all. It was a whole new different culture.

Back then, according to the media, I was known as the most notorious, the most prolific. They had all these title names for me: “notorious,” “infamous,” “the prolific Chaka,” “the famous Chaka.” It was pretty devastating when I got caught. Especially at the time, I am very young at that point, and all these people—businessmen, movie makers, and corporations—are trying to turn me on and say, “Hey, let us use this talent. Let us make something out of this, out of your story. You are a story.

His arrest, hospitalization at a state mental health facility, and final sentencing became a major media event eclipsed only by the O.J. Simpson Trial a few years later. His story was told and retold, with varying degrees of inaccuracy, in several *Los Angeles Times* articles between 1990 and 1994 (Anima, 1991; Pool, 1991; Sahagun, 1991; Zamichow, 1994) and sporadic updates regarding his activities since (Boehm, 2009).



Figure 3.14. Slez and Chaka infamous courthouse elevator tag.
Source: Mark Boehm, *Los Angeles Times*, 1991

Chaka's brazen attitude toward writing his name on everything he touched inspired equal numbers of fans, enemies, and emulators. It was a major turning point for graffiti and for the lifespan of L.A.'s freeway murals. The sheer number of people writing on walls increased in addition to the intensified approach new writers took.

One of Chaka's contemporaries, Duce—who now paints murals and runs Maintain, a graffiti and skate supply store in Highland Park—recalls with some acrimony the reach of Chaka's arrest:

At the time that Chaka got busted, I remember very few writers in my school. And as soon as that dude made the news, everybody in my school was a writer. You know, everyone was a writer. Everyone knew what I did all of the sudden. When before they would ask themselves or ask me, 'What are you doing?' 'Is that gang writing?' 'Are you from the gang?' 'What is that?' And I would tell them 'I'm a writer,' 'That's my tag.' They couldn't make anything of it. But after that, they would say, 'Oh, like Chaka.' You know? Which was really how the media fueled everyone, because Chaka, in my opinion, was up. He was, but so were many other people, you know. He's just the one that caught the limelight. He's the 'Taki 183 of Los Angeles.' And you know, yeah, he got up really fast. I remember one morning I left my house, I walked into downtown, all of a sudden I saw Chaka, Chaka, Chaka. It was like, 'Who the fuck is Chaka,' you know? But he came and he went and left us with all of this shit to deal with. (personal interview, 2010)

Duce is referring to the stigma that was suddenly attached to graffiti. What had been seen as an art-in-the-streets movement at best, or a petty vandalism scourge at worst, became seen as an all-out violent attack on society. Just as the appearance of lawlessness was seen as directly correlated with actual crime according to some people's reading of the Broken Windows theory at that time, so too did the appearance of graffiti symbolize the presence of gangs and all that gang members brought to neighborhoods—the drug trade, drive-by shootings, a general malaise in community moral, declining property values, etc.

The confluence of gangs and graffiti attracted the anger of community members everywhere. Believing that all of those who spray-painted their names on walls were also gun-totting hoodlums embroiled in gang warfare over wall space, many citizens turned to vigilantism during this time. In one of the more well-known and tragic cases of violence

against taggers, in 1995 William Masters II shot in the back and killed an unarmed 18-year-old Cesar Rene Arce as he wrote his tag name, Insta, with his friend David Hilo on a Hollywood Freeway underpass along a flood control area in the San Fernando Valley at 3am (Phillips, 1999). Williams, reportedly a recently discharged Marine and part-time actor, had no permit to carry the gun (Riccardi, 1995). But when he made a public statement that he was standing up to “Mexican Skinheads” (O’Neill, 1995) he was celebrated by many people in the media who referred to Masters as an “observant neighbor,” “do-gooder,” “white knight,” (Riccardi and Tamaki, 1995; Riccardi, 1995) and “outstanding citizen of the year” (Martin and Schwada, 1995). Charges of manslaughter were dropped against Masters despite the fact that Hilo was injured with a gunshot wound to the butt and Arce was shot in the back from ten feet away.⁴⁴

Such a violent climate helped precipitated the literal rise in graffiti during the mid-1990s. Graffiti writers, most of whom were adverse to gangs and had no inclination to commit acts of violence or other non-graffiti related crimes, began a type of writing known as “daredevil bombing.” Daredevil bombers would climb up to out-of-the-way spaces such as ledges along freeway bridges and rooftops high above busy intersections in an effort to avoid potentially violent clashes with gang members, law enforcement, and vigilantes, while still maintaining a high profile.⁴⁵

In addition to Wisk and Ser who scaled freeway signs, Oiler and Decline are considered by many to be the first all-city “daredevil” writers. By the mid-1990s Oiler’s name could be seen written in large bubble letters across freeway bridges that afforded only 6-inch ledges for standing, along rooftops that forced him to hang over or rappel down the side of the building to write his name, or across the front of billboards over sixty feet in the air. As Oiler reflects:

At the time when I came out, the first generation had kind of teetered out, and there really wasn’t even nobody doing black and silvers from like

⁴⁴ Anti-graffiti vigilantes are the focus of the documentary, *Vigilante, Vigilante* (Good, 2011).

⁴⁵ Joe Austin (2001) and Susan Philips (1999) chronicle the literal rise of graffiti as a result of increased criminalization of graffiti writers in New York and Los Angeles respectively.

1990 to '91 after Chaka, Slez and Cab and them had kind of teetered out too. So that was me, I went out. But the buff guys, they didn't teeter out. The buffers were out there en masse. So everything went up a notch, literally, off the ground. When Chaka and these guys, Wisk, were hitting poles and curbs and grills, you know I had to hit rooftops and signs and billboards and freeway bridges—movin' it up into the air a little bit. But that was fun, the spots stayed up. It was original stuff. A little bit of thrill, a rush to go and get to climb. You know I always had a knack for finding a way to get to a spot I wanted. Even if the tag didn't come out beautiful it was up and you read it. (personal interview, 2010)



Figures 3.135 and 3.16. (below). Oiler on the side of a building in Downtown and on a freeway “heaven,” 1993. Source: www.50mmlosangeles.com



Bombers such as Oiler and Decline are credited not only with elevating graffiti, both figuratively and literally, but also with helping to challenge the perception that graffiti writers and gang members were one-in-the-same (personal interviews, 2009-2011). Ironically, distinguishing themselves by taking such risks to write their names helped clarify that these were not the same individuals who were carving out gang territory as part of the drug trade by demarcating wall space in

neighborhoods. Writers were once again getting a new form of recognition and respect for their efforts.

This physical elevation in graffiti had another consequence. It forced many bombers to “go bigger” and bolder in an effort to have their names seen in an already crowded field. The Olympic murals provided that high profile platform. According to Wisk, it was his and Oiler’s contemporaries—the legendary bombers Gin and Duce—who were the first to “hit”—write on—the murals. As Wisk recalls in a personal interview (2011):

hitting the murals started with the daredevil mode of writing. It’s not that they’re high, but it takes some guts to hit those, out in the open. It’s a huge risk. I have to admit it, but it was guys from my own crew who destroyed part of the culture of L.A. and what I was raised on—those murals. We destroyed a part of our culture. Ya, it looks fresh when they get hit, but look at what we’re destroying too. I love them and miss them so much. Around ‘95 is when it started happening after guys like Gin and Duce took the opportunity to do what no one had ever really done. They hit that mural in Downtown of the guy with his hands spread out (figure 3.15). Gin did the palm of one hand and Duce did the other hand. It looked fresh, but it sucks in a way at the same time. I really narrow it down to one thing: opportunity. It was there and they took it. It was just part of the new ‘I just don’t give a fuck mentality’ in the graff community. I also blame it on a lack of leadership from the older writers. We were too busy getting chased down and trying to do our own thing to establish that leadership. So a bunch of us were speaking out against hitting murals, but we didn’t reach everyone, and those we did reach sometimes didn’t care to listen. You know, you can only talk so much.



Figure 3.17. Kent Twitchell's 7th *Street Altarpiece* depicting artist Jim Morphesis. Courtesy of Robert "Wisk" Alva.

Just before the completion of this dissertation I was able to interview Duce (2012) about Wisk's claims. After sounding unsure whether or not he wanted to discuss it, he told me that he and Gin selected the mural specifically for its content and for "compositional issues"—two hands to support each of the writers' names. Reluctantly elaborating, he said:

Gin did the letters and I filled them in. He wanted continuity between the letters and then he hit-up some of our friends on the guy's face. It was all about placement for him and me. We wanted this giant guy in the mural to present our names to everyone. At first I didn't want to hit it, but it was a picture opportunity. It would look really great and be a great piece to have. Back then we were like a lot of writers—we were collectors of images and pictures, like kids who collect baseball cards. It was also a high-traffic area that we knew would ride for a long time, and it did. People would see it in action too. We wanted it to have an impact—and I guess it did since even you're asking me about it 20 years later, you know.

But really we just wanted to incorporate our piece into the mural, not to destroy it outright. We wanted it to be unified. We didn't want to cap it like other fools started doing, just covering up the whole mural. I respected Kent [Twitchell] because I knew him and who he was. But Gin was all like 'don't worry, [the city] will clean it. It has that graffiti protective coating shit on it.' So that justified it in my mind.



Figure 3.18. Gin (left) and Duce (right) on the south section of Kent Twitchell's *7th Street Altarpiece*, 1992. Courtesy of Robert "Wisk" Alva and Robert "Relax" Reiling. This is considered the first instance of major graffiti writers hitting one of the Olympic Festival murals.

After Gin and Duce precipitated the trend in the early 1990s, a newer generation of daredevil bombers such as Air from LTS and Gkae from MSK became more deliberate and systematic in their mural bombing. Both Air and Gkae produced small two-color "throw ups" on the surface of several freeway murals from 1994 to 1997—most notably, and perhaps for Air and Gkae justifiably, on the surface of Steve Rose's law enforcement-themed murals *Buckle Up* and *Designate a Driver*.



Figure 3.19. *Buckle Up* by Steven Rose with bottom portion painted out by a graffiti removal crew, c.1995.



Figure 3.20. Gkae (left), Air (center) on Rose's *Designate a Driver*, c.1995.
Source: kgmadman/wordpress.com

Although prolific, both Air and Gkae had short-lived careers as mural bombers. Air committed suicide at the height of his bombing spree, and Gkae was arrested in 1997 for felony vandalism. He was extradited from the Seattle area where he fled after a warrant was issued for his arrest. The media paid close attention to Gkae's (aka Timothy Badalucco) case due to his uncharacteristically wealthy upbringing in an exclusive gated community in the Calabasas suburb north of L.A. County. He was fined \$100,000 and ordered to perform 1,000 hours of community service—the most ever awarded in a vandalism case (Blankstein, 1997).

Among that cadre of aggressive and systematic mural bombers—Bas and Kween from CDP, Ozie from YR (Figure 3.17), and Esel and Deis from CBS—it was Tribe who was instrumental in legitimizing the trend. Being a well-known and respected bomber, her actions were often trend setting. When she focused almost exclusively on bombing murals—hitting Twitchell's *L.A. Marathon* and Glenna Boltuch Avila's *Kids at Play* in 1998 with large multi-colored letters in particular—it sent a message that any residual stigma against writing on murals had been lifted.



Figure 3.21. Ozie (left), YR, Skuz, and Ken (right) on Avila's *Kids at Play*, 1997.
Source: www.50mmlosangeles.com

As the City of Los Angeles and the California Department of Transportation—the agency primarily responsible for graffiti removal on freeways—increased their graffiti removal and abatement efforts, they were able to count on \$30m allocated to them by the County of Los Angeles and another \$10m by the L.A. City Council (Blankstein, 2008; SPARC, 2011). At the same time city funding for mural preservation was stopped, with most mural preservation being handled by the Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles (MCLA). Over the next few years, as the murals were being covered in graffiti, the MCLA worked to restore or relocate some of the freeway murals with help from the Department of Transportation, the Cultural Affairs Department, and the California Arts Council with the help of \$1.7m in funding from the State of California. But these efforts came too late for many of the freeway murals.

The relatively small amount of funding for mural clean-up and preservation during the late 1990s was nothing compared to other well-funded graffiti removal

efforts.⁴⁶ The priority given to otherwise blank walls certainly had unintended consequences in addition to revealing where the city's priorities laid in terms of graffiti eradication and abatement. As a result of these priorities for the use of graffiti-removal funds, graffiti writers were tacitly encouraged to write on murals where their work would stay for longer periods of time as apposed to adjacent beige freeway walls from which their work would quickly be painted over or sandblasted off. Writers such as Tribe we not looking to disrespect murals as some would have it, but were simply using the surface of the mural for lack of a better choice given their desire to "get up." As Judith Baca acknowledged in a radio interview in 2008:

there is a policy that says that any graffiti on a wall has to be removed within 24 hours, except if it's on a mural. So that has actually shifted the emphasis on to painting on murals. Because if you want to get your mark up, if you want to get your tag up, and you want it to stay up, hit a mural. (Olney, 2008)

Hitting murals, with their high profile location and assurance that graffiti produced on them would stay up and therefore be seen, had another effect. Dare-devil mural bombing provided female writers such as Tribe the street credibility they sought.

As Tribe puts it:

I tried to get my own spots. I tried to be original and get some virgin spots. And that's when Oiler taught me to get more spots that would stay up longer. So it was kinda like seeing and then being like, 'Oh, I want to do that shit, too' but I'm a female, you know what I mean, and like no female's really been doing that much. (personal interview, 2010)

⁴⁶ As I explain in chapter 5, purported fear of litigation brought by the Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) of 1990 also hampered many municipalities' ability to protect murals from graffiti and other forms of damage including environmental degradation.



Figure 3.22. Tribe, c.1997.
www.50mmlosangeles.com

Writing on freeway murals was also a far safer option than writing on the still-violent streets of Downtown L.A., where writers, especially female writers, were still prime targets for harassment by patrolling police, private security, roving gangs, and “heroes.”⁴⁷ The freeway provided exposure for their graffiti and earned female writers “bomber” status, but without the personal risk of walking the streets. As Pedal puts it:

I felt a lot of challenge to get respect. But in the end, I felt like I pretty much got a lot of respect. 'Cause, you know, I wouldn't back down. I would hit those big spots because I had to always be strong and stand up for myself. But, you know, I felt like females get particularly targeted, so it was harder. (personal interview 2010)

⁴⁷ “Hero” is the slang term used to describe citizens who take it upon themselves to catch taggers. Unlike a vigilante who uses force to apprehend taggers, heroes typically follow writers until they can flag down a police officer, or once cell phones became popular, call 911 to report an act of vandalism in progress.

Cuddles, one of the first and most well known writers in L.A., adds:

it's like I had to prove myself and prove myself and prove myself. But, you know, it didn't matter. I could be the uppest chick and I still wasn't good enough, you know. I wasn't good enough for, you know, any of these guys. And I don't know what it's over, like, why they're hating us, because I'm actually doing dirt and, like, mobbing freeways and catching tags...and I'm upper than them, you know. And they're the ones that are there talking all the shit. But it sucks having to prove yourself for so many years and it's like you still haven't gotten that respect because you're a female. (personal interview, 2010)

Another reason for the increasingly hostile environment on the streets adjacent to the 110 Freeway was the large-scale restructuring taking place at the time. Most notable were the development of Frank Gehry's \$270m Disney Concert Hall, Rafael Moneo's \$250m Cathedral of our Lady of the Angels, and new condominium towers being built across from the Museum of Modern Art in the Community Redevelopment Agency's (CRA-LA) Downtown project zone extending north along Grand Ave.⁴⁸

Chalk, one of the first female writers recalls what she terms the "insidious rise of freeway bombing" (personal interview, 2011). She says:

the shutters and spots in Downtown became a burn. You would get rolled up just walking in Downtown whether you were a guy or a chick. And I can hold my own. I'm no, like, upper class snooty chick, I know what I'm doing out there. But still Downtown was a burn. But at that time no one dared to move over and write on murals until someone with a big name did it. And when someone like Tribe, I have to say, did it, not only was it now, like, acceptable, but it was already done so why not just let the flood gates open on it. It just grew in a matter of, like, a year. There would be some tags in the past on the murals, but then, bam! They were destroyed. But it was better than getting your ass popped (arrested) in Downtown.

As Chalk and others I have interviewed recall, "it was TKO and their beef that started it all," and Tribe's actions in particular that legitimized mural bombing.⁴⁹ As a member of the TKO (Total Knock Out) crew, Tribe was enmeshed in an all-city feud

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the exclusionary practices that accompanied Downtown redevelopment at this particular time see Davis (1990) and Flusty (2000).

⁴⁹ For fear of reprisal, many of my respondents have asked to remain anonymous concerning TKO's actions.

with rival crews CTF (Constantly Taking First) and MTA (Must Take All). In addition to violent acts committed against each other, their combative bombing styles spilled over and onto the murals painted at the confluence of the 110, 10, and 101 Freeways in Downtown—the geographic center connecting CTF’s turf in Mid-City, TKO’s ‘hood in South L.A., and MTA’s stomping ground in Hollywood.

TKO has long been one of the most notoriously aggressive crews in L.A.⁵⁰ Under the heavy-handed leadership of one of L.A.’s most prolific and pugnacious writers, Toomer, TKO came to fame as much for initiating conflict with other crews as for the quality and quantity of their work.⁵¹ While many writers saw TKO as the typical tag-banging crew—that is they resembled gang members in terms of dress as well as behavior—Toomer says they were simply a crew of “down ass motherfuckers who didn’t take no shit, but didn’t claim a neighborhood either.” He elaborated on the distinction further saying:

a bunch of crews [in the mid-to-late-1990s] turned into gangs. They started to put the ‘13’ at the end of it, or they just got fuckin’ roped into whatever gang where they live at. A lot of gangs got bigger after that, because they just started sucking up all the little tag-bang crews. But I’m from TKO and I write graffiti. I’m a grown-ass man. I like to paint graffiti, and that’s it. I don’t do it in gang’s ‘hoods, and I don’t fuckin’ sell drugs on the corner, and I’m not driving around shooting people out the side of my window. I’ll fuckin’ stand up for what’s mine or my homeboy’s but that’s another story and from where I come from. (personal interview, 2009)⁵²

⁵⁰ TKO gained infamy when members of the crew—Jelous (Candy Ellen Srichandr) and Lifer (Gabriel Singer)—were featured on *America’s Most Wanted* and placed on the FBI’s most wanted list for shooting and killing Ojay from MTA (Anthony Sena)—outside of an art show in the San Fernando Valley in 2006 (<http://www.amw.com/fugitives/case.cfm?id=50309>).

⁵¹ Toomer, or TLok, is one of the featured members of the graffiti community in the documentary *Infamy* (Pray, 2005) and has received media attention for his brazen form of graffiti writing (Mohan, 2003).

⁵² The number 13 was used by street gangs to show their affiliation with the Mexican Mafia. Today the number 13 follows most gang graffiti and indicates “South Side”—for Southern California—as well as the 13th letter of the alphabet, which is M for marijuana.

Natoe, a fellow South L.A. writer and member of the CBS crew, concurs with Toomer's understanding of tag-banging's influence of some graffiti writers. As he put it:

well we didn't even know it was 'tag-banging,' we didn't call it 'tag banging.' Fox 11 News called it 'tag-banging.' That was just the way we lived. Growing up where we grew up, you always had to stand your ground. You're always constantly getting hit-up or tested to see where you were at. We held this mentality, this gangster-like mentality from our older family members. A lot of the influence that they gave us. That just passed down towards the way we handled our crews. We didn't know no better. It was all where you're from. Like, for example, the Harbor area guys were more on the Hip Hop tip and the South Central characters were more tag bangers. (personal interview, 2009)

TKO originated in South Central L.A. (now officially called "South L.A.") in the late 1980s. By the late 1990s TKO had members in every part of L.A. and several other states as well as Mexico. Outside of the graffiti community

Toomer believes the bombing of murals emerged from an intensified period in L.A. in the mid-1990s when crews were facing the "green light," more stringent criminal penalties for vandalism,⁵³ and a more "thug-like" mentality among newer graffiti writers. In a personal interview he recalled the moment that freeway bombing went from sporadic to systematic:

We battled the WAIs (Wild Art Images), I believe, it was 1999, or something. That was an all-freeway battle in which we fuckin' just overwhelmed the whole city. I remember, at that point, driving with my girlfriend at six in the morning to see the damage, and saying to myself, 'Fuck. I'm gonna go to jail.' Because it was so... it was just ridiculous. We had the 5, the 10, the 110, the 105, the 405, the 605, the 91... like, every fucking freeway. We just had all the sound walls destroyed. We had giant rollers, just big, blockbuster rollers on every rooftop. We just had everything crushed. There were no fucking limits whatsoever. (personal interview 2009)

Nine years after the WAI battle, which was not known outside of the graffiti community aside from the effect it had on the appearance of freeway wall space, and just two years

⁵³ It was not until January 1, 1997 that vandalism penalties could no longer be aggregated, meaning individual misdemeanor charges could not be combined in order to create a felony offense.

after members of TKO were featured on *America's Most Wanted*, the general public became aware of TKO by name.

Cyrus Yazdani, one of the most prolific mural bombers of all time, gained widespread fame as “Buket” in 2008 after posting a video of himself on www.youtube.com in which he brazenly bombed freeways in broad daylight (Blankstein, 2008).⁵⁴ Although TKO members including Tribe and Toomer had been competing with CTF and MTA for freeway spots for a few years, it was Buket’s bombing style that escalated the mural-bombing frenzy beginning in 2001.



Figure 3.23. Buket on Frank Romero’s *Going to the Olympics*, c. 2001.
Source: www.50mmlosangeles.com

⁵⁴ Clips of the “viral video sensation” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfMMBjvIa5I>) were shown on local and national news programs in 2008. For a discussion of social media and youtube’s role in promoting “vernacular creativity” among graffiti writers see Griffiths, M., B. Light, and S. Lincoln, 2012.



Figure 3.24. Buket (on right) on Alonzo Davis's *Eye on '84*, c. 2001.
Source: www.50mmlosangeles.com



Figure 3.25. Buket (left), CBS (right), c. 2001.
Source: www.50mmlosangeles.com



Figure 3.26. Buket (center) on *Los Angeles Marathon* in Downtown, c. 2001.
Source: www.50mmlosangeles.com

Trying to top Buket's tenacity, CTF also took mural bombing to the next level. By filling fire extinguishers with household paint and repressurizing the canisters, Booster and Ralos from CTF were able to spray their names in 20-foot-high letters. While less intricately conceived than Buket's letters, the giant CTF tags were impossible to miss and helped the crew attract fame and therefore respect.



Figure 3.27. Ralos throw-up atop Twitchell's *L.A. Marathon*, c.2000.



Figure 3.28. A fire extinguisher “Boost” tag on a Downtown factory, c. 2000.
Source: www.50mmlosnagels.com



Figure 3.29. BRUK tag atop CTFK on *Ed Ruscha* by Kent Twitchell. Source:
www.50mmlosnagel.com

One of CTF's most destructive fire extinguisher tags led to the illegal whitewashing of Kent Twitchell's *Ed Ruscha* mural and to the subsequent invocation of the Visual Artists Rights Act in court, which I discuss in chapter 3. CTFK's fire extinguisher tag is pictured above on Twitchell's mural covered by "BRUK"—a rival crew using the same method of getting up. In response to the destruction of his mural which took several years to complete, Twitchell said "what was once the mural capital is now the graffiti capital—although I don't call it graffiti, I call it spray paint vandalism. We cannot coexist" (Haithman, 2008).

One of the consequences of mural bombing was increased criminalization for those responsible. Although there was no local public money allocated to mural preservation, the California Highway Patrol, the L.A. County Sheriff's Office, and the Los Angeles Police Department's Community Tagger Task Force spend hundreds of thousands of dollars going after Bucket and other mural bombers. As result of his actions posted on the Internet, Buket was charged with 32 counts of felony vandalism and sentenced to 10 months in jail in 2008. Three months after his release in 2009 the L.A. County Sheriff's Department charged him with one more count of felony vandalism and he was sentenced to 44 months in state prison—the longest even prison sentence for a graffiti writer convicted of vandalism.

Whereas Buket received extensive jail time, others, many of whom paved the way for Buket, received only probation. Reflecting on mural bombing in general and how it led to her own arrest, Tribe recalls:

murals got so much attention because of these toys that were using the up writers to get fame kinda like in the rapping world where 50-Cent is just saying 'motherfucker' to get attention. And then bam, he's up there. It just started becoming crazy, like everyone was out for fame, you know what I'm saying? Everybody. Everybody wanted to be somebody. It burned spots. It just burned it because then the CHP [California Highway Patrol] got crazy because the murals were getting capped, cap, cap, cap, cap, right. So, you know, California Highway Patrol was like, 'fuck, dude!' They were losing all kinds of money or whatever. Then they started doing investigations like the MTA [Metropolitan Transit Authority] and then they were using the MTA's information to catch people like me. You know what I mean? And Oiler and I don't know who else they got—
Toomer, Ken.

But, you know, everyone that's been raided that I know and those people I mentioned, it's because of all the other people writing, you know? These other fools were doing some sucky-ass shit, some toy shit, and it looked whack on the freeways. And that's when they started taking notice because some of our shit was looking pretty tight. You know what I mean? And when we're hitting the murals it was making them look tighter and I was adding colors to my shit finally and was elevating in the artistic part of it, but as a bomber as well.

I was getting more into that so that's how CHP eventually caught up with me 'cause I was caught tagging and it was over some beef shit because they were beefing with these other crews. There were too many taggers out there and when there's too many people together, what happens? They all start fighting with each other, right? So that's what happened. Everyone started fighting with each other and then there was beefs everywhere; and all I was doing was crossing out somebody because it pissed me off. I wasn't thinking. I ran out on the freeway to cross them out and then, boom, went on a wild police chase and they caught me.

Once I was out on \$20,000 bail and they found out who I was, that I was Tribe, they come knocking on my door. I don't know, but I wasn't that scared because when Oiler got raided I was there. I mean, I've been through like five raids in my life, so when I got raided I wasn't like 'Oh, my God,' like shitting my pants or anything. I was like, 'Alright I'm going down.' But I thought it was more serious. I didn't know I was getting just probation. I thought it was more serious than that. I kinda was like, 'Ah, man, I'm going down forever,' but it was a misdemeanor. So afterwards I kept it going with the bombing and everything. I just didn't give a fuck, mural or not. Whatever. (personal interview with Wisk One, 2009)

In an even more defiant tone, Toomer candidly recalls the legal backlash from bombing murals saying:

after those battles [with WAI and CTF], the cops were so hot on us, like, seriously parked in front of my pad, Tribe's pad. They raided my house, they raided Tribe's house, they raided Ken's pad. They were doing so much shit to fuckin' put us down that I just said it was time to leave. I went to Tijuana for three years, and fuckin' destroyed T.J. They even started a police force there to stop graffiti because of us in Tijuana. I kicked off a giant resurgence of vandalism out there too. I'm proud to say that police, regular people, and just all kinds of fuckin' drug lords in the ghettos know who the fuck I am. (personal interview with Wisk One, 2009)



Figure 3.30. The beef between crews and increased mural bombing by individual graffiti writers is evident on Glenna Boltuch Aila *L.A. Freeway Kids*. Source: www.lataco.com

Similar to Colt 45's attitude toward murals and muralists, it seems that Tribe and Toomer began to express hostility, or at least indifference, toward murals and muralists only after their actions were widely perceived as excessively deleterious to the appearance of public wall space in L.A. What Colt 45, Toomer, Tribe, and other mural bombers may not have realized then or perhaps ever now is that their actions combined with a cessation in funding for the preservation and production of public wall art may have spelt ruin for the future of murals in L.A. and for the critical Chicano mural movement altogether.

The Beginning of the End for the Critical Chicano Mural Movement?

In a 2007 *Bomb Magazine* interview with Marisela Norte, Gronk who is best known for his contribution to the Estrada Courts mural project and a performance piece from 1974 entitled "Instant Mural" (Figure 3.29) in which he taped Patssi Valdez to a wall with duct tape, sees the issue of his own murals being painted over with graffiti as "a

tip of the hat” (Norte, 2007, 14) to his work. As he explains to Norte (2007, 14), getting covered is like paying “homage to those who came before and whose pieces were whitewashed [such as] Siqueiros and Diego Rivera. In a sense, our recent history has been whitewashed.”



Figure 3.31. *Instant Mural* by Gronk, 1974. Source: Harry Gamboa Jr.

Notwithstanding such a postmodern perspective, Toomer’s defiance supports Baca’s views regarding a drastic change in how young people and a new generation of Chicanos disrespected murals. Whereas the production of murals were once understood as part of establishing community identity, the destruction of murals illustrates a concern for crew and individual identity. Part of the shift may be the result of how young Chicanos and other graffiti writers began identifying with a larger community of graffiti writers as opposed identifying with an abstract notion of “community” which was defined

in terms of a supposed monolithic neighborhood affiliation.⁵⁵ Applicable to members of the graffiti community, Liz Bondi (1993, 97) understands identity as “process, as performance, and as provisional... acknowledg[ing] that identity is always both internally fractured and externally multiple.”

Along with the physical destruction of the freeway murals, community and identity shifts may also signal the beginning of the end of the critical Chicano mural tradition as it once existed—as the primary visual representation of a politically-charged community which possessed a more cohesive identity and attachment to place. As Goldman (1977, 125) argues, “in rejecting Anglo-American values, Chicanos felt the necessity of devising their own communications media. In effect, they by-passed corporation-controlled mass media to establish... street muralism (wall newspapers) [which were] often "underground" in character.”

However, with the aid of graffiti magazines, graffiti and street art coffee table books, and the Internet,⁵⁶ writers like Toomer looked past wall art as an articulation of community ideals and education, and toward the expressions of a dispersed and diversified community of graffiti writers. As Latorre (2008, 124) acknowledges, “the practice of creating graffiti function[s] for many taggers and writers as an identity in itself.” Such a shift in identity is part of the larger issue of assimilation, globalization, and transnationalism in the Chicano community, particularly in major cities like Los Angeles

⁵⁵ Steve Herbert (2006) discusses the notion of “community” in his *Citizens, Cops, and Power*. He cites Bell and Newby’s (1974) notion of “community” as “a God word” in American discourse and a “modern elixir for much of what ails American society.” However, within all communities are various and sometimes antagonistic perspectives that reveal a wide range of values and perspectives.

⁵⁶ By 1996 Los Angeles’ s most popular graffiti website, www.50mmlosangeles.com, was already on line. The global graffiti website www.artcrimes.com, which also shows pictures of graffiti produced in over 100 countries, went on line a year earlier. The Art Crimes website also helps challenge the misconception that supposedly authoritarian anti-Western countries such as Indonesia, Algeria, and Iran do not have hip-hop style graffiti. One look at the website reveals the large volume of graffiti being produced in those, as well as over 100 other, countries on every continent.

since World War II (Chavez, 1991; Acuña, 1995; Rocco, 1998; Davis, 2000; Chávez, 2002; Viesca, 2000, 2004).⁵⁷

As Man One—graffiti-muralist and owner of the Crewest Gallery in Downtown—puts it: to me, graffiti is a very unifying culture. I can go to any country in the world for vacation or a visit, and it will probably take me a couple of e-mails or a couple of phone calls and I'll have somebody to show me around town.... We might not even speak the same language, but graffiti is very unifying thing; it makes the world really small if you're in the culture (in Latorre, 2008, 127).

As with Toomer, Man One's affiliations with the graffiti community extends beyond the neighborhood, past L.A.'s city limits, and across national boundaries. This is in contrast to muralists whose audience and affiliation were significantly more localized. In describing the reach of the Chicano mural movement during its peak in terms of power and productivity, Chicano art historian Shifra M. Goldman (1977, 127) writes:

in most cases their viewpoint is micro rather than macrocosmic. Many minorities and poor residents of big cities live in isolated islands of community safety, seldom venturing into surrounding 'enemy territory' except to work. Young people often grow up knowing only their small segment of the city. This type of provincialism in the heart of the cosmopolis has its own standards and life support systems, factors which muralists have to consider if they wish their pictorial imagery to connect with the community.

By the 1990s it appears that increased geographic and socio-economic mobility among the Latino community further weakened the power of the mural as a pedagogical device. As neighborhood demographics shifted as a result of upward mobility and displacement resulting from gentrification, a neighborhood mural no longer realistically

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the larger Los Angeles-San Diego-Tijuana-Mexicali regional identity see *Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Baja California* (Dear and Leclerc, 2003). Also see Willard (2004) for a discussion of *Nuestra* (new) Los Angeles and changing Chicano cultural space.

articulated “the voice of the Chicano people.” As Goldman (1984, 57) explains, the cultural changes in and to the Latino/Chicano community actually started before the 1990s, and even before the conservatism of the 1980s. As she argues:

in 1975, or even earlier, the Chicano political movement was changing course, and rifts opened in the early alliance among students, urban workers, and farmworkers. The fraternal, unified community of the early period began to fragment as more Chicanos entered the middle class, attained professional or business status, and established a stake in the status quo. Simultaneously, a schism opened between artists who chose to continue serving the still largely working-class Mexican population and those who were beginning to enter the mainstream art world of elitist museums, private galleries, and collectors.

To the list of people leaving, or perhaps building upon, the Chicano art movement I add those who chose to enter the world of illicit wall writing in an effort to produce a more diversified brand of urban aesthetics that is as influenced by black, Asian, Caribbean, and Anglo suburban culture as by Chicano sensibilities. Because of the multiculturalism found in many sub- and counter-cultures, graffiti writers often eschew traditional ethnic and cultural categorization in favor of self-identifying with their adopted peers.⁵⁸ Graffiti writers and artists are thereby able to rebuke what graffiti writer Posh One calls the “stable definitions... and established rules and regulations” of established communities regardless of how generally “radical,” “other,” or “marginalized” these communities may be in comparison to mainstream society (in Latorre, 2008, 130).

Whereas bell hooks (1990, 149) sees “marginality as a space of radical openness,” in a postmodern setting such as contemporary L.A., the margins may be the very places where some see the most rules and restrictions regarding identity placed on them by

⁵⁸ The multicultural and multiethnic composition of L.A. should not be overlooked. As indicated on the bronze plaque in Placita Olvera in the original center of the city, most of the original non-native settlers, or *pobladoras*, were in fact “mixed, mualatto, and mestizo” (Estrada, 2008).

members of the radical left. Being romanticized and claimed by the radical left is, as I have witnessed firsthand, a major point of contention with many graffiti writers. Despite their countercultural approach to the production of space and means of expression, many graffiti writers are intolerant of traditional Chicano ideology and disdainful of leftist politics in general—from issues of war and peace to matters of class, gender, and sexuality. However, when it comes to race and ethnicity the graffiti community is among the most diverse, open, and tolerant from my perspective. Part of this openness may be a result of living in diverse urban environment from which graffiti hails, or as author of *Aerosol Kingdom* Ivor Miller (2002, 36) puts it, it may be because “urban writers from all ethnic groups have a common history of dislocation.” It may also be the result of identifying first as graffiti writers, and only second as “black,” “white,” “Chicano,” “Asian,” etc. Whatever the deeper-rooted identity politics at play, graffiti writers are far from willing to align themselves with those who seek to categorize them as anything more than “writers.”

That said, the issue of a declining Chicano influence and identity among graffiti writers might be moot because, as Man One argues, the graffiti community and its aesthetic is not a break from the Chicano movement, but rather a reflection of its history and reification of its potentiality—even for those individual graffiti writers and artists who do not consider themselves to be Chicanos. According to Man One:

what is going on with graffiti art right now is just an extension of the Chicano Movement. To me, we're the new Chicanos taking on the movement. It's more than just the Chicano Movement, it's an intercultural movement now, so I think it's even stronger because more people are fighting the cause. In the seventies, the Chicano Movement was happening because everything that was happening against Chicanos was very blatant, and it was pretty easy to single out. But now, the racism is so hidden in the culture that it is not as easy to detect anymore. Things like graffiti push the bottoms of [the mainstream] and [the prejudice and racism] comes out as a result of that. To me, it's totally an extension of the Chicano Movement (in Latorre, 2008, 127).

What is evident in the destruction of the freeway murals, however, is that new writing styles and more aggressive tactics in terms of producing wall art in public places started to replace the inclusive practice and populist aesthetic of Chicano murals.⁵⁹ The shift in Chicano identity and sense of community affiliation transformed how the new school of urban wall artists visually represented their sense of community and place. No longer were the romantic backdrops and social-realist depictions of Chicanos engaged in education, innovation, and industry being painted on barrio spaces in such large numbers. Rather, it was urban art in the form of complex lettering and simplistic caricatures being produced with aerosol paint throughout the city that was taking wall space from traditional muralists by force. What follows in the next two chapters are case studies of the production of Critical Chicano murals in that context of contestation.



Figure 3.32. Alonso Davis's *Eye on '84* in 2012. Photo by José Tchopourian.

⁵⁹ Ironically, indigenist glyphs—particularly Aztec and Mayan—were more often integrated into graffiti-murals beginning in the 1990s, but it was often done by non-Chicano graffiti writers such as Posh from the CBS crew who was nonetheless attracted to the aesthetic (Latorre , 2008, 123).

Chapter 4. Building the Wall: *Evolution of a Gang Member, 1975.*

In this chapter I provide the social and spatial context for the painting of Judith Baca's *Evolution of Gang Member* by discussing the three decades of redevelopment that took place before she took to the wall in 1975. First, I provide a short history of the building of the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls by the Work Projects Administration (WPA) in 1940. I argue that this project, like many others in the vicinity at the time, were construction efforts aimed at controlling nature. I move on to a larger discussion of the large-scale redevelopment projects aimed at paving the nation's first freeway along the Arroyo Seco, the modernization of the L.A. River, the razing of the Bunker Hill neighborhood in what is now L.A.'s central business district, and the eviction of residents from the Chávez Ravine neighborhood. I provide these histories with the use of rare historical images obtained from the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

“Los Angeles was expensive to build, and investors wanted assurance that they had not misplaced their money... the early civic leaders felt that the city's landscape needed to look more like the pictures for their city to grow. With the purpose to make reality match civic imagination, literally to create an ‘official’ urban aesthetic, a snug relationship between visual culture and capital investment developed.”

—Sarah Schrank, 2008, 4.

“The power of property owners and real-estate interests in partnership with engineering orthodoxy remains a formidable obstacle to different ways of conceptualizing nature and public space within the city [of Los Angeles].”

—Mathew Gandy, 2006, 143.

The Work Projects Administration (WPA) plaque was the first marker used to lay claim to the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls.⁶⁰ These walls line a ¼-mile stretch through the Echo Park and Silver Lake neighborhoods located between Downtown Los Angeles and Hollywood. The plaque's text—“Built By United States Work Projects Administration 1940”—situates the construction of the Sunset walls squarely in the middle of L.A.'s most ambitious and contentious periods of redevelopment. Since being embedded into one of the concrete walls, the bronze plaque has been one of the few constants in an ever-changing community.

⁶⁰ The “Works Progress Administration” (WPA) changed its name to the “Work Projects Administration” in 1939.

The WPA plaque does not just commemorate the building of a wall, but acts as a centerpiece around which scholars and students can discuss the urban built environment in its always-changing physical, cultural, and aesthetic context.



Figure 4.1. WPA plaque in black with purple spray paint detail, 2010.
Photo by Stefano Bloch.

Built to sure-up a sandstone hillside along a soon-to-be major thoroughfare, the 30-foot-high Sunset retaining wall was one of many New Deal-era construction projects that sought to create jobs for laborers during a struggling post-Depression wartime economy. Aside from their apparent utilitarian function, the walls were also erected as part of turning a working class, pedestrian friendly neighborhood into an absolute traffic corridor that would move traffic between the nation's first freeway at Arroyo Seco a few miles to the east and the burgeoning film industrial complex a few miles to the west. Socially and spatially the Echo Park and Silver Lake neighborhoods were in the middle of it all.

The work on Sunset Boulevard began as early as the late 1880s as part of attracting development to the then-bucolic area. Nearby, Gabrielino Indians and Mexican

Nationalists were still competing with Spanish *pobladoras* and incoming Italian and Chinese merchants over the identity of L.A.'s original *placita* (Estrada, 2008). But in 1901 the City Council officially slated Sunset for widening. The city's own chain gang would widen the 74-foot-wide cut through the hill, which began unofficially a few years earlier as a route for the Pacific Railroad and Ostrich Farm Railway Company (www.erha.org, last accessed 27 February 2012). From 1902 to 1904 competing contractors using a steam shovel and large work crews to turn the tracks and unpaved road into a major east-west corridor across the north side of the city.

Once completed, the viable road helped attract Selig-Polyscope Studios and later Mack Sennett's Keystone Studios to the area—the first film production facilities in the region. But once the actual pavement was laid, automobile and truck traffic flowed easily, allowing local film studios to relocate altogether to Hollywood by the 1920s.



Figure 4.2. Sunset Boulevard under construction, c. 1936. LAPL Photo Collection.

When the Red Car—L.A.’s public trolley system—was taken out of operation beginning in the 1950s, city buses were already moving along the boulevard. But the predominantly Latino residents living in the foothills in and around Echo Park were forced to by-pass the union-held film industrial complex in central Hollywood, traveling several miles further west along Sunset to go to work as nannies and gardeners in the still-rural Beverly Hills and Bel-Air enclaves. It was in these wealthy neighborhoods near the UCLA campus that many actors, writers, producers, and musicians from the East Coast and wartime Eastern Europe bought new homes and built estates.

Like much of the utilitarian and monumental infrastructure being built at the time—from the famed Art Deco Union Station and Griffith Observatory, to the aqueduct system and the dozens of bridges crossing the L.A. River—the construction of the Sunset walls was fueled with equal parts necessity and ideology. Late to be transformed from a pueblo to a major U.S. metropolis, builders, planners, and real estate speculators still considered L.A. a *tabula rasa* into the 20th Century. Boosters of all stripes were intent on taming nature, which for many of them included the “restless populations” residing in and around the slums between Downtown and Echo Park (Dear and Flusty, 1997).

In particular it was the *barrios*—or *Chicano*-populated slums and neighborhoods—that faced a particularly aggressive cycle of urban restructuring (Romo, 1983; Acuña, 1984; Villa, 1992; Rocco, 1998). Although established Angelinos living around the original *plaza* contested much of the social and structural changes taking place in the 20th Century (Villa 2000; Estrada 2008), by the time WPA projects and film studio construction were underway, the city had already been transformed into a car-crowded company town.

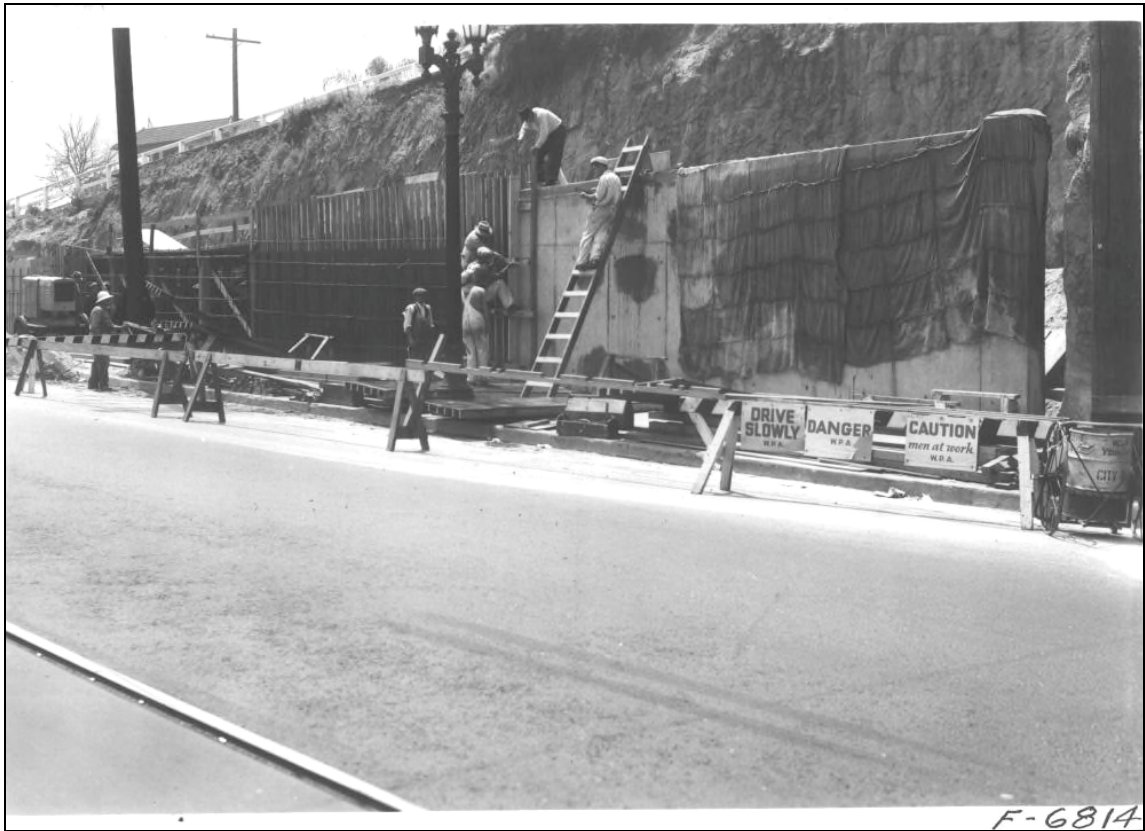


Figure 4.3. “Caution-Men at Work, WPA.” WPA Workers building the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls, 1940. Courtesy of the Los Angeles City Clerk’s Office.

The WPA, along with the Army Corps of Engineers, helped publically subsidize the soon-to-be modern metropolis—or what Raúl Homero Villa (1992, 113) despairingly calls a “‘super city’ of urban Planners’ dreams”—and cope with its growing, sprawling, population. As I discuss in chapter 3, while the WPA helped develop the State of California’s public art resources and aesthetic repute—there being over 30 public art projects completed by the WPA and its affiliates between San Francisco and Los Angeles alone (<http://livingnewdeal.berkeley.edu/map/?cat=39>)—its contribution to the development of everyday neighborhood spaces has received little academic attention.⁶¹

What has received attention is the political strife that has faced the socially, economically, and ethnically bifurcating city (Soja, 1996, 2010; Davis, 1990; Fulton

⁶¹ The *Living New Deal Project* out of U.C. Berkeley provides a national database of documents, maps, photographs, and personal reflections about public works made possible by the New Deal (<http://livingnewdeal.berkeley.edu/>, last accessed March 2012).

1997; Stevens, 2009). Much of this has been a fight waged by boosters, investors, progressive planners, and the federal government against the natural landscape (Fogelson, 1967; Davis, 1998; Fitzsimmons and Gottlieb, 1996; Hise, 1997; Klein, 1997; Pincetl, 1999; Gottlieb, 2007). The impetus for much of the city's structural development, including the construction of the Sunset walls, was the region's periodic though disastrous tendency to flood. Los Angeles is situated in a mostly low-lying basin located along the Pacific Ocean. Every 5-7 years the waters of the Pacific became markedly warmer, displacing large schools of fish crops and bringing substantially higher tides. Because this warm water phenomenon occurred around Christmas, fisherman working off the coast of Peru called this sporadic weather event *El Niño*, in reference to the birth of Christ (Suplee, 1998).

The El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), as it is formally known, is the result of warm surface water bleeding eastward against the weakening trade currents in the tropical South Pacific. The resulting change in ocean and atmospheric circulation patterns often increases ocean temperatures along parts of coastal North America. When these warmer conditions interact with cool moist air circulating down from higher latitudes, the result is substantially increased rainfall along the otherwise arid coastal deserts of Southern California. Meteorologists have recorded year-long El Niño and less intensive La Niña events in L.A. every decade on average (Suplee, 1998, Sturken, 2001).

In part because of its being located along the Pacific and in the path of El Niño weather events, and in part because the L.A. basin is naturally carpeted in sparse shrubs, small succulents, and other drought-resistant chaparral, Los Angeles and its environs "face a greater natural hazard from catastrophic floods than any other metropolitan area in the nation" (Gumprecht 1999, 132). In fact, catastrophic flooding in 1914 was the catalyst for the construction of one of the largest flood control programs in the U.S. By 1940, the same year the Sunset retaining walls were completed a few miles away, the 51-mile-long Los Angeles River was paved by the Army Corp of Engineers in response to yet another flood two year earlier.

The need for so much poured concrete was, paradoxically, too much poured concrete. As geographer Mathew Gandy (2006, 138) notes, "the increasing conversion of

the city's surface into roads and parking lots served to exaggerate the potential impact of sudden downpours by directing runoff straight into the city's simplified network of concrete channels in a matter of minutes." As urbanization crept up to the banks of the L.A. River and into the sandstone canyons along Sunset and other hilly surface streets, the El Niño rain and resulting floodwaters often created impassable messes along paved roads. The water that under natural conditions sank down through the sandy basin began undermining foundations of hillside homes and businesses (Davis 1998, 70). As a main thoroughfare for workers, large fabricated film sets, and the movement of people, goods, and services, an impassible Sunset was the region's economic and logistical Achilles heel.

Figure 4.4. Flood on Sunset, c. 1936.
Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.5. Sunset Boulevard rock slide, c. 1950.
Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

Despite periodic weather calamities, including water permeating the saturated hillside, the Sunset walls and their metal plaque have remained mostly intact and structurally unadulterated,⁶² but only partially so. To this day portions of the sandstone cliffs to both sides of the walls crumble under the weight of rainwater and erode against the warm and powerful Santa Ana winds as a result of what local historical Rory Mitchell (2011) calls the oppressive nature of the wall itself.

But contrary to Mitchell's assertion, the Sunset walls has been anything but oppressive for two generations of muralists. Like other public wall space and public works projects in the city, these WPA walls have provided the background and platform for more than one Los Angeles mural movement. In the following four sub-sections I

⁶² In his book *The Hollywood Sign: Fantasy and Reality of an American Icon*, Leo Braudy (2011) writes that one way to judge how iconic a symbol or landmark is to see how often it is destroyed on the big screen. During the 1970s, as the Hollywood sign, like the Eiffel Tower, Statue of Liberty, and Big Ben, became a target of aliens and severe weather events in the growing genre of apocalyptic disaster films.

provide background on public works projects that were taking place at about the same time as the walls' construction in 1940. Each of these projects—the making of the Arroyo Seco Freeway, the paving of the L.A. River, and the redevelopment of the Bunker Hill and Chávez Ravine neighborhoods—sought to control nature, protect would-be major thoroughfares and neighborhoods, and would literally lay the foundation for what would become some of the city's most contentious sites of public memory and meaning replete with gang writing, graffiti, murals, and graffiti-murals.

The Arroyo, the River, the Hill, and the Ravine:

Along with the construction of the Sunset retaining walls during the cycle of urban restructuring that took place in Los Angeles roughly between 1933 and 1959 were the development of the Arroyo Seco Parkway along the Arroyo Seco waterway, the paving of the L.A. River, the razing of Bunker Hill to make way for the growth of L.A.'s high-rise central business district, and the construction of Dodger Stadium in bucolic Chávez Ravine. Each of these modernization projects symbolizes how, as historian Sarah Schrank (2008, 4) puts it, Los Angeles was “carved out of the desert to function as an irrigated urban paradise.”

Perhaps it is because of L.A.'s relatively recent and highly contested urbanization process that the city is writ large in the geographical literature on the urbanization of nature and nature/society relations (Fitzsimmons, 1989; Davis, 1996; Harvey, 1996; Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2000; Desfor and Keil, 2004). Much of that literature has been produced by critical scholars following Soja's (1989) call for a reconceptualization of the geographical imagination. Since Soja's framing of the city as the outcome of what Latour (1993) calls “networks of infinite transgressions and liminal spaces,” scholars have mined anarchist and Marxist writings for evidence of nature's dialectical tension with social structures (Davis, 1996; Harvey, 1996; Braun and Castree, 1998, 2001). As nature/society scholars argue, “the environment of the city (both social and physical) is the result of a historical-geographical process of the urbanization of nature” (Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2000, 23); however, that is not to imply that nature is replaced by urbanization, but that

nature is an integral part of the process of urbanization (Heynen, Swyngedouw, and Kaika, 2006).

The dialectical tension between nature and society is less apparent but no less important to Lefebvre's approach to issues of nature/society. As Lefebvre puts it, upon the destruction of primordial nature, the town emerges as "second nature" (1996, 14). Even here, nature is not obliterated by development, but subsumed by it. Nature becomes, as Margaret Fitzsimmons (1989, 106, following Harvey 1985, following Marx) puts it, a "concrete abstraction." This understanding of nature's role in urbanization challenges Cronon's (1992) claim of a "triumph over nature." Rather, nature becomes one of the participants in the production of space (Soja, 1996). Just as Soja advocates for the removal of hierarchies in studying the production of space, so too must nature not be relegated to the margins in the study of even the most urbanized landscapes. Following this and Mathew Gandy's (2006, 142) assertion that "to erase all trace of the landscapes is to ignore the 'ordinary city' that lies concealed behind the dominant cultural and political narratives of urban change," I begin my discussion of urban change in and around the Echo Park neighborhood with two examples of public-works redevelopment precipitated by attempted triumphs over nature.

These projects—the paving of the Arroyo Seco and the Los Angeles River—also represent some of the major non-housing infrastructural redevelopment in L.A. which was initiated to provide more driving room, sellable plots of land, and parking spaces to mostly white middle-class commuters and wealthy speculators. The concrete banks of the Arroyo Seco and the L.A. River, like the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls and many other abstract and utilitarian spaces conceived by local and federal public works programs during this time, have since been reinterpreted and reused by sub-groups such as gang members, graffiti writers, and muralists, which I discuss in subsequent sections of this chapter.

The Arroyo Seco

Before major parkway construction began along what would be the nation's first freeway, which in 2011 was added to the National Register of Historic Places, engineers

had to plan for sporadic flooding such as the major flood of 1914. But it was the flood of 1938 in L.A. that eventually underscored the need for major work along the Arroyo to prevent erosion along the six-foot high banks of the planned parkway. What would eventually become platforms for some of the first gang writing and graffiti-murals in Los Angeles, and in 2008 the site of a controversial 10,000-foot-long graffiti-mural produced by several graffiti writers and artists (see Chapter 5) were once natural dirt embankments that ran along the Arroyo. Although Arroyo Seco is Spanish for “dry stream,” the construction plan relied on federal relief funds for flooding, calling for huge amounts of dirt that had to be brought in with the use of heavy equipment to secure the concrete banks along the once pristine watershed.



Figure 4.6. “The Force at Work, F-4251” Arroyo Seco, 1933. L.A. City Clerk.



Figure 4.7. “Gangway for Arroyo Seco Freeway!” 1947.
Herald-Examiner Collection / LAPL

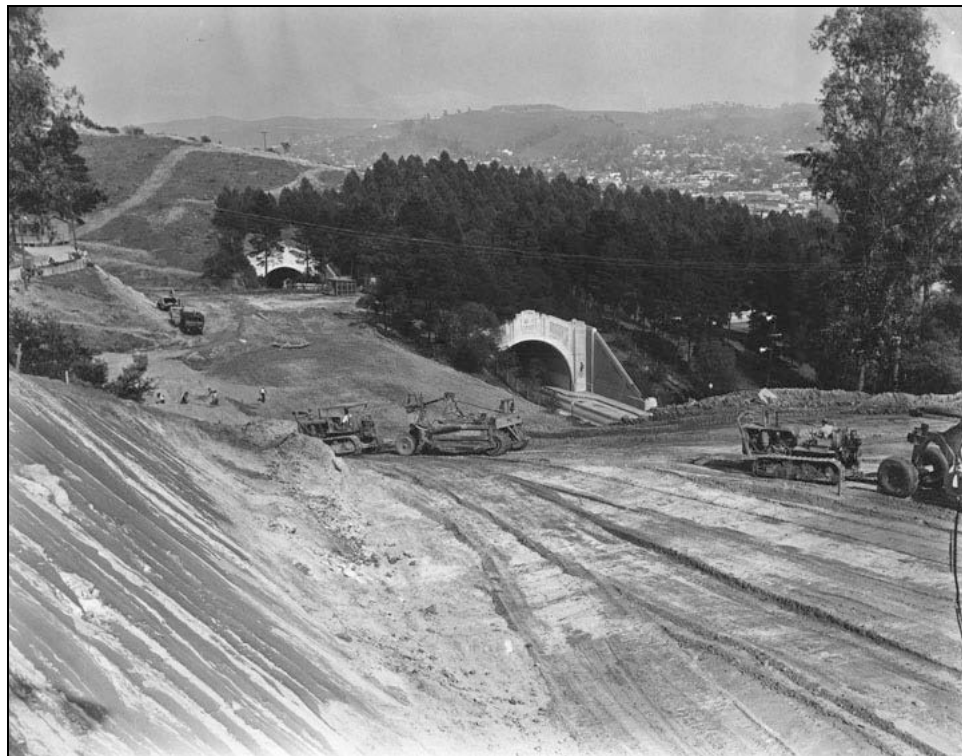


Figure 4.8. “A whole mountain is being moved to fill in dirt for the new relief road for the heavy traffic,” 1941. Herald-Examiner Collection / LAPL

In 1884 when Los Angeles luminary, preservationist, historian, photographer, and writer Charles Fletcher Lummis was offered the job as editor for the City Desk of the Los Angeles Times, he walled to L.A. from Ohio, recording his journey for the paper. He moved into the Arroyo Seco watershed area and constructed his home from boulders from the dry stream bed. When he heard of distant plans to turn the area into a traffic corridor connecting Pasadena with the growing Downtown, he organized a group of fellow resident artists and intellectuals in the arts and crafts movement who adhered to the principles of natural preservation that were popular at the time.

The group became known as the Arroyo Seco Federation with Lummis as president. Soon after the movement shortened its name to Arroyo Culture, it died out before major work began decades later. However, the group was able to influence aspects of the design in terms of its aesthetic and the engineers' concern for using locally excavated building materials (Gruen and Lee, 1999). The group may also have influenced more well-known preservationists who came to work on the project in the 1930s.

When the Arroyo Parkway project received federal funding and legislative authorization in 1934 to complete a road that had been started in small increments years earlier, it included some plans advocated by City Beautiful advocate and New York Central Park planner and landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmstead. Olmstead along with Harland Bartholomew and Charles Henry Cheney were first hired by the traffic commission to write their *A Major Traffic Street Plan for Los* in 1924. In it they advocated for the Arroyo project as long as it provided scenic driving and a plan to preserve surrounding natural and recreational resources. By 1930, in his *Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region*, Olmstead deemed the high-speed roads planned for the Arroyo as “necessary to provide Los Angeles with ‘adequate relief’ from the congestion problems of its overburdened city streets.”



Figure 4.9. “First motorists to travel over the new link at 53rd Street,” 1940. The concreted arroyo is visible at left. Herald-Examiner Collection / LAPL



Figure 4.10. Traffic on the Arroyo Seco coming north from Downtown. L.A. City Hall is visible at center in the hazy background. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection

The Arroyo Parkway was eventually built with financial as well as ideological support from the federal government which declared the 8.2-mile roadway as part of the National Strategic System of Roads, permitting federal financial assistance, labor from the WPA, and worth of receiving scarce wartime materials like steel and concrete (ibid.). In the words of engineering historians of the Arroyo project J. Philip Gruen and Portia Lee, the Arroyo Seco Parkway project served as a “prominent example of the evolution from recreational parkways to more utilitarian high-speed freeways, [it] marks an important stage in the history of American transportation engineering.” It was completed in 1940 as the concrete was drying on the nearby Sunset walls and along the Los Angeles River riverbed.

The Los Angeles River

In terms of its effect on public consciousness, as well as in terms of the sheer amount of concrete poured for the project and the scare left behind, it can be argued that the paving of the L.A. River is the most significant development project in the city of Los Angeles’ history (Arroyo, 2010). In his book on the L.A. River, Blake Gumprecht (2001) details the pre-history of the river, when its watershed was not confined to a gray trench that cut through mostly industrial districts and working-class communities as it made its way from the San Fernando Valley to the San Pedro Bay almost 50 miles away.

The river divides the east from the west side of Los Angeles and, aside from recently becoming home to a several-mile-long bike path and exclusive kayak and paddle boat trips at its headwater, has been a frequent filming location for Hollywood movies, hideaway for homeless people, and fishing destination for mostly Mexican, Salvadorian, and South-East Asian men. And because much of the river is hidden from view despite running through densely populated neighborhoods, the banks have long been a favorite practice and gathering location for graffiti writers (Mauer, 2008).

Image 4.11. L.A. River banks with graffiti by (from visible left to right) Zoueh, Huero, Trigz, Black, Elose, Bus, and Saber. Photo by Mark Mauer.

Like the Sunset retaining walls and freeway sound walls, the L.A. River has been battled over by muralists (“river cats” artist Leo Lemon in particular), gang members, graffiti writers, muralists, and city buffers for years. During the 1970s and into the 1980s muralist Leo Limón painted dozens of the storm drain covers that fed the river along Interstate-5 with colorful cat faces. The covers are now painted beige when not hit with errant gang writing by one of the several gangs such as Toonerville and Frog Town that claim the river area as part of their ‘hood.

The appearance of graffiti in the river was not subjected to public ridicule until 2008 when members of the MTA (Metro Transit Assassins) crew painted “L.A.’s largest tag” on one of the mammoth banks of the River near the 4th Street bridge near Downtown (Winston, 2009). Because of its monumental size and perhaps due to the fact that MTA had recently become the first graffiti crew to have a gang injunction sought against it (Blankstein, 2010), the Army Corps of Engineers who paved the River 70 years earlier

were called in by council members Jose Huizar and Ed Reyes to remove the three-block-long, three-story-high letters at a cost of \$3.7million (Hoag, 2011).



Figure 4.12. MTA letters in the L.A. River, 2008. Source: *Los Angeles Times*.

Saber, a well-known graffiti writer and artist whose work is featured in the MOCA exhibition “Art in the Streets” and is the apt target of Heather Mac Donald’s (2011) attack of the exhibit as part of what she calls the “graffiti-glorification industry” in her article “Radical Graffiti Chic,” had what was previously considered the largest and most elaborate graffiti piece in history just a few miles down river from the huge MTA letters (Gastman, 2007). In response to his piece also getting buffed by the Army Corps of Engineers 12 years after he completed it, he said in an interview with Eugene Kan (2010):

I was honored that the United States Army Corp of engineers used federal stimulus money to buff my piece. What a way to go out. The Army uses millions of federal funds to help fuel the LA war on graffiti, painting out

layers of raw history in the armpit of the city while schools have no books and hospitals are closing.

Referring to the 51-mile-long L.A. River as the “armpit” of the city, or what Gumprecht writes is for many “little more than a local joke,” is common. As Gumprecht (2001, 10) points out, the current channel, which runs far east of the original river, has more shopping carts, sofas, and litter than plant species, non-rodent wildlife, and, for most of the year, water. Much like the Arroyo Culture group’s attempts to protect and preserve the Arroyo Seco, which is a tributary to the L.A. River, the non-profit Friends of the L.A. River has sought to restore the river to a more natural flow by removing the concrete embankments and then turn portions of it into a recreation area. But realizing this uphill fight and perhaps misguided conservation effort, Mathew Gandy (2006, 142) argues:

“this latest phase in the history of the Los Angeles River is marked by a duality between two ‘expert’ visions: an environmentalist pre-occupation with ‘ecological restoration’ and a technical concern with the modernization of the city’s floodplains. The meaning of the concrete river as a lived space within the city is largely lost within the cultural and historical amnesia of both environmentalist and engineering discourses.”

As Gandy suggests, more than simply a battle over the utilitarian nature of its banks or the surface aesthetic of its walls, there has long existed a fight over the state of the river as part of establishing L.A.’s cultural identity. Like the indigenous species of chaparral that are routinely plucked from its bed as part of “river clean up,” the removal of graffiti from its walls are part of the battle against who and what is able to lay claim to public space in L.A. For Judith Baca such battles are part of the city leadership’s and Anglo elite’s mission to contest nature and bury sites of public memory. She writes:

The banks of the river were lush and green when the original Tongva people formed Yangva, the village that later became Los Angeles. Flowing through the heart of the original Pueblo, the river was the lifeblood for the people. People have lived, worked and followed their dreams along the river ever since...

This decision to concrete the Los Angeles River would affect the people of the city for generations to come in subsequent planning and development decisions and spiritual discord associated with the land. The concreted rivers divided the land and left ugly eyesores, carrying water too swiftly to the ocean, bearing pollution from city streets, affecting Santa Monica Bay and depriving the aquifer of water replenishment through normal ground seepage. In a sense the concreting of the river represented the hardening of the arteries of the land. If the river overflowing its banks regularly destroyed opportunities for the real-estate expansion that fast became the chief commodity of the fledgling city of the 1920s, then the river would simply have to be tamed. These first decisions about the river made it easier to displace historic indigenous and Mexican communities in the name of city development. (Baca, 2001, 11-12)

Later reflecting on her placement of her 2,754-foot-long *Great Wall of Los Angeles* mural started in the late 1970s she elaborates, writing:

The river continues to connect us to this history, and serves as an important site of public memory. When later in the 1970s, the Army Corps of Engineers, trying to deal with the eyesores left along these rivers developed a plan to aesthetically improve the sites, I saw an opportunity for a seemingly endless wall, thirteen and a half feet tall and miles long, along the Tujunga Wash. (Baca, 2005, 156)



Figure 4.13. The concreting of the Tujunga Wash in Van Nuys, c.1967.



Figure 4.14. Judith Baca with youth working on the *Great Wall*, c.1979.

Although the redirected placement and paving of the river symbolizes deeper cultural and economic hostilities in L.A., it is the displacement of the Bunker Hill and Chávez Ravine communities along its banks that Baca has depicted in her art and has used as inspiration to produce sites of public memory.

Depictions of Bunker Hill and Public Housing: the Photography of Leonard Nadel

The Bunker Hill neighborhood, once a district packed with large Victorian homes and tall tenements in the heart of the city became the location for L.A.'s expanding central business and entertainment district. By the time the cement for the local freeway system was dry, many suburban and exurban residents saw downtown as a viable place in which to shop and find entertainment. In the next few decades after redevelopment, companies in the FIRE sector (Fire, Insurance, and Real Estate) opened offices on Bunker Hill, attracting workers and managers by the thousands to its high-rise offices overlooking the L.A. basin and helped to turn Los Angeles into "a major challenger to the triumvirate of Tokyo, London and New York atop the global hierarchy of 'capitals of capital'" (Soja, 1996, 441).⁶³

As part of garnering such a distinction and becoming the a focal point and model for social scientific research, Bunker Hill and its environs underwent a particularly aggressive round of restructuring. In a particularly puissant passage in his *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Edward Soja (1996, 214-215) writes:

In the 1940s and the 1950s, the 'blightedness' of Bunker Hill became a matter of widespread civic scorn and frenzied public campaigns, largely because it was in the way of downtown development. Led by the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), which began operation in 1949, and the Los Angeles Times, a public-private partnership was formed

⁶³ While also asserting L.A. as the "most global city in the world," Richardson and Gordon (2005) have disputed Soja (1994,1996) and others' (Davis, 1989, Scott, 1990) claims that the FIRE, manufacturing, high-finance, and high-tech sectors can be unduly created with providing L.A. with this distinction.

to declare Bunker Hill a blot on the landscape of the burgeoning modern city center, an unhealthy canker that must be removed before it spreads. And removed it was. By the end of the 1960s, all 396 buildings were destroyed, 11,000 residents were displaced, local resistance was defeated, the hill was flattened out, the maze of property ownership was packaged into large lots by the CRA and sold for a song by the superdevelopers. The cut-off hilltop was crowned by the Music Center, some expensive condominiums were added later with some cheaper apartments for the elderly (although not cheap enough for most of the elderly displaced), and a New Downtown began to grow rapidly further southward...

Erasing this past, literally shearing it off, has been an avalanche of specifically cultural redevelopment rolling down Grand Avenue (née Charity Street), from the Music Center complex that first injected culture into the rectangular CITADEL-LA in the 1960s; to the vast mixed-use and still-being-completed California Plaza project that now contains the celebrated MOCA, skyscraping almost trompe l'oeil office towers, pock-ettes of good and bad (appropriately capitalized) Public Art.

Included in Soja's description of the geographical, if not imagined, center of Los Angeles are the words of private-detective fiction and noir writer Raymond Chandler. In his *The High Window*, Chandler (1942) describes Bunker Hill as:

[an] old town, lost town, crook town... In the tall rooms haggard landladies bicker with shifty tenants. On the wide cool front porches, reaching their cracked shadows into the sun, and starting at nothing, sit the old men with faces like lost battles... Out of the apartment houses come women who should be young but have faces like stale beer, men with pulled-down hats and quick eyes that look the street over behind the cupped hand that shields the match flame; who look like nothing in particular and know it, and once in a while even men that actually go to work. But they come out early, when the wide cracked sidewalks are empty and still have dew on them.



Figure 4.15. A serene view of Bunker Hill, 1940. Photo by Ansel Adams.
Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

But even more illustrative of the typically romanticized community that once lived on Bunker Hill are the photographs taken by Los Angeles Housing Authority (LAHA) photographer Leonard Nadel. Leonard Nadel's best-known images—those of Mexican guest workers taking part in the U.S. Bracero Program in 1956—were made four years after he concluded his tenure with the LAHA. His striking photograph of a young man being sprayed in the face with DDT at a processing center in Calexico has appeared in numerous publications (e.g. Street, 2005; Zamudio-Gurrola, 2009; Mitchell, 2010) and is included along with several others in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History collection (smithsonianmag.com/multimedia/photos/59660532.html, last accessed 27 December 2011). Lesser known, but no less striking and important as

visual historical documents, are Nadel's later images of gang graffiti made in 1974 on L.A.'s south and west sides. As Susan Phillips (1999, 283) writes in her *Wallbangin': graffiti and gangs in L.A.*, Nadel's photos are "material representations of a crucial point in Bloods and Crips history."

But his images of urban housing conditions in 1940s and 1950s L.A. are the best example of photo-documentation of everyday spaces. Whereas L.A. has been well-documented—particularly in photo series ordered by boosters celebrating the area's hospitable climate and happy communities between 1880 and 1950 and in Hollywood films beginning in 1925—much of the actual housing conditions and working-class populations of color were rarely ever seen first or even second hand.⁶⁴ Despite that fact that the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection maintains a large public archive including his work, his images have only been discussed in a handful of scholarly texts (Spalding 1992, Cuff 2001, Briante 2011, Bloch 2012a).

Nadel's photographs, which I use to depict scenes of Chavez Ravine later in this chapter, are strikingly similar in both composition and aim to the work done by social-reformist photographer Jacob Riis. Riis's captured images of slum living in New York City years earlier were collected in his *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the tenements of New York* (1890), which helped spark housing reform. Perhaps Nadel's work on Los Angeles has received far less attention because of the fact that the spaces he photographed and the people he met all soon disappear as result of redevelopment.

⁶⁴ Carolyn Kozo Cole, a librarian and archivist at the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection, sought to include people of color in ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the collection as part of her Shades of L.A. project beginning in 1991. As part of the six-year project she asked families to bring personal photos to designated locations where they would be professionally photographed and added to the collection. According to the LAPL Photo Collection website (http://www.lapl.org/catalog/photo_collection_overview.html), "Shades of L.A.: A Search for Visual Ethnic History is "an archive of 10,000 photographs representing the contemporary and historic diversity of families in Los Angeles. Images were chosen from family albums and copied in a project sponsored by Photo Friends, a library support group. They include daily life, social organizations, work, personal and holiday celebrations, and migration and immigration activities." Cole along with Kathy Kobayashi published a book of photos from the collection in 1996 (Cole and Kobayashi, 1996).

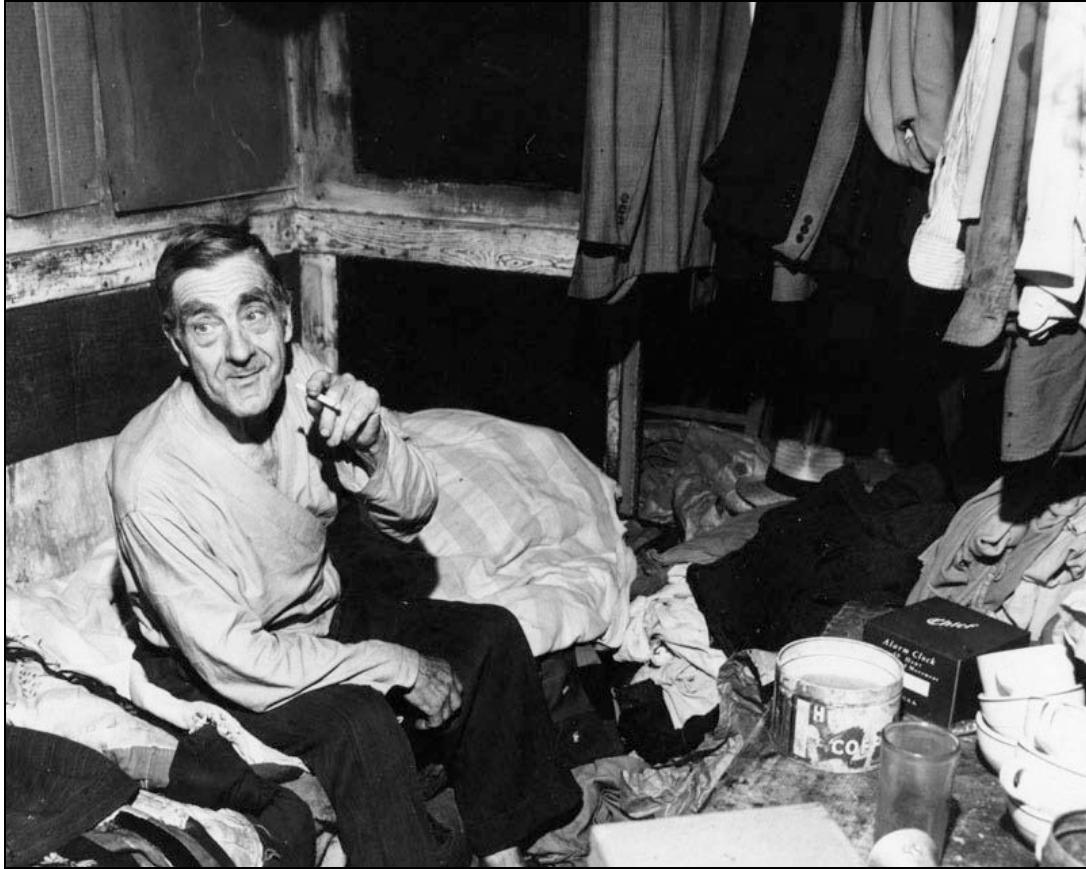


Figure 4.16. “Urban Poor,” c. 1951. The caption on Nadel’s photo reads: “Charlie, a single man, sockless and wearing shoes without laces, smokes a cigarette as he sits on his bed in a crowded room in a substandard building. Clothing hangs by the bed and dishes sit on top of a cabinet. He is being relocated to Estrada Courts.” Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.17. Apartment on Bunker Hill. City Hall in background, 1951. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.18. Children on fire escape in Bunker Hill, 1954.
Herald-Examiner Photo Collection / Los Angeles Public Library.



Figure 4.19. “Women washing clothes in a tub, slum dwelling,” 1952. A woman peeks out of a doorway as Nadel attempts to capture a candid moment of domesticity in the Bunker Hill district of Los Angeles. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.20. “Garcia family members pose outside their slum dwelling,” 1951.
Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.21. “Photograph of a small child sitting in a highchair in the kitchen of a slum dwelling. Family was evicted by the Health Department.” Photo by Leonard Nadel. LAPL Collection.

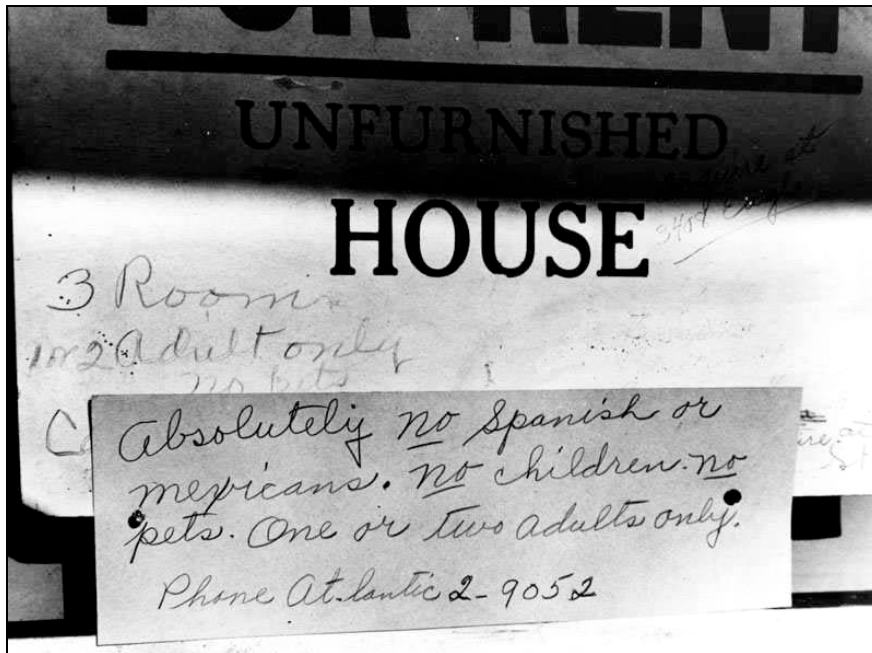


Figure 4.22. “For Rent sign.” “Absolutely no Spanish or Mexicans. No children. No pets. One or two adults only,” 1951. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

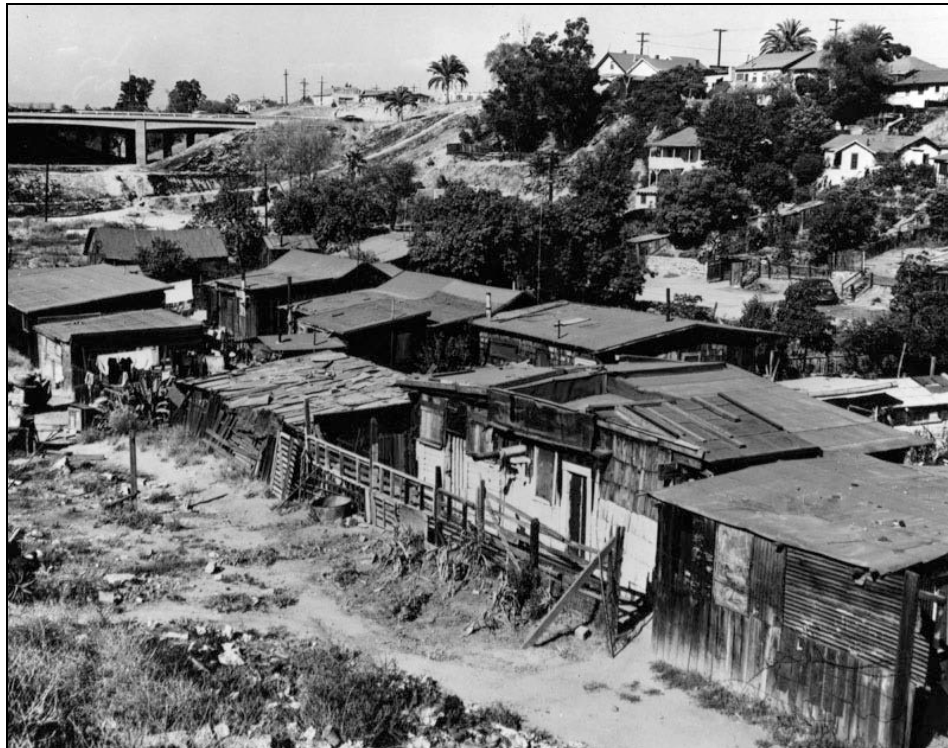


Figure 4.23. “View of Fickett Hollow,” c. 1949. This photo illustrates the patchwork course of planning in several neighborhoods during the time. Ramshackle homes in the foreground, stucco-covered homes on the hill, and a completed public works project bridge at the left of the picture. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection



Figure 4.24. “Children watch Harbor Freeway construction,” 1948. As in other U.S. cities during the time, neighborhoods in Los Angeles were split in two as freeway construction followed the path of least political and economic resistance. Nadel captured this demolition scene in Downtown just before going to work for the LAHA. LAPL Photo Collection.



Figure 4.25. “Demolition work in preparation for the construction of the Harbor Freeway near Court Street.” A Harbor Freeway overpass is visible at the left of the image. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.26. “Aerial view overlooking construction on Bunker Hill,” 1967. Los Angeles Public Library, Herald-Examiner Collection.

Just a few miles away from Bunker Hill, Nadel later photographed families taking part in the first racially integrated and federally subsidized housing programs in the nation. As an advocate for the development of housing as part of the 1949 Housing Act, and as UCLA architectural and urban design historian Dana Cuff (2000) shows, Nadel first used his images in the 1950s to promote support for the Aliso Village Housing Projects.⁶⁵ Taken during the post-war era when the suburban ideal was being heavily promoted, subsidized, and profited from (Hall 2002; Miller, 1991), and perhaps meant to be juxtaposed with his stark images of slum living as part of what would have been an effective propaganda campaign, Nadel's images depict families residing in the short lived Rodger Young Village in Griffith Park, the William Mead Homes Housing Project situated between the L.A. River and Downtown in an area now known as Dog Town, and several other Housing Projects.

Channeling Nadel, Dana Cuff (2000, 163) describes the people and scenes pictured in Nadel's unpublished monograph as:

hopeful, their stories idealized, and the direction of that idealization is telling: each family is hardworking, firmly located in the American dream, and appreciative of public housing as physical shelter and social community. There is a black family, a Mexican family, a white family, and an Asian family, depicting integration as the future of American communities and Aliso Village's modern architecture as the appropriate setting... At a time when government agents enforced segregation and interracial fraternizing signified communist leanings, the early residents of Aliso Village predicted a radically new society.

⁶⁵ Jacob Riis had visited the future site of Aliso Village in 1909 and reportedly commented that he had "seen larger slums but never any worse" (LAHA, 1909). After Riis's visit, an outbreak of bubonic plague and a perhaps not merely coincidental real-estate boom helped precipitate the creation of the LAHA in 1938 (Bloch, 2012a).

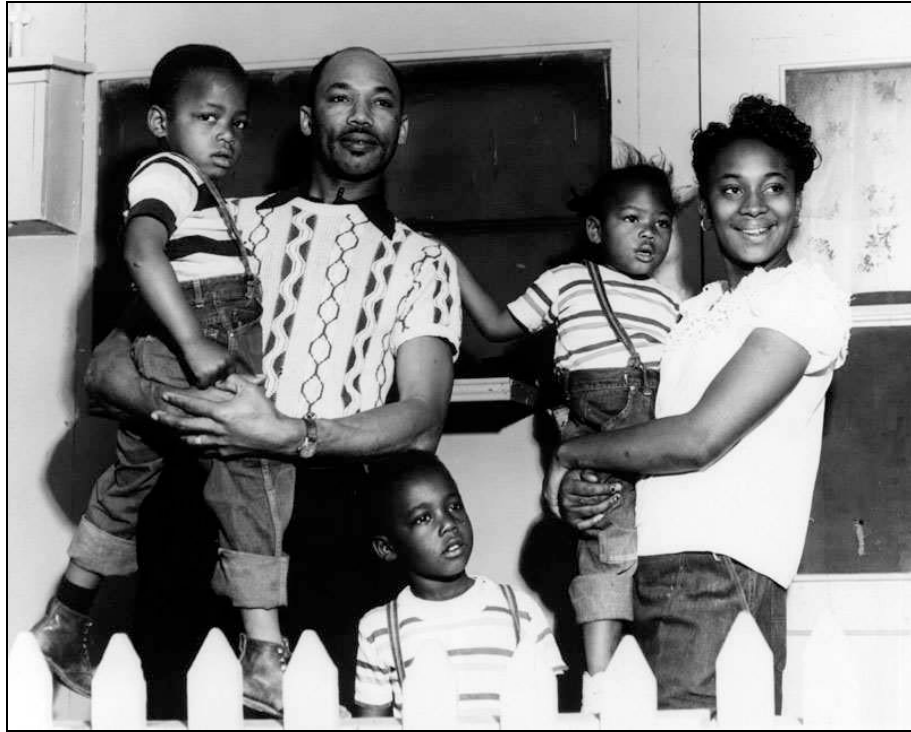


Figure 4.27. “Mr. John Barnes poses with his wife and three children in the Roger Young Village,” 1952. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection



Figure 4.28. “The Guzman family, who were relocated from Chavez Ravine, pose in 1952, in the living room of their new apartment at the William Mead Homes Housing Project. Mr. Guzman is a machine operator.” Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.29. “A pregnant Mrs. Lourdes Benigno and her three children pose outside of their unit 1147 at Rodger Young Village” 1952. In contrast to the cramped and dirty conditions in Nadel’s previous photos, these later images portray housing projects that provide clean architectural lines, green grass, and equally well-kempt children as residents. Within a generation, these and others housing projects like it would become some of the most violent communities in the country. In addition to his photos made at the Ramona Gardens Housing Projects, Nadel captured life at Aliso Village east of the L.A. River, Basilone Homes next to Hansen Dam in the San Fernando Valley, and Roger Young Village at the base of Griffith Park. Only Ramona Gardens still stands. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.30. “The Gillen family inside their kitchen at the Aliso Village Housing Projects,” 1952. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.31. “The Altamayo family poses in front of their apartment at Ramona Gardens after their relocation,” 1952. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.32. Photographer Leonard Nadel titled this photo "Freedom Train," 1952. This image also appears in Cuff (2000). Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.33. An interracial rally at Rodger Young Village in Griffith Park, 1952. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.34. “Balisone Homes Housing Project,” January 11, 1949. A rare snow day in L.A. and early interracial harmony captured at the Balisone Homes Housing Project for veterans and their families. The BHHP was located near Hanson Dam in the northern end of the San Fernando Valley. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

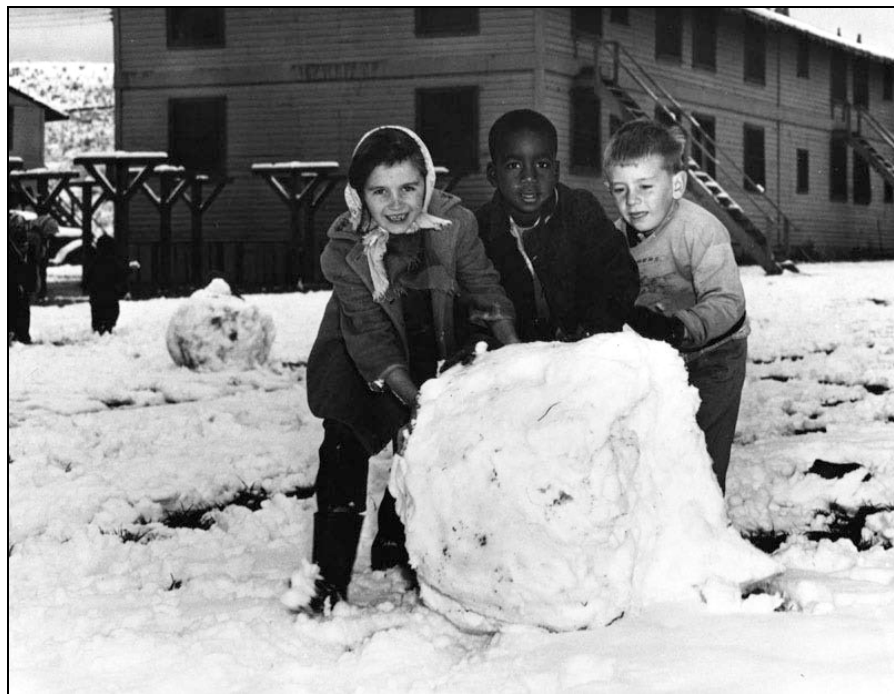


Figure 4.35. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

While one can agree with Cuff that the faces in these photos show hope, and that the housing projects in Los Angeles were, at least initially, a welcomed counter to government-enforced segregation, there is something else not being shown in the images that should raise concern. As L.A.-based housing historian Sophie Spalding (1992, 114) puts it, Nadel neglected to capture the “complicated nuances” present in urban neighborhoods. Rather, he chose to depict “in the most poignant and unambiguous terms, the hopelessness and anomie of the stereotypical slum.” For Spalding, Nadel was blinded by his commitment to public housing as he cherry-picked “cliché images of the blighted slum whose debilitated condition required not repair but clearance” (ibid.), which he juxtaposed with sterile images of temporary contentment in what would prove to be temporary housing.

Furthermore, many of these residents were forced into these housing “villages” as result of forced evictions elsewhere. The hopefulness caught on camera should also not obscure the harsh reality of what was to come in terms of the degradation of public housing projects in the U.S.—most famously resulting in the literal implosion of the structurally unsound and crime-ridden Pruitt-Igoe Projects in St. Louis (Birmingham, 1998; Rainwater, 1970) and the closing down of the “the most frightful addresses in the country” (Saulny, 2007) at the Cabrini Green Housing Complex in Chicago. In Los Angeles “Projects” such as Jordan Downs, which were featured in the aptly named film *Menace II Society* (Hughes, 1993), became synonymous with the worst the city had to offer in terms of blight, crime, neglect, gang violence, the crack cocaine trade, police brutality, and other urban ills. As I discussed in chapter 3, the murals at the Estrada Courts Housing Projects were painted in an effort to assuage the effects of an otherwise blighted and hostile environment.

Chávez Ravine

Located between the L.A. River and Arroyo Seco Freeway to the east, and the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls to the west, Chávez Ravine has long been synonymous with the original Mexican-American community in Los Angeles. The area has been inhabited since before the acquisition of California from Mexico, and in recent times

became the epicenter of Angelino zoot suit and *pachuco* styles known for long coats, baggy high-waisted and pleated pants, slicked back hair, low rider cars, and machismo stance (Cosgrove, 1984; Bright, 1995; Stevens, 2009). Until redevelopment arrived, the area was also home to up to three hundred families who maintained *rancheros* (South-Western homesteads) and retained a traditional way of life long after the Americanization and modernization of other Chicano barrios.

Part of the traditional way of life in Chávez Ravine was recreated in the film *My Family, Mi Familia* (Nava, 1995). The film follows three generations of a Mexican-American family that moves from Mexico to Los Angeles. The three main characters in the film played by Edward James Olmos as “Paco,” Jimmy Smits as “Jimmy,” and Esai Morales as “Chucho” each represent and personify part of the Chicano experience: migration, deportation, imprisonment, and death. When the family’s male elder, *El Californio* played by León Singer, dies in the home he had lived in for decades, he is buried in the corn crop he planted as a young man. He asks that the headstone read “When I was born here, this was Mexico, and where I lie, this is still Mexico” (ibid.). The ranchero-style home, corn crops, as well as free-roaming chickens depicted in the film are all emblems of the Chávez Ravine neighborhood.⁶⁶

In 1949 photographer Don Normark also captured the scenes in Chávez Ravine, which he later published in his *Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story* (1999). Normark sympathetically used his camera to create images of an intact and idyllic rural community and Mexican-American social landscape reminiscent of L.A. when it was still a small pueblo. But it was also a community wherein, as Normark put it in his maudlin manner, “the people seemed like refugees—people superior to the circumstances they were living in” (Normark, 1999, 11). As expressed in a 2004 documentary on Chávez Ravine (Mechner, 2004), Normark’s photography is also credited with helping an impoverished yet socially thriving community speak truth to a powerful real estate lobby and local political elite that would soon raze the area. The destruction of the neighborhood began just one year later, in 1950, when a photographer for the Housing

⁶⁶ As I show below, these are also motifs present in Judith Baca and Cache’s murals.

Authority helped document the conditions of Chávez Ravine to help make the case for redevelopment. That “misgudied” photographer was none other than Leonard Nadel (Spalding 1992; Loukaitou-Sideris and Sansbury 1996; Bloch 2012a).

Perhaps used unwittingly as propaganda to help clear the area, or altruistically as photographic evidence of the need for better quality subsidized housing in the area, Normark’s and Nadel’s images captured parts of Los Angeles that have rarely been seen. But whereas Normark’s photographic artistry captures cracked dirt roads and young men hanging out on chaparral-covered hillsides, Leonard Nadel’s images tend to convey abject poverty and palpable desperation on the faces of his subjects.



Figure 4.36. Two children on an unpaved road in Chavez Ravine, 1950 The faint outline of City Hall in the distance. Photo by Leonard Nadel. L.A. Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.37. Veteran Bill Nickolas and children. Photo by L. Nadel. LAPL Photo Collection



Figure 4.38. Crossing a dirt road, 1949. Photo by Don Normark. LAPL Photo Collection.



Figure 4.39. Children on a hillside in Chavez Ravine, c.1949. City Hall is visible through the haze. The then newly opened Arroyo Seco Freeway is visible at left center. Photo by Don Normark. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.40. “Dominquez family in front of their slum dwelling,” 1951. Children with their smiling father pose for Nadel on the steps of their Chávez Ravine-area home. Photo by Leonard Nadel. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.41. “For Rent sign, slum housing,” 1949. This sign in the Chávez Ravine neighborhood reads “For Rent, lovely 2 room house with private toilet, to any unmarried L.A. Police Officer for \$1.00 per month. Gas, water, electric included. The Landlord, 1705 Pine St.” Compare this artistically crafted image captured by Don Normark to Nadel’s photo in Figure 4.38. Nadel’s “For Rent sign” reveals a much different social climate. Whereas the property owner’s sign in Normark’s photo appeals to police officers training at the nearby Police Academy and Gun Club, the property owner’s sign in Nadel’s photo specifies “Absolutely no Spanish or Mexicans. No children. No pets. One or two adults only. Phone Atlantic 2-9052.” Even Nadel’s composition is less artistically crafted, evidently favoring documentation over aesthetics. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

In addition to housing traditional Mexican and Chicano communities, Chávez Ravine was also known as the home of the Los Angeles Police Revolver and Athletic Club and the Naval Reserve Armory. The proximity of the young mostly White military trainees and young Chicano residents became troublesome in 1943 and erupted into the infamous Zoot Suit Riots. The riots erupted after servicemen receiving training in radio communications at the Armory walked through Chávez Ravine and neighboring Dog Town on their way to dancehalls in Downtown. Along the way they were accosted by young men dressed in what Errol Wayne Stevens (2009, 275) calls the dress of “minority

youth rebellion.” Small fights broke out for several days between the sailors and the young men wearing zoot suits, as, reportedly, the young Chicanos taunted the sailors with chants of “Heil Hitler” (ibid.).

On the last day of what had been small skirmishes, Navel officers from bases as far away as San Diego poured into Downtown L.A. by the thousands and were backed by groups of white male residents from the area. They commandeered taxis and went in search of zoot suiters along the L.A. River and over the bridges into East L.A. During the protracted fights it was only young Chicano boys who were arrested. As Stevens points out, “much of the fight was the result of 18-to-20-year-olds from an all-white Navel Training School stationed in an all-Mexican-American neighborhood encountering and being encountered by those who were ethnically and fashionable alien to each other (2009, 274).

In 1950 when orders to vacate were issued to the residents of Chávez Ravine, the police academy which was still located in the neighborhood was not included. The initial reason for mass relocation was to clear the way for the development of housing for “families of low income” (Figure 4.58). The Housing Authority under Frank Wilkinson had proposed the construction of two-dozen thirteen-story apartment complexes. These high-rises were similar to other projects that were being touted at the time as part of urban infill projects known as New Towns-In Town (Perloff, 1967; Martin, 1978). However, the plan designed in part by architect Richard Neutra was never realized because it was deemed communistic by the local real estate lobby (Mechner, 2004).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Wilkinson was asked in court and before the House Un-American Activities Sub-Committee about his political affiliations and eventually served a year in jail for contempt of court. Although he lost his vision of Chávez Ravine, he was able to clear his name in 1992 (Mechner, 2004).

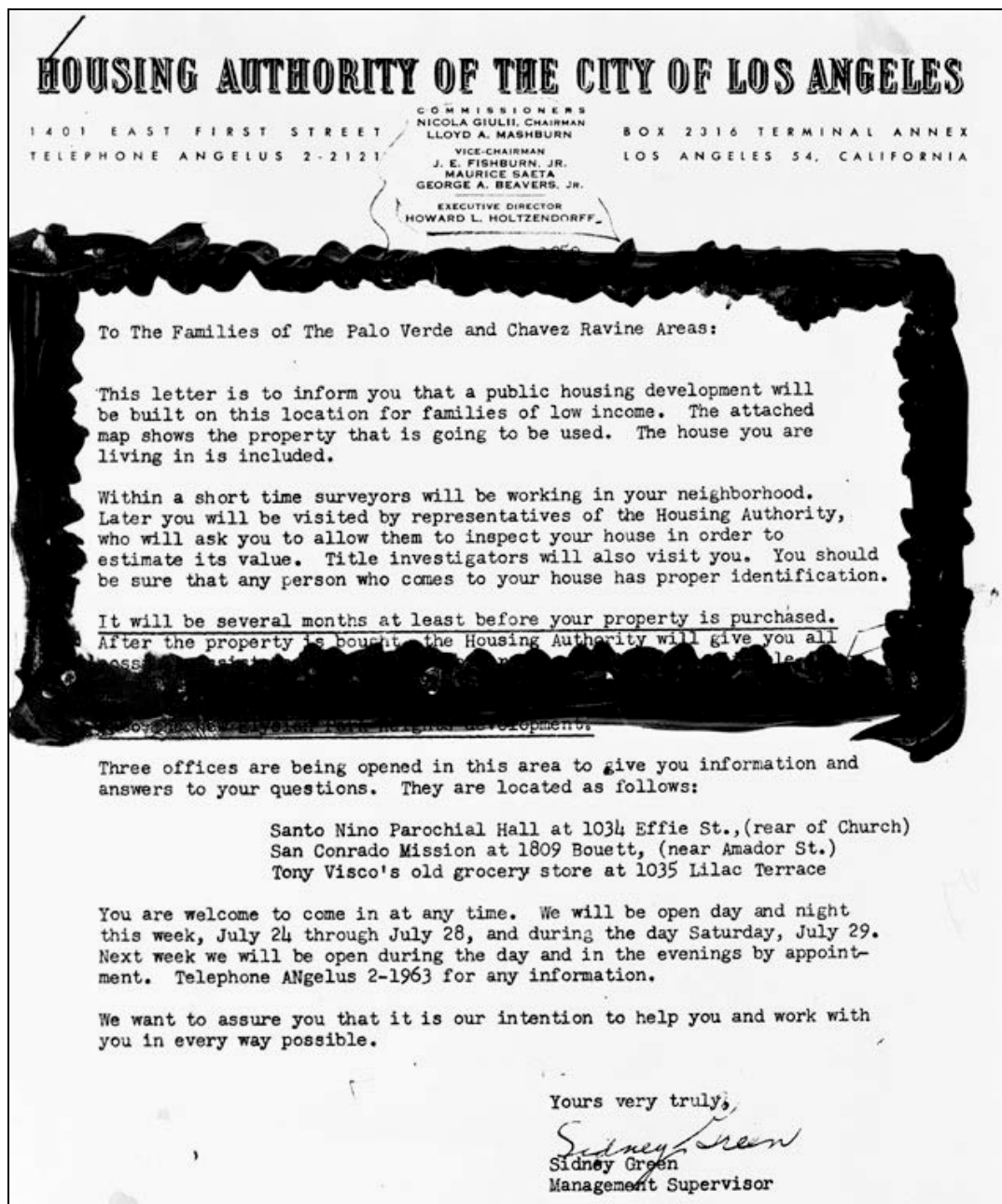


Figure 4.42. L.A. Housing Authority Letter, 1950. The letter erroneously states that “a public housing development will be built on this location for families of low income.”
Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 4.43. “A Herald-Examiner reporter points out the future location of home plate.” Chavez Ravine, 1957. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

What were considered a docile community residing in the area waged protests against the evictions. Before Jane Jacobs became one of the first community organizers to lead a protest against “rational planning” (Jacobs, 1961) and the building of the proposed Lower Manhattan Expressway across Greenwich Village by Robert Moses,⁶⁸ the people of Chávez Ravine were already immersed in a battle over their community in the face of redevelopment. Their struggle to stay in their homes has received far less academic

⁶⁸ Redevelopment under Moses took the form of mass destruction of neighborhood spaces and the displacement of entire communities as part of Federal Urban Renewal enacted by *Title 1* of the *Housing Act* of 1949. For a first-person account of contestation against Moses see Jacobs, 1961; for a Marxist critic of renewal under Moses see Berman, 1983; for an excellent documentary on the process see Burns, 2001; for a historical account see Page, 1999; for a critique of neo-liberal redevelopment see Brenner and Theodor, 2002; for a discussion of creative destruction under capitalism in Paris and New York see Harvey, 2003.

attention than the citizens of New York and their contentious redevelopment history despite evoking issues of community identity, immigrant housing, eminent domain, forced eviction, and massive redevelopment. Some even credit Jacobs and her fellow protestors in New York with being the first women in America to use placards to further their cause for housing (Burns, 2001). But as the photographs below show, it was mostly female residents of Chávez Ravine with placards in hand who took their unsuccessful campaign to City Hall and the Major's Office as early as 1953.

After a 10-year battle over the 352-acre site, the city sold the area to Walter O'Malley, the owner of the Chicago Cubs and a Bronx native. The Health Department and the city enforced eminent domain against the remaining residents, many of whom stayed and fought well into the development of the 56-thousand-person-capacity baseball stadium and its 13,000 surface-level parking spots. Despite Nadel's images of happy people living in government-subsidized housing up the L.A. River, many families refused to leave their homes and were forced to live in tents in Chávez Ravine until the Health Department evicted them, again, in 1959.



Figure 4.44. “Plea to the mayor, ‘Help us keep our homes and freedom,’” 1953. L.A. Mayor Norris Poulson (1953-1961) smiling before protestors. Herald-Examiner Collection



Figure 4.45. All-female protestors and Chavez Ravine residents inside L.A. Mayor Fletcher Bowron's (1938-1953) office, 1951. Herald-Examiner Collection / L.A. Public Library.



Figure 4.46. “Mrs. Alice Martin, 73, and friend, Mrs. Ruth Rayford, 85, await eviction. They look ready to fight!” 15 May 1959. Herald-Examiner Collection / Los Angeles Public Library.



Figure 4.47. “Los Angeles County Sheriffs forcibly evict Mrs. Aurora Vargas, 36, from her home at 1771 Malvina Ave. in Chavez Ravine,” 9 May 1959. LAPL Photo Collection.



Figure 4.48. Forced eviction of Aurora Vargas. “Four months later groundbreaker for Dodger Stadium took place.” Also reproduced in Bloch, 2012b. LAPL Photo Collection.



Figure 4.49. Evicted from their Chavez Ravine home, families put up tents on their lost property. “Pictured here left to right: Mrs. Victoria Angustain, Mrs. Manuel Arechiga and her son-in-law Mike Angustain holding Ira, 8 months. In rear of tent Ida Angustain, 7, Rachel, 10, and Ivy, 5.” 9 May 1959. Photo by Howard Ballew. Herald-Examiner Collection / LAPL.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
City of Los Angeles

Official Notice No. 25476

Date MAY 11, 1959

To MRS & MRS. M. ARECHIGA AND CHILDREN Section or Dist. No. Y

Address 1801 MALYNA AVE. Re Premises at SAME

You are hereby directed to COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING,

DISCONTINUE THE USE AND OCCUPANCY OF TENTS FOR LIVING AND SLEEPING PURPOSES,

This notice shall be complied with in accordance with the laws, ordinances and rules applicable thereto.

This Date MAY 14, 1959

Served Mrs Arechiga

BOARD OF HEALTH COMMISSIONERS
George M. Linn, M.D., Health Officer

Jack J. Finster

Form (5-40 Rev.)—600 Bks.—6-58 F H M CC

Figure 4.50. A second eviction letter, 14 May 1959. Herald-Examiner Collection / LAPL.



Figure 4.51. Looking east, Dodger Stadium and its expansive parking lot under construction, c.1961. L.A. City Clerk's Office.

Dodger Stadium has long been a symbol of the city's preference for commercial and entertainment-oriented development over the preservation of existing communities—particularly low-income communities and communities of color. But unlike the massive urban renewal that was occurring elsewhere in the U.S. after WWII, the redevelopment and renewal projects in L.A. were initiated in an effort to attract white suburban commuters back to the city, not so much to help them flee as was the case in New York City. The 13,000 parking spots built around Dodger Stadium and atop a community that had been dependant on walking and public transit were put in to attract suburban families back to the center of L.A. as the smoothly paved freeway on-ramps located around Chávez Ravine would help them get back home again. Massive redevelopment projects like Dodger Stadium that are typically agents of displacement are simultaneously envisioned by planners, boosters, and private developers as facilitators of return.

This return to the center was part of a larger plan to enliven a declining downtown. As in other cities after white flight occurred, downtowns became derelict relics that were ignored by all but those who became dependant on cheap housing (Jakle and Wilson, 1992). But despite the popular notion that Los Angeles is a centerless mass of conjoined suburbs, Los Angeles boosters have regularly looked for schemes to attract people back to the designated center (Isenberg, 2004). Those attempts have, however, often exposed the city's deep-seeded racism and exposed an unrealistic Anglo vision of itself (Soja, 1986; Davis, 1990; Parson, 1993).

In many ways Los Angeles' downtown has remained in residential limbo whereby transient communities and cyclical migrants move through the metropolitan area, to and away from Downtown's Skid Row, in and out of its short-term housing facilities, and back and forth between Downtown's many pay-by-week hotels (Law and Wolch, 1991; Rahimian et al., 1992; Wolch and Rowe, 1992; Wolch et al., 1993). Meanwhile surrounding communities to the north, south, west, and east have traditionally found the downtown landscape impenetrable given restrictive residential covenants, exorbitant land rents, inhospitable infrastructure not suitable for long-term living, and a paucity of available housing stock for families.⁶⁹ Therefore, when redevelopment has affected surrounding communities, residents find themselves squeezed into neighboring enclaves as Downtown is not a viable option for residential relief.

As residents were displaced from the Chávez Ravine community as well as from neighborhoods along the Arroyo Seco and L.A. River, they often relocated not very far from where they started. This localized displacement and unplanned mobility (Clark and Ledwith, 2005), I argue, is one of the contributing factors that led to the sharpest rise in street gang violence in American history due in part to the burden of relocation on surrounding communities. In an already crowded housing market, the families who had lost their homes and were not relocated by local government were seen as contributing to

⁶⁹ While Los Angeles's Downtown districts are currently undergoing a massive renaissance compete with new cafés, galleries, and the development of high-end loft spaces and housing units, the area is still not attractive to families or low-income residents due to higher than average rent costs and lack of basic services such as grocery stores and green space.

the scarcity in local housing stock and were perceived to fuel rent inflation. The frustration with forced migration, combined with the hostility that erupted as result of involuntary residential proximity, is best expressed in the writing on the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls in the form of antagonistic gang graffiti a decade before Judith Baca began to paint her *Evolution of a Gang Member* in 1975.

Judith Baca's *Evolution of a Gang Member*, 1975

“A mural is a work of art created in relatedness. Relatedness to the architecture in which it is placed, to the people for whom it is painted.”

— Judith Baca (2005, 155).

For muralist Judith Baca, the struggle over territory in Chavez Ravine was equally a struggle over identity. The hardscapes that paved over communities and the infrastructure that divided neighborhoods was part of a larger and longer-term racist fight waged against people-of-color in Los Angeles. Since white Anglo-Saxon Protestants began migrating to Los Angeles from parts of the Mid-West through Oklahoma at the end of the 19th Century, territorial disputes have been poor cover for ethnic, racial, and religious hostilities in the region. In one section of her *Great Wall of L.A.* entitled *Division of the Barrios and Chávez Ravine*, Baca portrays the violent interaction between brown people and the tools, machines, and infrastructure white people used as weapons against them (Figure 4.68).

The mural section depicts, at left, Chicano families being divided by freeways whose pillars tear through the roofs of the small bungalows below. In the center foreground, a bulldozer blade approaches a scared child and small homes situated below in the ravine. The right side of the mural depicts forced eviction as an Anglo police officer carries away a screaming *Chicana* wearing traditional Indigenous braids. In the center background, an illuminated Dodger Stadium descends upon the ravine like an alien spacecraft against a backdrop of the Santa Monica Mountains at Sunset. The mural also depicts two roaming chickens apparently frightened by the chaotic scene.



Figure 4.52. *Division of the Barrios & Chavez Ravine* by Judy Baca. Courtesy of SPARC.

Division of the Barrios reveals Baca's critical interest in and concern for the affects of redevelopment and restructuring that displaced a community from its land. But more than an abstract and invisible displacement revealed through census data or faint local memory, the displacement of communities from the neighborhoods around Echo Park had tangible consequences revealed in part in the writing on the local walls.

As families were pushed out of the ravine in Elysian Park, many moved east along Sunset Boulevard, closer to the newly built Arroyo Seco Parkway area and into what was known as the Happy Valley neighborhood. Many of the children who once lived in Chávez Ravine continued to identify with the area—the larger Echo Park neighborhood in particular. As Chastanet and Gribble (2009) argue and as long time residents have expressed, “even when the kids moved out they took their elegance with the barrio and the local gang with them” (personal communication, “Margaret,” 2009).

Young peoples' deeply held affiliations and the resulting struggle over changing territorial boundaries began to play out in the form of gang warfare. This warfare was expressed on the Sunset walls in the form of antagonistic gang graffiti. Although the Happy Valley and Echo Park (EXP) gangs predate stadium construction,⁷⁰ the conflict between these two gangs was exasperated by the immediate and forced proximity resulting from restructuring. Seeing the arrival of members from EXP—then a local click of “Pee-wees,” Zoot Suiters, and Low Riders—Happy Valley began making their own retaliatory incursions back into Echo Park. By making visual claims to Echo Park's wall space in the form of graffiti, Happy Valley was asserting their beef and showing their strength.

The antagonistic gang writing was part and parcel of a larger conflict over territory, identity, and local migration instigated in part by developers. This development- and displacement-generated violence predates the active drug trade now credited with precipitating much of the street violence attributed to gangs across the U.S. While feelings of attachment to place are certainly at stake in redevelopment, so too is a community's freedom from the perhaps unintended outcome of corresponding violence.

⁷⁰ A “Happy Valley” tag written on a bank of the L.A. River in 1931 appears in Phillips' *Wallbangin'* (1999).



Figure 4.53. Pee-Wees in Chavez Ravine, c. 1955. L.A. Public Library Photo Collection.

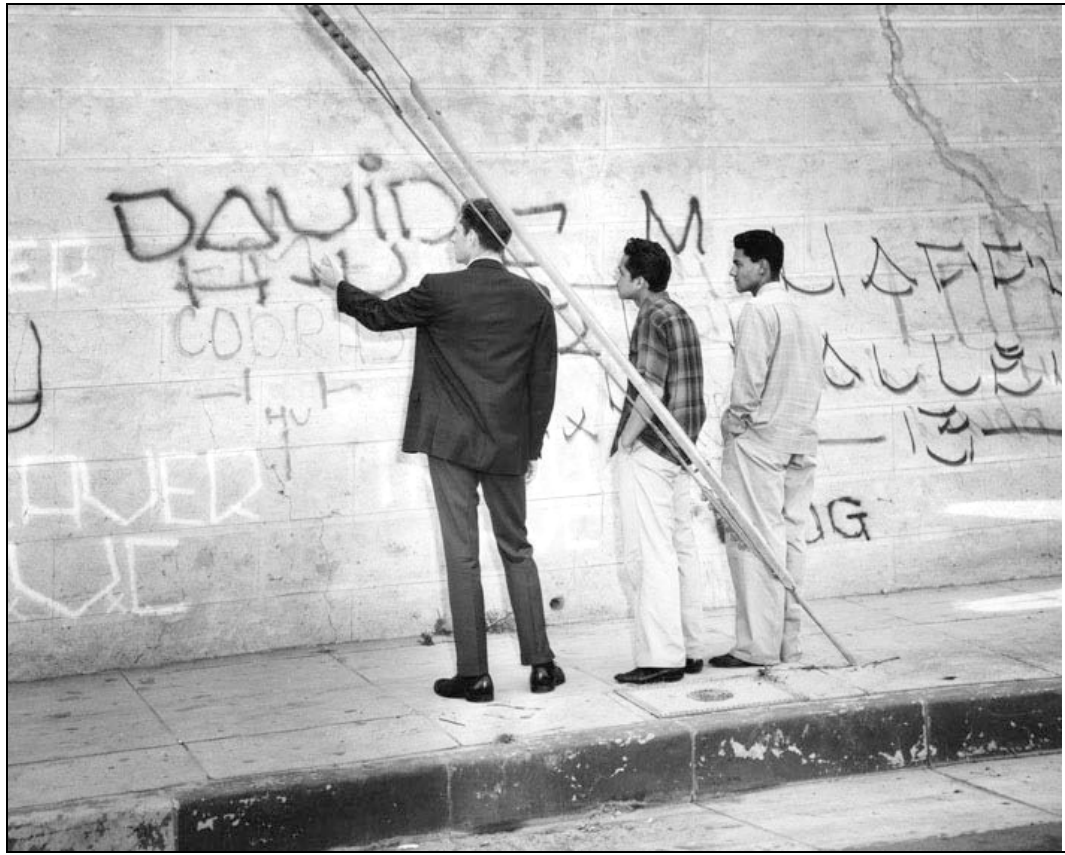


Figure 4.54. “Graffiti Reading: Deputy Probation Officer Al Franklin and two boys from the Happy Valley gang examine gang legends and emblems on a wall on March 4, 1965.” Appearing soon after the opening of Dodger Stadium, the right side of the wall shows “Happy Valley 13” written in traditional *cholo* lettering. Herald-Examiner Collection / Los Angeles Public Library.

The loss of Chávez Ravine had by the early 1970s help ignite a full-blown gang war which included Silver Lake 13 and other area cliques such as White Fence, Rockwood Locos, and Temple Street. When Baca sought permission to paint the first ever mural on the main section of the local retaining walls—covering the very graffiti that told the violent story of the territorial struggles initiated in part by redevelopment—she did not initially go to the city agency legally responsible for the appearance of the walls.⁷¹ Rather, she sought permission from the rival Silver Lake 13 and EXP gangs who had controlled the neighborhoods adjacent to these walls since the 1950s.

⁷¹ At that time the Citywide Murals Project oversaw the appearance of the walls which were still under the care and supervision of the Department of Public Works (Bloch 2012b). As I show later in this dissertation, legal control over the Sunset retaining walls

As Baca put it:

I wanted to make sure the actual people in these neighborhoods accepted what I was trying to do. I needed the residents' respect, including the gang members', and I got it by showing them that they had mine. I wasn't trying to control this space or be elitist, I was trying to express a collective feeling about prevailing social issues facing the community. (personal interview, 2009)

Baca's concern for how her work would be perceived both in terms of its aesthetic and its placement is reflective of the Chicano muralist tradition. But more than looking to appeal to a collective community spirit and inspire public participation in the production of her mural, Baca was attempting to "negotiate between warring neighbourhoods and mediate between rival gang members competing for public space and public identity" as part of what she calls the "first step in the development of a unique collective process" (Baca, 2001, 6). She acknowledges that mediation, not just collaboration, should be of primary importance to muralists working in barrios afflicted with gang violence. It is not enough to produce art in public places for the sake of beauty; but the art must also provide an ameliorative effect.

At the time Baca began sketching her *Evolution of Gang Member* she was working with the Citywide Murals Project—a civic organization that operated under the auspices of the Department of Recreation and Parks. It was also at that time, 1975, that critical *muralistas* were starting their own public art and mural organizations in Los Angeles. Like the muralists who started the East Los Streetscapers, Baca was an activist as well as an artist. Her desire to negotiate with local gangs before seeking official permission to paint the Sunset wall is an example of that critical tradition. It also exemplifies the necessary, and her case successful, production and procurement of barrio space, which, as Latorre (2008, 140) argues, "signifies for artists an empowering victory over the marginalizing politics of federal urban initiatives."

Latorre further acknowledges that "community mural painting constitute[s] an artistic practice that required a complex negotiation with city officials or other potential

in terms of structural upkeep and surface appearance has shifted several times in subsequent years.

patrons for the public space in which it was located” (ibid.). In Baca’s case, however, those “other potential patrons” happened to be gang members—a subgroup who possess as powerful a vested interest in public space as other stewards and legitimate interest groups. The complex mix of patrons and their official and unofficial claims to space in the Echo Park/Silver Lake neighborhood is not unique given the complex politics at work in producing similar spaces. As Soja (2010, 32) puts it, “urban life is nested within many different geographical contexts above and below the administrative space of the city,” and Echo Park/Silver Lake, like many other inner-city areas, was the economic, spatial, and social product of politics operating at several scales—from the local to the global.

However much multiplicity plays a role in the social production of urban space, the downturn in the U.S. economy after the Vietnam War and the oil embargo of the early 1970s resulted in a new found hostility toward immigrant and Chicano populations who were perceived by some as adding pressure to an already weak system. Federal and state subsidies used for social welfare programs and public housing projects, such as Estrada Courts, and local resources being used to police, educate, and medically treat Chicano communities angered many Americans. The legal and institutionalized segregation and xenophobia of the previous generation began to take the form of muted racism and class antagonism. This racially divisive climate in L.A. grew throughout the 1980s under the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush presidential administrations, Daryl Gates’ tenure as Chief of Police, and culminated during Pete Wilson’s term as Governor during which time we oversaw voter approval of Proposition 187 and the Los Angeles Riots in 1992.⁷²

Such institutional as well as *de facto* unequal treatment and cultural partitioning of Hispanics exacerbated an already difficult time for people living in Los Angeles. Regardless, immigration from Mexico and parts of Central America grew steadily through the 1980s (Bhimji, 2010). Despite how bad things were for undocumented as well as legal residents of Hispanic origin living in L.A., they were still seen as a much

⁷² Proposition 187 was a 1994 voter-approved and later overturned ballot initiative to establish a state-run citizenship screening system and prohibit undocumented aliens from using publically funded health care, public education, and other social services in California.

better alternative to what was brewing and about to erupt in places such as Nicaragua with its purging of the Sandinistas by the U.S.-backed Contras, in El Salvador with its civil war, in Guatemala with its “guerra sucia”—dirty war—under U.S.-backed General Efraín Rios Montt, and in Mexico with its abject poverty and unabashed street violence and drug wars funded largely by U.S. drug consumers (Blum, 2003).

Although L.A. was receiving contracts from aerospace, munitions, textile, and other heavy manufacturing industries at this time, in addition to being home to a vast film industrial complex (Scott, 1988, 2005), the benefits were not trickling down to the barrio where most of the working people were forced to settle for underpaid manual labor jobs, domestic help positions, or having to work in sweatshops due to citizenship restrictions.

Spatially, the 1970s was a period of transition between the ghettoization of people-of-color that had taken place with the building of the freeway system during the 1960s, and the gentrification and resulting displacement that was to begin in the 1990s. The L.A. of the 1970s and 1980s was among the most racially bifurcated places in the U.S. in addition to being one of the most hostile and violent periods in L.A.’s own local history. Chicano and critical muralists were attempting to paint in the most gang-ridden and impoverished places in the country where the only representatives of local government who entered were members of the L.A.P.D. As historian Sarah Schrank (2009, 3) puts it, “1970s murals in Los Angeles challenged the civic and political invisibility of different cultural groups who, while demographically significant, lacked socioeconomic power.”

But for many *los muralistas* such an environment was not a threat to creativity, it was a harbinger and motivator. Baca took her spatially-conscious and community activist/artist perspective to the Sunset wall to create what was the first mural painted on the then 35-year-old retaining wall. Appropriately so, her 8-by-186-foot *Evolution of a Gang Member* completed in 1975 called for “unity” within an environment of despair, social evolution, self-help, and community reliance among Chicanos. From the right side of the mural (Figure 4.71) the barrio is painted in dark hues with a cruising low rider, skeletal hand imprisoning a *pachuco*—or gang member. Traditional death figures—or *calaveras*—walk out of a cemetery past a room of children at study and scientists at work, toward a smelter in which a knife is being disposed.



Figure 4.55. Despite being the first commissioned mural on Sunset Blvd. west of Downtown, representing the *muralista* tradition in appearance and theme, and being one of the first murals completed by Baca, this mural has not appeared in any publication focusing on the mural movement or on L.A.'s cultural history. Courtesy Elliot Barkan.



Figure 4.56. *Evolution of a Gang Member* (left portion) by Judith Baca, 1975. Chicano Wall Art, the First Generation, 1968 – 1985 collection, courtesy of Elliot Barkan.

From left to center (figure 4.72), a diversity of Chicanos are depicted cooperating against a backdrop of agricultural and urban landscapes in which the word unity is spelled in architectural form.

As with most other muralists and as indicated by her work in the Tujunga Wash, the importance of place is not lost on Baca. Far from “plop art,” or what some refer to disparagingly as “corporate art in public places,” murals are intended to communicate for and with the hardscapes and landscapes on and in which they appear. Muralists often speak of a wall “coming alive” after being painted with a new image. Cognizant of the mural’s role in producing and being produced by place, Baca typically evokes her own spatial consciousness when discussing her work and her role as a muralist. In an interview with Amalia Mesa-Bains, the former Commissioner of Art for the City of San Francisco and regional curator of the running *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* collection, Baca describes herself as:

an urban artist. That is, I’m particularly tuned into an urban environment which could be the barrio that I grew up in. I believe that as an urban artist I have to be responsive to the urban environment. I’m interested in the transformation of the physical environment as well and the creation of a space that in itself reflects the people who live there. I see myself as an instrument to give voices to the general sentiment. (in Cockroft and Barnett-Sánchez, 1993, 82)

As Baca and other critical Chicano muralists such as Wayne Alaniz Healy and David Botello showed beginning in the 1970s, murals could be effective at promoting positive ideals, ideas, and aesthetics in otherwise negatively perceived and inequitably conceived neighborhood spaces. Once the barrios had attained a negative stigma for being classified as inner city and ethnically other, and were therefore seen as blighted, it took changes to the outward appearance of infrastructure to challenge peoples’ perceptions, regardless of literally superficial those changes may have been. It was not structural change that muralists were immediately achieving, but they were able to change another important indicator of the health of a neighborhood in the eyes of most people—its outward appearance.

Although many people still saw murals as “ghetto art,” aesthetically speaking, they were still able to exhibit a level of creative activity taking place in what outsiders otherwise interpreted as depressed, harrowing, and hostile places. As Guisela Latorre (2008, 144) writes in her monograph on Chicana/o indigenist murals in California:

The reputation of the barrio as a dangerous and undesirable place to live is challenged by the creation of these mural environments. Chicana/o artists created these environments with the express purpose of transforming increasingly deteriorating barrio spaces (usually due to city initiatives), and others were erected to change the predominantly negative attitudes about the spaces inhabited by Mexican and Chicana/o communities. In both cases, however, mural environments function as emblems and physical markers of a space exclusively allocated or altered for the needs of the Chicana/o community.

Latorre points out that in an attempt to make these spaces more appealing, they also distinguished them to a greater degree as “Chicano”—that is “other.” Such was the goal of many critical muralists for whom a community’s identification with “La Raza”⁷³ or embrace of *Aztlán*⁷⁴ was a means to liberation. At a time when the civil rights movements of *la causa* and *el movimiento* were in full swing, calls to identify with “La Raza” and recognize Southern California as being part of *Aztlán* were common in murals as well as in gang writing and graffiti. A sense of shared identity and pride felt in possessing Chicano roots were part of the larger struggle for immigrant rights, racial equality, and civil rights during the 1970s (Chávez, 2002).

While critical murals painted on main streets and boulevards did show passers-by

⁷³ La Raza is Spanish for “the race” or “the people.” It is a term used to identify those of Chicano identity and mestizo (typically indigenous Aztec and Mayan) roots.

⁷⁴ “Aztlán” is the mythical ancestral homeland of the Aztecs located in current day southwestern United States including Los Angeles. As part of *el movimiento* and the Chicano rights movement was the formation of *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* in 1969. “El Plan” sought to reclaim the southwest territory as part of the Chicana/o liberation movement (Pulido, 2006).

another side of barrio life and identity, murals painted on side streets—typically on the sides of liquor stores and community centers—were quickly covered in graffiti due to the wall’s proximity to young gang members and taggers for whom the space was easily assessable and familiar. These side-street murals signaled to the rare outsider who penetrated the barrio an even more violent and chaotic environment with no sense of shared identity or social cohesion. Aside from what was being positively expressed in critical murals, there was certainly a reality of barrio life that too often fit the negative stereotypes and peoples’ suppositions. The harsh reality of the barrio combined with the romantic aspirations of critical muralists often clashed, though the two realities left indelible marks on local residents’ perceptions of place.

As one who was equally repelled by the violence and inspired by the murals in his neighborhood of Boyle Heights,⁷⁵ Chaka (Daniel Ramos) recalls life in the barrio at the time Baca was painting her *Evolution of a Gang Member* a few miles away:

I moved to the projects when I was three years old. And when I got there there was a shootout. My mom and my dad had thrown me and my brother in one of those old metal tubs upstairs because the bullets were going inside the walls and stuff like that. This was back in the ‘70s. I remember another occasion playing in the morning one time on a tricycle and there was a person hung off the tree with the stomach ripped open and his guts hung all the way down to the grass.

Another time two bodies lay right in my front lawn and my mother called the cops or the ambulance to have the bodies picked up and they gave instructions. They said, “We cannot pick up the bodies tonight but we can tell you to just go cover the bodies.” So my mom got two blankets and covered the bodies and the next morning, they came to pick them up.

There were times all the way into the early ‘90s where kids could not even go outside and play. There were two years kids couldn’t go outside because there was just all this broad daylight shooting. And then finally my brother got involved in gangs and he brings somebody home with a gunshot wound right in the middle of the stomach. I got to call 911 and the operator tells me, “I am sorry. We do not service there.” So 911 did not even service there!

⁷⁵ Boyle Heights, just east of the L.A. River and Echo Park, was once a predominantly Jewish community. The Aliso Village housing projects in Boyle Heights were photographed and held up as a model housing community in the 1950s by Leo Nadel.

So, yes, I skated and later tagged as a way to dodge the bullets, something that could channel my talent and my expression too. On the way to school I would sign my name up. I was like, “oh, this is me and this is me.” So my admiration was for me and the murals and graffiti. I wanted just to become me. And it was also like an escape from the environment that you were living in. I mean, at least in the [Aliso] Village [Public Housing Projects]. I turned to myself since everything around me was so violent. (personal interview, 2009)

The violent scenes that Chaka recalls became all-too-common from the 1970s and into the 1990s. These three decades mark the most brutal era in L.A. history in terms of street-level violence predominantly perpetuated by and against young Latino and African-American men (<http://projects.latimes.com/homicide/map/>). Reacting to, or rebelling against, an unjust system of segregation, uneven development, disenfranchisement, and a lack of investment in basic human services are largely to blame for such a climate. Regardless, the depictions in radical murals of a monolithic Chicano identity and universal cultural adherence to the tenets of *La Raza* were largely exaggerated artistic renderings of what could be, not what actually was. Critical muralists should therefore be considered part of the Chicano vanguard and radical front, not as mouth-pieces or representatives of an otherwise homogeneous community.

While Latorre (2008, 66-70) and others are right to suggest that murals added a viable visual platform through which people of color could articulate their newly politicized identities and newfound nationalist/indigenist selfhood under *el movimiento*, it would be naive to think that the critical murals represented the lifestyles or general feelings of the majority of people living in the barrio any more accurately and wholly than depictions of widespread violence and malaise on the nightly news.

Where critical murals did achieve success was in promoting the complex ideas of liberation and cultural expression through a visual medium. Regardless of how representative of daily life murals may or may not have been, or how effective in changing peoples' hearts and minds, murals were able to, as Arturo Rosette (2009) argues, parallel and intersect with critical theory, post-colonial and subaltern theory, and critical pedagogy. As visual representations of largely inaccessible socio-political and cultural ideologies, murals should, as Rosette argues, be considered instrumental as

teaching devices for the under-classes and disenfranchised at whom radical pedagogy is most often aimed (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994, 2003).⁷⁶

Along with the rise of a critical perspective held by many people living in the barrios beginning the late 1960s including the Brown Berets was a not coincidental rise in street crime. In addition to the government's punitive responses to the rise in militancy among educated young people and their acts of civil disobedience and protest during the 1970s—most infamously resulting in the killing of students on the Kent State University campus just three months after the killing of Chicano journalist Rubén Salazar in East Los Angeles in 1970—the Los Angeles Police Department formed the CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums) Unit under Police Chief Daryl Gates. Gates is best known for his creation of LAPD's S.W.A.T. (Special Weapons and Tactics) and remembered for his ouster after the Rodney King beating and the resulting L.A. Riots of 1992.

CRASH was a specialized task force of 300 officers whose motto was, in addition to the Department's "To Protect and To Serve," "We Intimidate Those Who Intimidate Others" (McCarthy, 2000). The now-infamous CRASH unit was disbanded in 2000 after

⁷⁶ I remember as a child walking along Judith Baca's *Great Wall of L.A.* and being captivated by the images in the wash below. Among the many scenes visually chronicling the history of Los Angeles and running the length of Los Angeles Valley College between Burbank and Oxnard Streets were images of Native Americans coming to greet a White settler with deed in hand, the black police baton used to beat a young Chicano wearing a zoot suit, the gaunt faces of imprisoned Jews, the crying baby with the word "BOOM" coming out of its mouth, the "White's" moving truck pulling up to identical suburban homes as a female industrial worker gets sucked into a television set, Senator Joseph McCarthy's frightening blue-hued face, black men and women making their way to the front of a bus, and a runner's triumphant crossing of a finish line. I had little idea at the time of what these images were referring to historically, but they made me intellectually and artistically curious. I used to take that route along the Tujunga Wash to and from a pay phone located at Valley College to make calls for my mother, begging the Department of Water and Power to keep our lights on despite not having paid the bill for months, or calling the absentee landlord for extensions on the rent, or to beg family members to bring me and my siblings food for the day. Years later when I started my educational career at Los Angeles Valley College I would make regular trips to the mural. Aesthetically and emotionally it maintained its usual grip on me, but intellectually and politically it became clearer every time I looked at it.

over a decade of widespread allegations of police brutality, corruption, and finally the indictment of several officers on allegations of assault, cover-ups, drug theft, and planting evidence in a what became known as the Rampart Scandal named after the Rampart Police Division just south of Echo Park.⁷⁷

The formation of the CRASH unit coincides with other national, state, city, and privately funded programs and initiatives aimed at quelling what some saw as a restless population living in the barrios and ghettos of East and South-Central Los Angeles. It can be argued that the formation of CRASH, the increasing criminalization of young people of color, and other anti-youth, anti-poor, anti-immigrant measures were just the beginning of a larger neoliberal agenda aimed at taking and profiting from space in the city.

Many of the “take back the street,” “neighborhood beautification,” and “community policing” initiatives that cities enacted after the 1970s and intensified with the adoption of the Broken Windows theory beginning in the 1980s can be tied to the beginnings of the neoliberalization of city space (Harvey, 2005). Steve Herbert writes extensively on what he has calls the “spatial logics of Broken Windows and situational crime prevention” (Herbert, 2001b). He argues that punitive measure taken by law enforcement to ensure the preservation of “community” are guises for the shoring up of neoliberal agendas aimed at privatizing and profiting from public space (ibid.). Like the spatial tactics used by law enforcement in driving away young people of color from gathering in public places (Herbert, 1996; Herbert, Carr, and Brown, 2009) and in exercising the right to free speech and engaging in peaceful acts of civil disobedience (Herbert, 2007; Herbert and Beckett, 2008), securing space is one of the primary weapons

⁷⁷ I was stopped by members of the CRASH unit several times as a teenager during the 1990s. They would routinely get out of their unmarked cars, slam my face against a wall or the hot hood of their car, and crush my fingers as they searched through my pockets. Each time after finding nothing incriminating, they would get back in their car without saying a word and speed away, leaving me with fingers so badly hurt that I would not be able to close my hand for days. I agree with California State Librarian and USC professor of Urban and Regional Planning Kevin Starr who called CRASH “in effect, the most badass gang in the city” (2004, 92). The Rampart CRASH scandal resulted in the LAPD having to abide by a U.S. Federal Consent Decree mandating more thorough reporting of stops and proper handling of citizen complaints against officers.

used in insuring the preservation of attractive and healthy (i.e. wealthy) neighborhoods as part of the neoliberal agenda. Instead of looking to social welfare and educational programs in an effort to better communities and encourage open political dialogue, cities such as Los Angeles look to well-armed law enforcement to simply secure territory for the sake of private investors and speculators. Such is the case of local government making itself more attractive to, at best, increased public-private partnerships, and at worst, a private takeover of civil society.

In addition to creating even more hostile lived environments, community improvement and punitive measures created unhealthy environments for the exercise of even innocuous street-based activities and behaviors that could be interpreted as loitering or even “play” (Davis, 1990; Flusty, 2000; Borden, 2001). Such hostile environments aimed at taking the street back for investors and potential consumers resulted in increasingly stringent rules regarding the production and placement of even mainstream public art and murals. In their attempt to create a safe space for members of the obedient and upper classes, anything associated with “the streets”—even public art—fell under greater-than-before scrutiny and suspicion. As I pointed out earlier in this dissertation, even the politically tame murals painted for the Olympic Festival in 1983 were deemed “too ‘bright’ and therefore too ‘violent’” (Baca, 2001).

In an attempt to control and then potentially sell off the city, bureaucratic measures regarding the sanctioning of civic public art and murals became increasingly stringent. Getting a mural approved became an exercise in navigating the many players and power brokers entrenched in local government. By attempting to legally and legitimately produce more murals for personal as well as social reasons, muralists’ work was becoming less seen. As Latorre notes, muralists’ aspiration to produce positive and aesthetically attractive wall spaces were “counteracted by the politics involved in the creation of public art” (2008, 144).

Paradoxically, the attempts made to “clean up the streets” and increasingly rely on civic arts organizations resulted in the proliferation of unsanctioned graffiti and graffiti-murals. Because graffiti writers and graffiti-muralists were not playing by the same rules or subscribing to bureaucratic mandates, the proliferation of graffiti increased in

proportion to the demise of murals beginning in the early 1990s. As I show in the next chapter, it was during the 1990s that public arts bureaucracies became even more complex, and the climate for legally producing murals became even more hostile. Consequently, illicit graffiti and graffiti-murals were produced at the direct expense of traditional and critical murals painted by law-abiding and bureaucratically-bound artists. This conflict played out once again on and around the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls.

Chapter 5. *Inner City Kickin' It*, 1996.

In this chapter I provide the context for the painting and eventual destruction of Ernesto De La Loza's *Inner City Kickin' It*. I first provide a history of the development and destruction of the Belmont Tunnel and Toluca Station—L.A.'s most important graffiti yard, *palota tarasca* field, and first subway line. I provide this history with the use of photos and interviews gathered while conducting fieldwork at the site. I argue that the multiple uses for and perceptions of Belmont position it as a quintessential postmodern site in L.A. I then show how Belmont's destruction and the nearby Echo Park neighborhood's simultaneous revitalization resulted in graffiti writers turning to De La Loza's long-neglected mural as a suitable spot for painting. As part of my discussion of the conflict over the destruction of De La Loza's mural, I discuss the legal applicability of the Visual Artists Rights Act to De La Loza's art work, as well as its possible future application to the illegal graffiti-murals that would be painted on that same wall space.

“Nowhere is the struggle for public space more pronounced than in the war against graffiti artists. More clearly than any other, the phenomenon of graffiti art, now a worldwide movement, plays out the power relations involved in public-space usage.”

—Judith Baca (2001, 20).

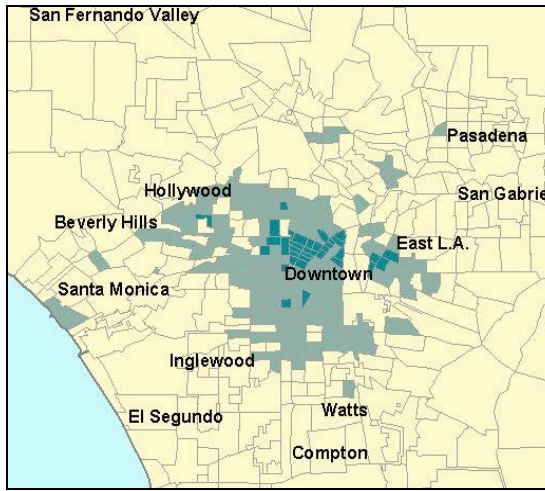
The painting of the murals along Southland freeways in celebration of the 1984 Olympic Games reestablished L.A. as, indeed, “the mural capital of the world.” Much of this revived mural movement was far more intent on showcasing the “new Downtown” than depicting barrio themes and Chicano motifs. Downtown's revitalization had been in the works for over three decades, beginning with the destruction of Bunker Hill to make way for the building of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and Mark Taper Forum in the late 1960s, and continuing with the opening of the Bonaventure Hotel and the Museum of Contemporary Art in the late 1970s. But it was not until the 1990s that mega-murals as a medium were effectively used to promote official, mainstream Angelino culture writ large—notably with Kent Twichell's 11,000-square-foot *Harbor Freeway Overture* commissioned by the L.A. Chamber Orchestra and completed in 1994 (Greenberg, Smith, and Teacher, 1977; Wada, 2011).



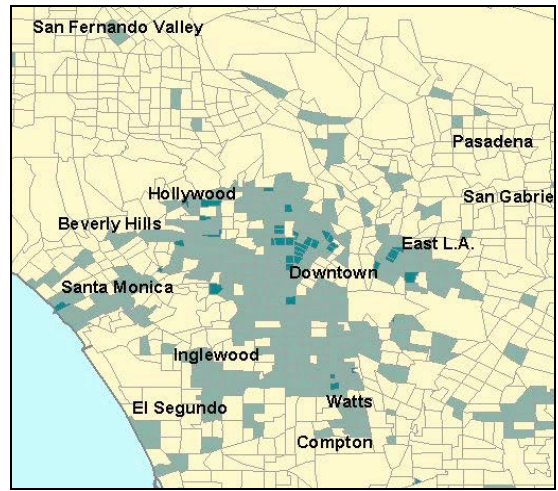
Figure 5.1. *Harbor Freeway Overture* by Kent Twitchell, 1994.
Robin Dunitz murals archive, USC.

But while much of Downtown was getting a makeover, the population of Skid Row—Downtown’s homeless enclave—was growing along with the rates of poverty and violence in every district—Pico-Union, Boyle Heights, South-Central L.A., and Echo Park—around Downtown’s invisible but no less impenetrable boundary. As the following maps illustrate, since the redevelopment of Bunker Hill during the 1950s, when Downtown was among the most densely populated parts of the city, density around Downtown (data tract located directly beneath the letters D and O in “Downtown”) has steadily increased, while the population density in Downtown has remained low.⁷⁸

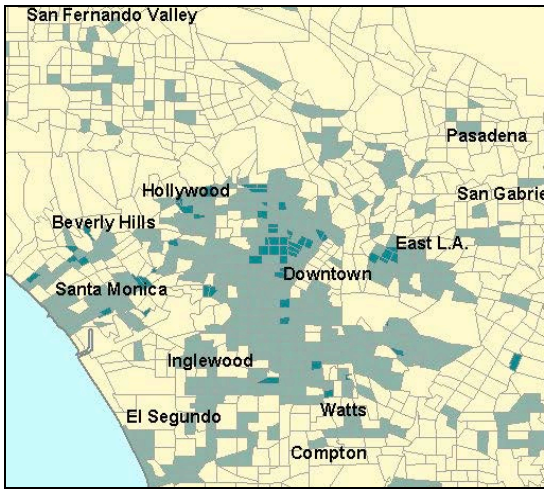
⁷⁸ The data does not fully reflect the large homeless and transient populations that call Downtown home much of the time. The 2020 census may show an increase in density in Downtown as result of the recent loft and condo boom that has in part signified the district’s redevelopment and gentrification process.



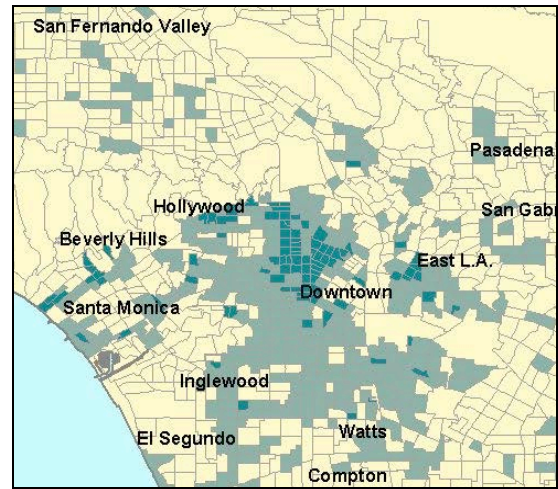
1950



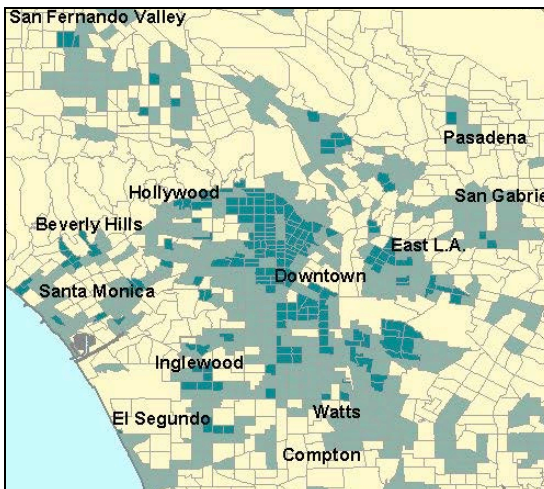
1960



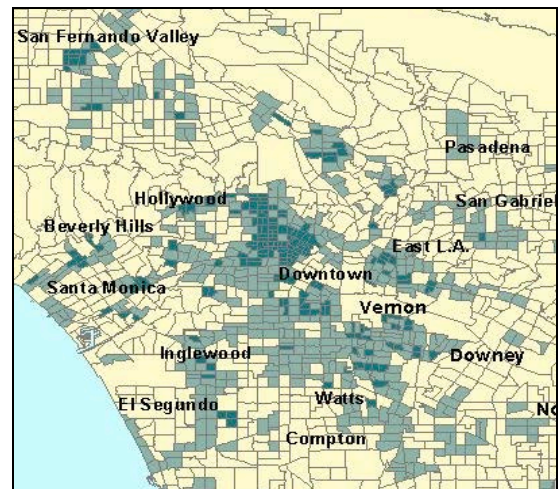
1970



1980



1990



2000

Figure 5.2. (Previous page) Lighter shades indicate low density, darker shades indicate high density. Data assembled by M. Zonta and P. Ong, UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Studies.

L.A.'s uneven growth and development was not interrupted in most people's minds until the 1992 L.A. Riots erupted at the corner of Florence and Normandy. The "restructuring-generated crisis" which took the form of these "Justice Riots" (Soja, 1996b) exposed the frustration many people felt for living in a city that possessed so many contradictions and inequalities in terms of wealth distribution and economic restructuring, treatment by police, infrastructural development, housing stock, public transit amenities, and the quality of education (Baldassare, 1994). But the crisis with development did not begin during the 1990s, nor has it ended.

Soja's (1996, 432) view of the inextricable link between socio-spatial development and civil society comes as part of his study of the Los Angeles region, "one of the world's largest industrial growth poles... and largest manufacturing city in North America" since the 1920s. In fact, as Soja and other members of the "L.A. School" argued early on (Soja, Morales, and Wolff, 1983), this growth was instrumental in redefining twentieth century urban form based on what Edward Soja and Allen Scott (1986) dubbed "the capital of the twentieth century." In moving away from the Chicago School's spatially simplistic concentric ring model, Soja argued for a reconceptualization of the very nature of urban studies and a revamping of our geographic vocabularies. As he put it, we must "see urban form more as a complex and polycentric regional mosaic of geographically uneven development affecting and affected by local, national, and global forces and influences" (436). Furthermore, he argues, "under these changes conditions, long-established epistemologies and strategies of action and behavior become increasingly problematic and open to question" (452). Such an argument is the foundation of a postmodern conceptualization of Los Angeles's urban geography and sets the scene for this chapter.

But more than a desire to simply recast Los Angeles as the preeminent postmodern urban center, Soja (2010) has brought his ontological restructuring, as he calls it, to bear on a reconsideration of social justice that includes an explicitly spatial component. As Soja (2010, 72) argues, "geographically uneven development, whatever

its particular source, is a contributing factor to the creation and maintenance of individual and social inequalities and hence to social and spatial injustices.” Following Soja, I am employing a spatial perspective to my understanding of how sub-groups have utilized space as part of achieving spatial justice and asserting their right to the city. Given their lasting marks and visual remnants, murals and graffiti are among the best indicators of how individuals have used and personalized space. Furthermore, the destruction of traditional murals by graffiti writers, which I discuss at length in chapter 3, is an expression of disenfranchisement and frustration that predates the Riots and helps tell an explicit story about people’s uneven access to, and ability to legally aestheticize, public space.

Before moving on to a discussion of continuing contestation of over wall space—specifically as it played out on the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls between muralist Ernesto De La Loza and local graffiti writers—I provide a short case study of the Belmont Tunnel and graffiti yard whose destruction foreshadows the spread of graffiti-murals.

The Belmont Tunnel and Toluca Yard: a thirdspace perspective.

Set against a low hill located at the confluence of the Echo Park, Westlake, Pico Union and Downtown districts, the bowl-shaped 2½ -acre space was home to the Toluca Sub-Station, which opened on 1 December 1925. Almost 75 years before the birth of the current subway line that connects North Hollywood and Universal Studios with Downtown was the opening of the first stretch of subway in L.A., which was slated to run between Hollywood and Downtown’s Bunker Hill. But as car ownership during that period rose and the freeway system was conceived, only 1-mile of tunnel was ever constructed. Before its closure in 1955, the “Hollywood Subway” carried an estimated 65,000 passengers per day from Bunker Hill through the Belmont Tunnel to the Toluca Station located at the corner of Glendale and 2nd Streets in the Westlake district (Electric Historical Railway Association, <http://www.erha.org/pewhl.htm>, last assessed February 2012).



Figure 5.3. Opening of the Belmont Tunnel at the Toluca Station, 1928. The tunnel is visible in the background. California Historical Society Collection, 1860-1960, USC Digital Archives.



Figure 5.4. Hollywood Subway, 1930. Chamber of Commerce Collection, USC Digital Archives.

As with the fate of all public rail transit in L.A. during the 1950s and '60s, the opening of the freeway system pulled riders out of the subway cars and off the Red Car trolleys and into private automobiles. What was for a time during the Cold War used as a storage facility for survival rations consisting of 329,700 pounds of crackers (Harvey, 2009), in 1966 the once-popular substation and tunnel area—or “yard”—became a storage facility for the city’s impounded vehicles. It was at that time that the foundation for the Bonaventure Hotel was being built mid-way along the tunnel at Figueroa, cutting the route off completely. After being literally sealed off from Downtown, the tunnel and yard became a filming location used in the production of movies—most notably it was the location of 23rd Street Locos’ barrio in the movie *Colors* (Hopper, 1988). Not much was needed in terms of set dressing for the film since Belmont was in reality a gang’s ‘hood—being controlled by local cliques of Rockwood and Headhunters whose members lived in the hill community behind the abandoned station.



Figure 5.5. The Belmont Tunnel, c.1992. The words “Red Car Tunnel” are still faintly visible near the top of the entrance. Courtesy of Gabe 88.

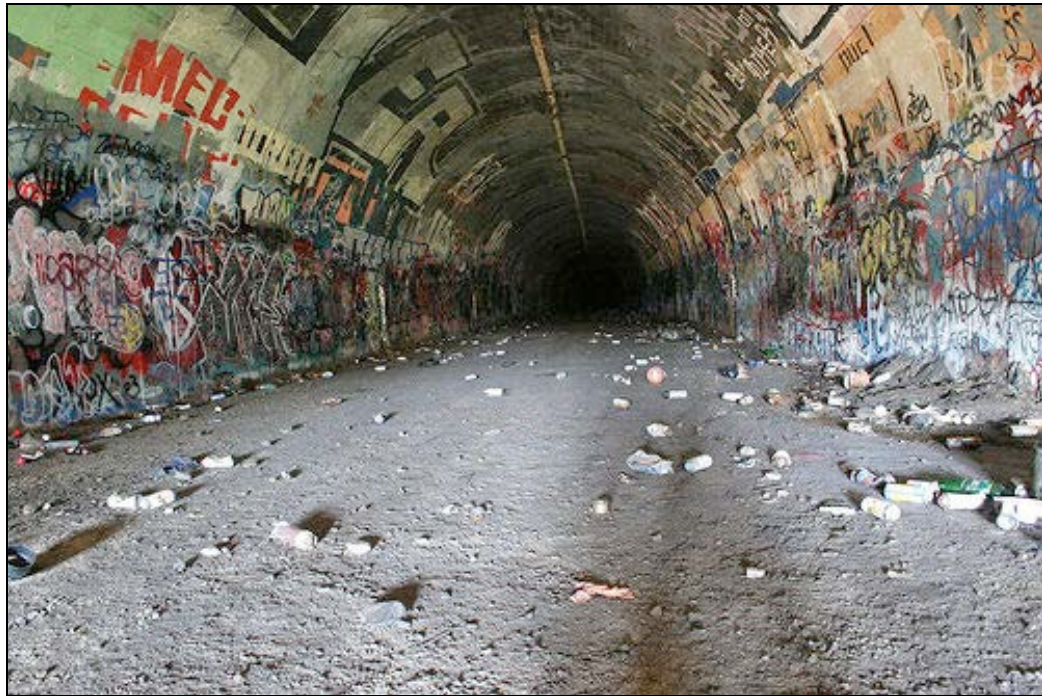


Figure 5.6. Inside the Belmont Tunnel, c.2000. Courtesy of Gabe 88.

Most of the background graffiti for the film was also authentic. However, most of the markings were not painted by gang members, but by members of the graffiti community who had begun using the tunnel and terminal building as a covert practice area and informal street gallery a few years before the film's production in 1987. After the area had been officially abandoned, no longer serving its legitimate purpose as a transit hub, it was reconceived by local graffiti writers, becoming a prime location for alternative uses. The first piece to be painted on one of the walls encircling the below-street-level yard was by one of L.A.'s first graffiti writers, Shundu. In a solicited written reflection he recalls tuning the derelict terminal building, tunnel, and surrounding land into what would become a popular graffiti yard:

Belmont High School was roughly two blocks north from the yard and it seemed that nobody cared much of what went on at the tunnel, not even the cops. So it was a perfect spot to paint. At that time, in the mid-1980s, Rick, Risco (R.I.P.), Primo-Dee, Dave and I would hang out at Rick's pad, which was conveniently located a few blocks away from the tunnel as well. We would practice sketching pieces for our recently formed crew, Los Angeles Bomb Squad (L.A.B.S.). We would head out to the tunnel

and bust. The first pieces at the tunnel were a “Risco City,” a “Shandu,” and a “Los Angeles Bomb Squad” piece.

I remember it being comfortable painting there. I guess ‘cause we were sort of hidden and away from any view. We’d also meet up with Geo One (R.I.P.), from Today’s Writing Artists (TWA), who also lived near by, and practice our tags and throw-ups and sketches. GEO would hit that shit up more than any one of us and would eventually master the art of writing before many of us. You would later see it in his tags that this cat was way ahead of his time. His tags were smooth and fresh. They would just flow.

Back then people hardly knew of the tunnel, only those who lived near by or would pass by the bridge overlooking the tunnel off Beverly Blvd. which passed above the area, or those that me and the crew would bring in. The tunnel became to us like our little clubhouse, our haven. (personal communication, 2006)



Figure 5.7. One of the first pieces painted at Belmont, and one of the first ever in L.A., 1982, by Shandu. Photo by Shandu, courtesy of Gabe 88.

By the early 1990s Belmont became the premier destination for Los Angeles graffiti writers. Its 150-yard-by-nine-foot-high walls encircling three sides of the sloping dirt and grass area provided the perfect platform for graffiti writers to practice their lettering styles without fear of being seen and arrested. As Faye Docuyan (2000, 103) writes in her case study of graffiti produced in contested urban spaces, “[Belmont] contained stylish forms of graffiti that are less visible to the general public. In unusually blighted and nonresidential areas like this one, graffiti writers have had more opportunity

to paint complex, time intensive pieces without being noticed or bothered by police and others.”

In addition to writers actively producing graffiti on the walls, groups of younger writers would sit along the platform of the old station watching the activity and exchanging blackbooks and photographs of graffiti—sometimes catching small tags inside the terminal building where they were less subject to scrutiny. On weekends there would often be up to 50 graffiti writers in the Belmont yard, arriving from every part of the city. Rarely did law enforcement drive along the street above the yard and look down at the activity below. An empty lot in one of L.A.’s poorest Latino neighborhoods did not attract the attention of law enforcement or concerned citizens. Spatially, as well as socially, Belmont existed far off the beaten path.

As hip hop-style graffiti arrived in L.A. from New York, the rules regarding respect for wall space had already been written by gang members in L.A.—going over another writers’ work was a sign of disrespect. So it was at Belmont where many newer-school writers learned what Laurie MacGillivray and Margaret Saucedo Curwen (2007, 354-355) call “tagging as an act of social literacy.” As writers hanging out at Belmont learned, one could go over another’s work if it was going to be bigger, better, verbal permission had been granted, or you were willing to physically fight or compete for the space as part of garnering respect.

Additionally, and perhaps even more important for social survival, writers visiting Belmont learned how to develop their own styles while subscribing to behavioral mores. As Docuayan (2000, 103) observed, “here [at Belmont] individuals spent hours of their time honing and displaying their skills, seeking recognition and respect from their peers, comparing and evaluation styles, socializing, and competing with others who happened to visit.” As Volt (pictured in Figure 5.10.) put it:

One of my first memories is going to the tunnel with my homie Price from OTR and seeing some of the dopest pieces from old school crews like LABS, STN, K2S, UCA, DTK and WC. But then tagging was becoming a big problem at Belmont, so kids weren’t really invited. I remember one day Price went up to Rick One from K2S and asked him if it was cool to hang out, and like a true OG, he was very cool about the whole thing. I remember as we walked around looking at all those

pieces, I simply understood to leave them alone, to not be a toy and try to put my name over someone else's dope piece. (personal interview, 2008)

As many writers have expressed in personal interviews, Belmont was like a second home to them, whether or not they actually painted there. As Oiler put it:

one day in Downtown I ran into this kid Sacred. Said he was going to Belmont. I said "Belmont, what's this?" This is late '89 or possibly very early '90. And he took me over to the Belmont place, and from there it was on! I was there about every Saturday sitting on the hill, watching the other writers paint down in the yard, watching other writers get jacked in the yard, fuckin' gangs come in and out. I was just a little dude just getting a glimpse of the people that were already doing it. (personal interview, 2008)

Chalk also recalled Belmont as both a prime location for graffiti writers as well as for possible violence:

I would be, like, painting on the wall and fools would be all, like, "fuck, that's a girl." But no one ever tried to jack me or anything because I had a bunch of friends around doing their own shit but kind of looking out for me. Besides, even gangsters leave girls alone even if they're writers. I used to love it there because the OTRs, UTIs, and everyone would be down there just kickin' back like everything was all good. And those chunti Mexican fools playing ball would always be there too and they just kept to themselves. (personal interview, 2008)



Figure 5.8. View of Belmont, c. 1988. The hillside neighborhood and Downtown are visible in the background. Courtesy of Gabe 88.



Figure 5.9. The Colorful Belmont walls, c. 1990. A piecer goes over a piece by Mear One CBS (written at center). It became common practice to go over completed pieces with new work, but it was also common courtesy to let a piece “ride” for several days before doing so. Source: 50mm.

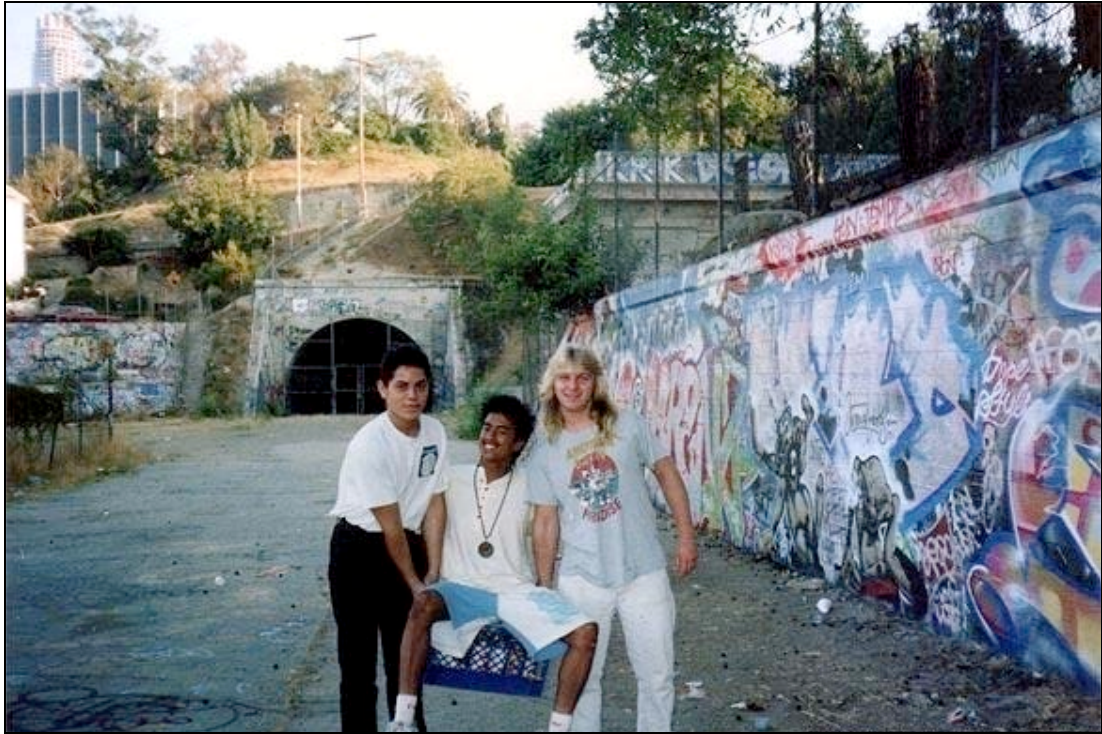


Figure 5.10. L.A. graffiti legends Volt, Hex, and Slez of the LOD crew leaving Belmont with a crate of spray paint, 1988. The U.S. Bank Building (top left) is visible in the background.
Source: 50mmlosnages photo archive.



Figure 5.11. Toluca Substation at Belmont, 2003. Four of the throw-ups on the structure are by female graffiti writers (Envee and Kween at top, Chalk at bottom left). The text written atop Cisco on the right side of the station reads “Subverting Spaces of Capitalism.” Photo by Unit.

It was also during the early 1990s that Belmont became the weekend home to *pelota tarasca* players from all around the L.A. region. Belmont, which closely resembled the 300-foot-by-25-foot-wide playing field for the ancient Aztec ball game, became the only playing location in the U.S. for the pre-Columbian sport. Players, mostly Mexican immigrants from the states of Michoacán and Guerrero, volley a small rubber ball, usually a shaved tennis ball, in an effort to eliminate players who miss their turn at hitting the ball with their bare hand (Krikorian, 1996).

Just like at an ancient *pelota tarasca* match—an Aztec community ritual in which the competition on the field symbolized interactions in the afterworld—onlookers at Belmont would line the playing area watching the competition, socializing, playing music, and trading food. Accompanying the all-male players, females, children, and the elderly would join the graffiti writers along the walls and in the shady areas around the

abandoned terminal. But instead of facing the wall and painting, the women in waist aprons would sell food to the players as well as the painters. Although the players are most often Mexican nationals, the food, like the neighboring community, was a blend of Mexican, Salvadorian, Guatemalan, and American dishes ranging from tacos, *papasas*, *rellenitos*, and hot dogs. Young boys would drag plastic tubs filled with bottled water and soda to the front of the Toluca Station, selling beverages for double what they paid.

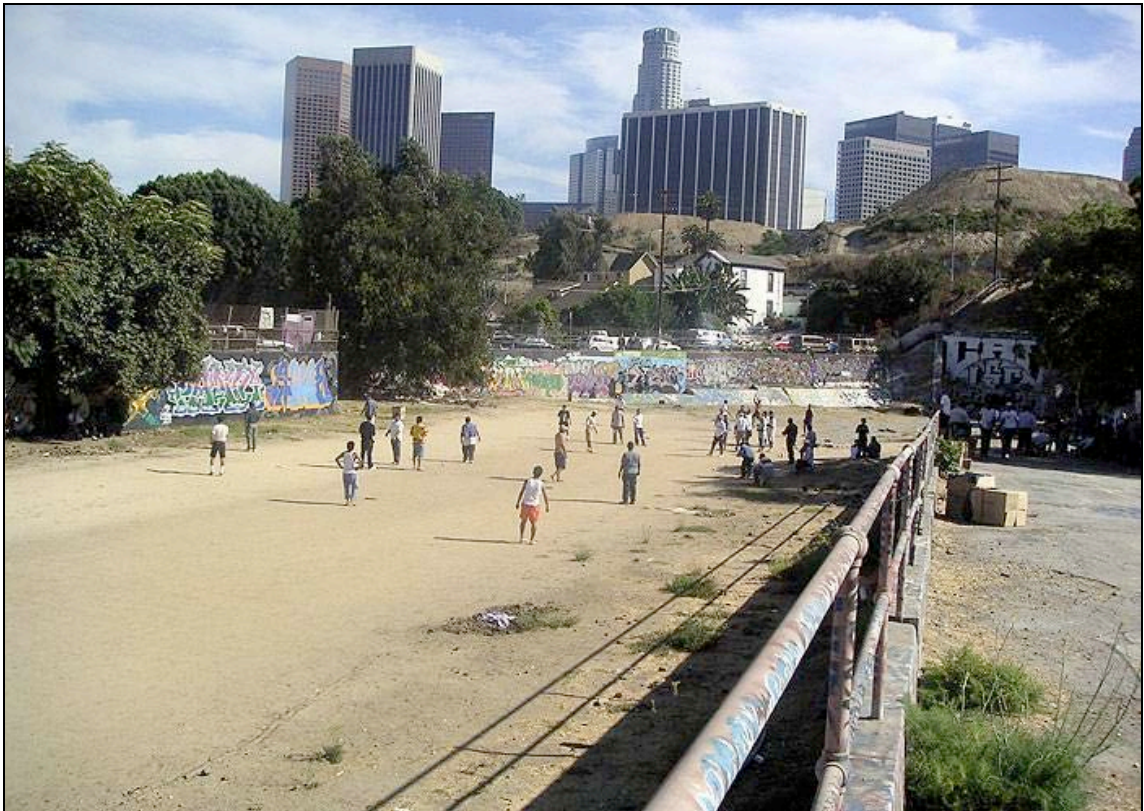


Figure 5.12. Players on the *tarasca* field with Downtown in the background. Courtesy Gabe 88.



Figure 5.13. *Tarasca* players and graffiti artists in background, 2003. Courtesy Gabe 88.

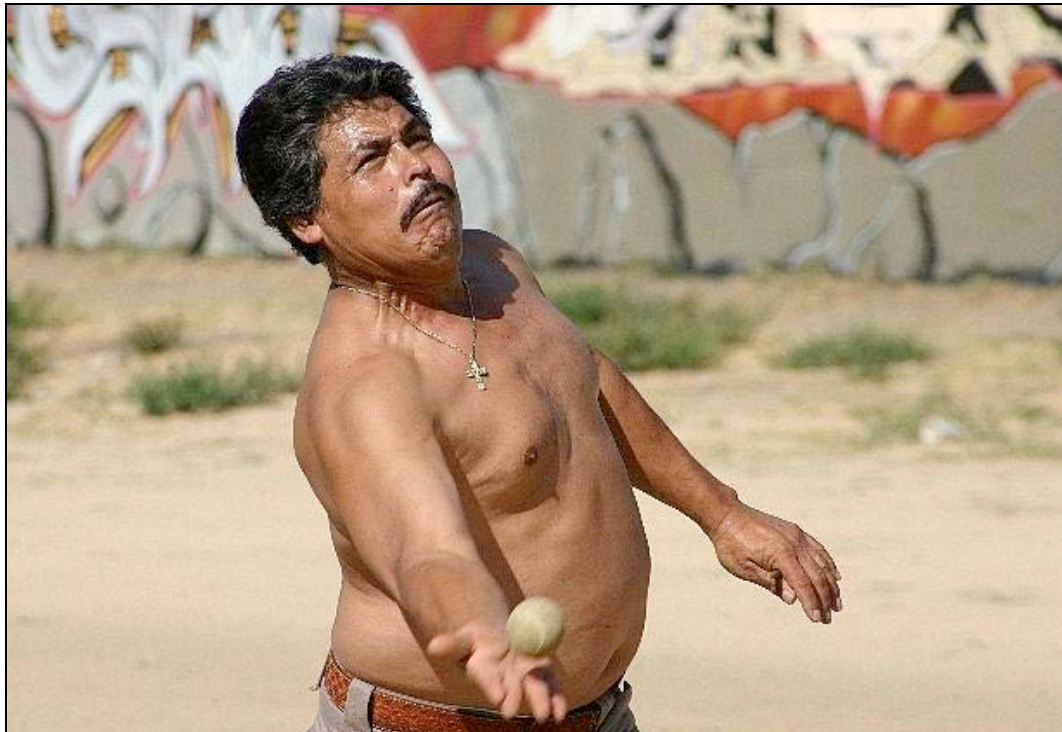


Figure 5.14. *Palota tarasca* player in action at Belmont, 2003. Courtesy of Gabe 88.



Figure 5.15. *Palota tarasca* players in front of a memorial production for Skate One by members of the graffiti crews UTI, THC, and CBS in 1996. I was part of the painting of that production along with Axis, Anger, Aura, Phever, and Exist from CBS, Chore, Vile, Lush, Trade, Relent from THC, and Skill, Pistol, and Ghost from UTI. As part of a usual day of painting at Belmont I walked down the steep hill at the rear of the yard aided by a rope which was always left tied to a tree stump. To get to our painting spot I walked along the wall so as not to interfere with the *tarasca* game that had already begun by 9am. After several hours of painting I took a break to eat tacos that I purchased from an elderly lady wearing a pink apron. By sunset most of the people in the park left to avoid run-ins with gangsters and the police who would be cruising the area after dark. Courtesy Gabe 88.



Figure 5.16. *Tarasca* spectators and graffiti piecers (background). Courtesy Gabe 88.

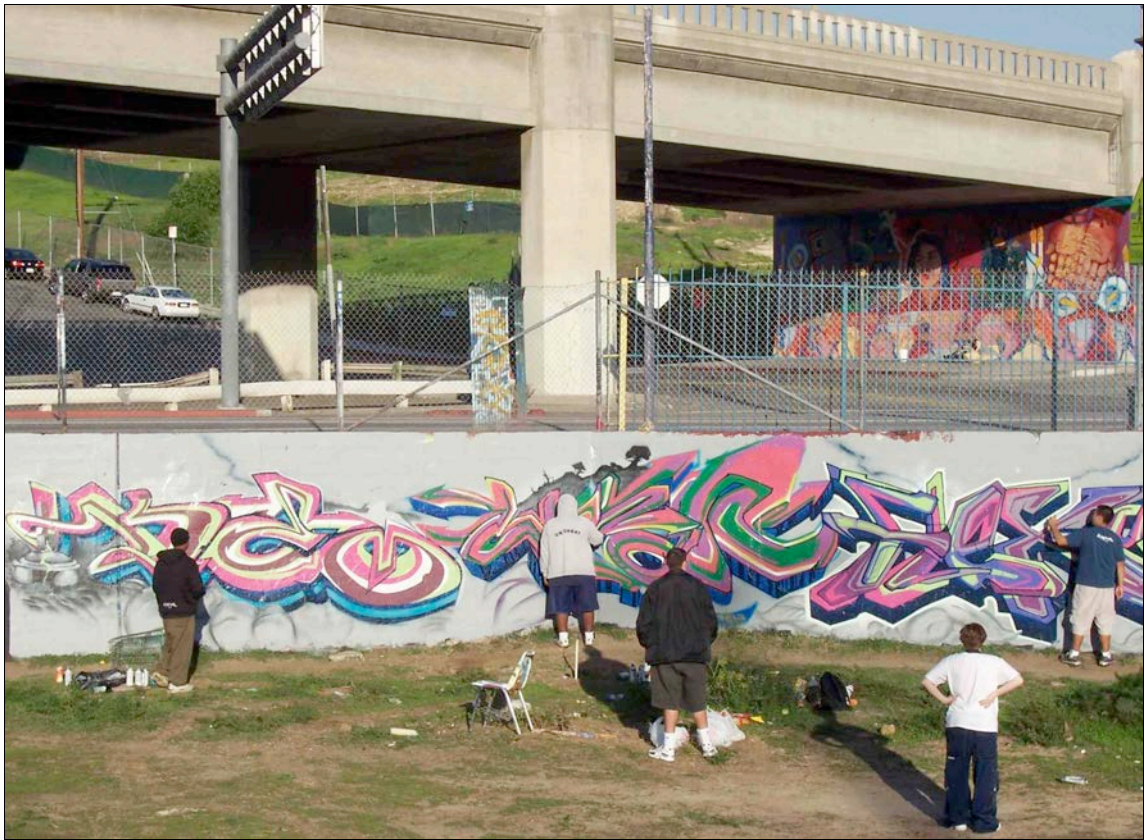


Figure 5.17. Graffiti artists painting below street level at Belmont, c.2003. The overpass at the top of the photo is Beverly Boulevard. At right, under the overpass, is Yreina D. Cervántez’s mural *La Ofrenda* painted in 1989. An image of the mural is used as the cover of Guisela Latorre’s *Walls of Empowerment* (2008). Despite being located directly across the street from one of the murals she focuses on in her book, and despite housing a collection of some of the most important and empowering walls for the graffiti community, Latorre does not mention Belmont in her study of murals and graffiti-murals. Despite the historical, social, spatial, and cultural importance of Belmont, it is has received little scholarly attention, for example, the space was the focus of an anthropology MA thesis out of USC (Hornish, 1993), a short discussion in Susan Philips *Wallbangin’* (1998), named in an anthropology journal article by Docuayan (2000), a brief mention in an American studies text book by Lynell (2006), an excellent reflection in an architectural almanac (Knight, 2006), and as the focus of a *Los Angeles Times* articles and a column by Kirkorian (1997), Hernandez (2004a, 2004b), and Harvey (2009), respectively. Outside of academia and popular media, Belmont has been the topic of countless art shows such as at CrewWest gallery in Downtown in 2009, and has been pictured in graffiti coffee table books such as *Spray Can Art* (Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987), *The History of Los Angeles Graffiti Art* (Alva and Reiling, 2006), and *Graffiti L.A.* (Grody, 2007). Photo by Gabe 88.

Belmont's many uses conceived of by its diversity of inhabitants over time make it a prime example of a postmodern manifestation of the phenomenological concept of the *Lebenswelt*—or “lifeworld.” A fitting portrayal of Belmont actually comes in the form of Soja's (1989) description of the Bonaventure Hotel—a building whose foundation signaled the deathblow to any possible future usage of the Belmont tunnel's 1-mile span. He (1989, 243-244) describes the grand hotel as:

a concentrated representation of the restructured spatiality of the late capitalist city: fragmented and fragmenting, homogeneous and homogenizing, divertingly packaged yet curiously incomprehensible, seemingly open in presenting itself to view but constantly pressing to enclose, to compartmentalize, to circumscribe, to incarcerate. Everything imaginable appears to be available in this micro-urb but real places are difficult to find, its spaces confuse an effective cognitive mapping, its pastiche of superficial reflections bewilder co-ordination and encourage submission instead. Entry by land is forbidding to those who carelessly walk but entrance is nevertheless encouraged at many different levels.

But unlike the Bonaventure's reflective façade and monumental postmodern architecture in the center of Downtown, Belmont is less available to passing scrutiny. What makes Belmont a space of contradiction that allows for no easy definition is its permanently locked gates and oft-used dirt paths used as access points, its colorful images painted against a drab backdrop of residential poverty, its visible infrastructural neglect juxtaposed with the daily activity that enlivens its void, and, in 2001, its disappearance beneath yet another round of redevelopment.

Like other “officially” neglected places in L.A. that are invigorated by their users' daily behaviors and reinvented by virtue of residents' vernacular use-patterns (Rojas, 2003, 2010), and similar to other thirdspaces such as the South Central Farm which received national attention as its farmers contested eviction and the impending development of the site (Mares and Peña, 2010), Belmont was eventually recognized for its profit-generating potential and was slated for redevelopment. As revitalization from

Downtown crept its way,⁷⁹ Belmont, which had been hidden for so long, finally got recognized.

When Meta Housing Corp. planned for the construction of a 276-unit luxury apartment in the Belmont yard, graffiti writers, artists, and neighborhood activists assembled to stop the plans. Arguing that Belmont was a historical location as the first subway station built in L.A., and pointing out its cultural significance as both an informal graffiti gallery and only *tarasca* field in the U.S., protesters represented in part by Stash Malenski of I.C.U. brought a motion before the L.A. City Planning and Land Use Commission asking that historical preservation and landmark status be granted to the site.⁸⁰ But the commission chaired by Councilmember Ed Reyes dismissed the appeal.

⁷⁹ It was not until after the major renovation of Pershing Square in 1992, the opening of the Staples Center in 1999, the completion of the Walt Disney Concert Hall in 2003, in addition to dozens of condominium and loft apartments, art galleries, and coffee shops popping up in the formerly depressed and crack-ridden neighborhood around 6th and Spring Street that downtown can be considered, in the past tense, revitalized. For an ongoing discussion of revitalization ups and downs in Downtown L.A. see the *Los Angeles Downtown News* (www.ladowntownnews.com).

⁸⁰ Based on the success of graffiti-as-mural in advertising, Stash Malenski founded In Creative Unity (ICU) in 1993 as another way of linking graffiti writers to those who wanted to pay to have murals produced for both personal and commercial gain. Currently Malenski and ICU works with mainstream murals groups such as Judith Baca's SPARC to advocate for the production of graffiti-murals and the restoration of existing traditional murals. Malenski has also become an outspoken advocate for the protection of murals as an art form that he argues should be protected under the 1st Amendment and therefore not subject to the signage and "supergraphic" ban currently being debated by the Los Angeles City Council. Until about 2001 when graffiti-muralists such as Man One, Kofie, Retna, El Mac, and others began to be generally accepted by both the mainstream mural and graffiti communities, graffiti writers were seen as hostile to muralists given the large-scale destruction of the freeway murals over the course of the preceding decade. But while the freeway murals were being covered by graffiti, graffiti writers working with Malenski were being hired elsewhere to paint murals using their recognizable "urban style." Beginning in the late 1990s artists such as Hex One were freelancing, painting store-fronts on Melrose Avenue, while Ash, owner of the Conart clothing company, hired a team of graffiti writers from the CBS and West Coast Artists crews to advertise his brand and help sell his line. As Ash put, "the t-shirt and the city walls was like a blank canvas and I was featuring [Conart] with all the hype artists—PJay, Express, Mear—under that umbrella. They could bust-out a Conart mural and it was more in your face than a regular billboard and other corporate advertising like that" (interview, 2008).

Before going to the full city council, Malenski, Unit, activist Robin Nelson, and others advocating for the creation of the “Belmont Art Park” waged a sit-in and protest campaign against the developer.



Figure 5.18. The “Save Belmont Art Park” protest included Susan Phillips, author of *Wallbangin’*. At right are plans for the design of a designated art park, 2004. Photo by Gabe 88.

The advocates for the Belmont Art Park added a “negative mitigated declaration” to their claims against Meta Housing Corp., and demanding that a full environmental impact report be done in response to claims that Meta Corp. developers had illegally removed gas tanks without city supervision and had demolished the ramp leading to the Toluca Station without permits. Although the protestors, calling themselves “Belmont Art Park United,” were not able to get the city to recognize the historical significance of the Belmont graffiti yard or *tarasca* field, in 2004 the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission did grant historic status to the tunnel and substation.

The commission President, Mary Klaus-Martin, said that although graffiti was a recognized art form, the murals around the tunnel were neither old nor unique enough to justify a historic designation on their own (Hernandez, 2004b). She then showed the packed hearing room her personal copy of *Spray Can Art*, which features Belmont, but added that “an art park would not serve the true interests of those who frequent the site” (ibid.). In an interview with Daniel Hernandez (2004b) of the *Los Angeles Times*, she said “[graffiti writers] like it to be dangerous, so if you designate it an art park and made it legal and validate it, would it become important to them? I don't know. It takes off the edge.”

Along with the historical designation of the tunnel and substation, the apartments, of which 20% is reserved for low income seniors, were still built. However, Meta Corp. and the apartment managers, Essex Property Trust, agreed to give tours of the designated historical area. As John Huskey, president of Meta Housing Corp., put it, “we're going to take that area, make it nice, and the legal status will be private open space. We're part of the community now” (ibid.). The apartments, which stand out against the otherwise low-income neighborhood and used-car lots beneath Beverly Boulevard, have also been renamed, in quintessential postmodern fashion, “Belmont Station.” In a historically designated space at the rear of the new Belmont Station apartments is a mural depicting the rear of a Pacific Electric Red Car painted on the permanently sealed entrance to the Belmont Tunnel. The Toluca Station has been fully restored and made free of graffiti for the first time in over 30 years.

During Belmont’s last days, graffiti writers organized an illegal four-day mass painting of the walls as *tarasca* players got in one last game. The graffiti writers, organized by Unit and others, painted the entire yard with a black background and a timeline spanning from 1982 when Shandu painted the first piece in the yard, to the day of the yard’s closure. Police watched from the street above but did not enter the space until ground had been broken.⁸¹

⁸¹ On my last visit to Belmont to film the area for a UCLA Department of Urban Planning graduate seminar with Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris on park usage, I was detained by police for trespassing. The police officer overlooked the fact that I was also



Figure 5.19. Sketch filling in his section of the Belmont timeline. Photo by Unit.



Figure 5.20. Norteño music being played on the accordion and *bajo sexto* during Belmont's last days. Courtesy Gabe 88.

painting the wall of the sub-station when he pulled up and ordered me to lean over the hood of his car with my hands behind my head and my legs spread apart.



Figure 5.21. The destruction of Belmont, 2004. www.50mmlosangeles.com.



Figure 5.22. The Toluca Station behind apartment development, October 2007.
Photo by Sergio Guerrero, www.laist.com

The closing of Belmont in 2004 left the graffiti community with one less space to paint in the city. Around that time several other smaller graffiti yards had also closed. The Sanborn Yard at Sunset Junction on Sunset in Silver Lake had closed in 2000 when the lot became the site of an El Pollo Loco fast food chain. The Venice Pavilion was almost completely torn down despite a long fight between local government and Judith Baca's SPARC who advocated for a graffiti zone.⁸² And dozens of empty lots in North Hollywood's "NoHo Arts District" that served as temporary graffiti yards had been developed beginning in the late 1990s as Los Angeles underwent an intensive period of redevelopment orchestrated in part by the Community Redevelopment Association and the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

But the closure of graffiti yards like Belmont was not entirely the result of development. Police began cracking down on graffiti writers seen entering spaces such as the Motor Yard on L.A.'s west side as result of citizen complaints. Yards in Universal City and throughout the San Fernando Valley and East L.A. suffered the same fate as a result, in part, of increased media attention paid to the practice of producing graffiti. According to some, yards, or what *L.A. Weekly* writer Michael Krikorian calls "graffiti testing grounds" (1996), help keep graffiti from being illegally produced on the streets (Halsey and Pederick, 2010). Rick One, a long-time graffiti piecer and frequent visitor to Belmont concurs, saying "if we had more yards we would spend more time making it look good because we knew it would be seen for longer periods of time. We lost Belmont where we were able to paint freely and semi-legally, so now that its been taken away from us more graffiti is going to end up on the street, looking wacked" (personal interview, 2003).

However, as muralist Ernesto De La Loza pointed out to me during a personal interview (2009), "graffiti writers don't want permission... Notice there were never murals painted at Belmont? It's because graffiti writers have no respect. They just go over each other's work. Graffiti is meant to be temporary, but murals are supposed to be

⁸² It may seem paradoxical that Baca, a critic of graffiti, would advocate so strongly for a graffiti zone. However, she believes that yards provide graffiti artists with a place to paint, thereby taking pressure off of muralised wall space.

permanent.”⁸³ Part of De La Loza’s apparent frustration with Belmont’s inability to contain graffiti was that for a number of years leading up to the yard’s closure, graffiti spilled over and onto his own mural located several blocks away. By the time Belmont had been destroyed by development, De La Loza’s *Inner City Kickin’ It* was buried beneath layers of graffiti and graffiti-murals.

Ernesto De La Loza’s *Inner City Kickin’ It (Drug and Alcohol Free)*, 1996.

With the rise in graffiti’s popularity with the publication of *Spray Can Art* (Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987) and *Subway Art* (Cooper and Chalfant, 1988) and the arrest of the infamous Chaka in 1990, the Belmont Yard became a more crowded destination for members of the graffiti community by the early 1990s. Spill-over from the yard in the form of tags and throw-ups appeared along the main routes leading into Belmont—along the Hollywood Freeway, Beverly, Temple, and Glendale Boulevards, and across Sunset.

For street bombers and taggers, having a piece seen in Belmont wasn’t enough. Everyone going to and from Belmont had to be made aware of who was “getting up.” And contrary to the claims made by advocates for the establishment and protection of yard space and the legitimization of “graffiti testing grounds” (Krikorian, 1996), some graffiti writers have argued that graffiti, by definition, is in fact meant to be done on the streets. As McAuliffe and Iveson (2011, 137) put in, “the fact remains that many graffiti writers embrace illegality as an implicit part of graffiti practice.” Moreover, some scholars suggest that yards may confine and legitimize graffiti, thereby limiting its power as a vernacular place maker, form of visual contestation, and method of social and political resistance (Ferrell, 1996; Iveson, 2010; Halsey and Pederick, 2010).

Partially in response to the increase in graffiti in neighborhoods such as Echo Park, and as an alternative measure to the increased criminalization of graffiti writers (Iveson, 2010), the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) began to more fervently

⁸³ For a discussion of graffiti as “ephemeral and permanent,” see McAuliffe and Iveson (2011). See Ferrell and Weide’s (2011) discussion of the graffiti in terms of its “longevity and durability.”

advocate for the production of murals as well as assist in the mural permitting process.⁸⁴ The DCA's involvement would, as Pat Gomez (personal communication, 2009) argued, help facilitate the city's ability to green-light the production of more murals in the city, which are seen as an effective and low-cost means of combating graffiti (Craw, et al. 2006; Taylor and Marais, 2009).

Although the DCA got involved in the process, they did not have the legal authority to deny or grant rights to muralists to paint on public property, nor did they have any legal say over the Sunset retaining walls in terms of the walls' structural upkeep or appearance. They were, however, able to help artists navigate the civic agencies who were the legal stewards of the particular wall space—a difficult task given the complexity of stewardship of the walls at any given time. Soon after their construction in 1940 by the federal WPA, the legal and ultimate responsibility for the surface appearance and structural upkeep of the walls shifted between the Departments of Public Works, Recreation and Parks, the City Planning Department, the Citywide Murals Program, and the Department of Building and Safety. Given the bureaucratic mess of shifting legal claims made to the Sunset walls, I asked De La Loza if his *Inner City Kickin' It* was in fact permitted by the appropriate and legal caretakers of the wall, to which he replied, “hell if I know” (De La Loza, personal interview, 2009).

Regardless, when the DCA along with councilwomen Jackie Goldberg and the non-profit community service agency El Centro Del Pueblo helped De La Loza secure a permit and \$20,000 commission to paint his 12-x-700-foot mural on two sections of the then 56-year-old retaining walls, Baca's unsponsored *Evolution of Gang Member* had faded under the harsh Southern California sun before becoming completely covered under layers of gang writing and graffiti. When De La Loza finally took to the wall near

⁸⁴ As part of the permitting process, artists must provide the Public Art Division of the Murals Manager for the Cultural Affairs Department with a full sketch of the mural, a scope of the project in terms of a timeline and materials used, and most importantly the artist must agree to provide “due diligence in the preservation of their murals.” This usually takes the form of providing the mural with a wax coating and/or touching up the mural at the artist's own expense when it is written on or damaged by human or environmental causes (*DCA Mural Production Guide*, 2002).

his home in Echo Park with assistance from artists Amos, Adrain Navarette, and Victoria del Gadillo, he constructed a mural that was visually derivative of Los Tres Grandes, but thematically it was based on a dialogue he was having with those he identified as “enemies of murals—the city’s power structure, the Anglo elite, and taggers” (personal interview, De La Loza, 2009).

Indicative of “his multiplicity of influences” which he says are the result of “not holding on to any one style... [but] learning from them all” (quoted in Latorre, 2008, 58), De La Loza’s mural consists of a social realist image of the child and mother *a la* José Clemente Orozco (Figure 5.23.), kneeling *trabajadores* in the style of Diego Rivera (Figure 5.24.), and a lush tropical landscape with a fetus as an homage to the work of Siqueiros (5.25). Like the heterogeneity of his murals in terms of style, as Latorre (2008, 58-59) discusses in a reading of his mural *Resurrection of a Green Planet* from 1991, so too are the allegorical figures and the content of his *Inner City Kickin’ It* multi-layered.

Part of the reason the images and figures in his mural have a dual meanings is due to the double meaning of the mural itself. Because his mural was in part sponsored by El Centro Del Pueblo (ECDP), which specializes in drug recovery and resistance outreach in the community, he was encouraged to address themes of drug addiction in his work. Since much of the mural had been sketched out prior to ECDP’s sponsorship, the already established content took on a second meaning and he added the subtitle *Drug and Alcohol Free* to his *Inner City Kickin’ It*.

Reflecting on the communal and participatory aspect of critical Chicano murals, De La Loza explained both meanings for each section of the mural. As he put it:

I had to appease the power structure, so I couldn’t just have the *trabajadores* symbolically throwing up their cultural as I initially intended. So I put it that they were purging alcohol as well, which is true also. It’s both I guess. They are throwing up their culture as a means of survival. Alcohol is also killing this community, the Chicano community, so they are throwing that up as well. (personal interview, 2009)

Furthermore, he explained, in an effort to get the “Anglo elite to accept the mural, they had to be made to feel comfortable about art made in public places. They had to know

that this wasn't graffiti that I was doing, so I crafted my images in true Chicano/Mexicana fashion like Rivera and the others of his time" (ibid.).



Figure 5.23. A mother with her children (east side), *Inner City Kickin' It*.
Source: L.A. Mural Conservancy.



Figure 5.24. Gerber Baby above buffed Wonder Bread logo (center east), *Inner City Kickin' It*.
Source: L.A. Mural Conservancy.



Figure 5.25. *Trabajadores* throwing-up their culture/purging alcohol (center west). Inner City Kickin' It. Source: L.A. Mural Conservancy.



Figure 5.26. Fetus (left), race horses (right) (west most portion of wall). Inner City Kickin' It. Source: L.A. Mural Conservancy.



Figure 5.27. *Inner City Kickin' It (Drug and Alcohol Free)*, full wall, c. 1999.
Source: L.A. Mural Conservancy

De La Loza also wanted his mural to hark back to the 1950s “when the Anglos arrived in Echo Park.”⁸⁵ So at the center of his mural he painted the image of the Gerber Baby above the logo for Wonder Bread, thereby evoking traditional American culture through images of typical American consumer products. He added that “nothing makes the power structure in L.A. more comfortable than a fat smiling baby and sliced white bread, so I gave it to them” (ibid.).

Aside from the bureaucratic maneuvering needed to assure the production of his mural, regardless of the politics surrounding the content and aim of his mural, and notwithstanding the graffiti and graffiti-murals that would come to cover his mural, *Inner City Kickin’ It* provides a sound test of the reach of the Visual Artists Right Act (VARA) of 1990. Before moving on to the aforementioned destruction of De La Loza’s mural, I provide an analysis of VARA and its applicability to murals produced on public space.

Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA)

According to provisions made by the federally passed Visual Artists Rights Act—an extension of the U.S. Copyright Act—artists possess “moral rights” to their works of “visual art” regardless of where the work of visual art exists. These rights preserve the “integrity” of the work, barring even subsequent owners of the work from “destroying, distorting, mutilating, or modifying” it (Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA), 1990). Whereas VARA is usually applied to the display and movement of photography, sculpture, prints, and other forms of visual art, the language of the Act raises interesting legal concerns when applied to murals and graffiti-murals in several areas.

First, as legal scholars and courts dealing with VARA cases have argued, murals pose a “violent interaction of artistic creation with the practical world of zoning, urban development... [and] community values” (Robinson, 2000). More important for Constitutional scholars and legal theorists, VARA-protected mural or other form of visual art produced directly on a structure may “infringe upon constitutionally granted property rights by requiring an affirmative duty to comply with the Act’s requirements” (VARA,

⁸⁵ Many of De La Loza’s comments are factually inaccurate, but are non-the-less illustrative of an alternative, radical Chicano-centric historical narrative.

1990). Put another way, a building owner deciding to remodel or remove his or her exterior wall on which a VARA-protected mural has been produced may find that VARA “is at odds with traditional property law” (Robinson, 2000). As Rep. George C. Smith of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Technology and the Law said in response to the Act’s passage under President George H.W. Bush, “[this] constitutes one of the most extraordinary realignments of private property ever adopted by Congress...The Act requires the owner to serve as the custodian of the physical and artistic integrity of the artistic property he or she possess, and it gives the artist the power to enforce these obligations through litigation” (Merryman, 2002, 359).⁸⁶

So far, courts have ruled that artists do in fact have the right to “protect their personalities” vis a vis their art (Bougdanos, 2001), thus ordering property owners to make appropriate arrangements for the protection and/or relocation of existing visual art. Works of art can only removed or altered with written consent from the artist—or after “good faith” attempts to contact the artist have made—or upon the death of the artist of the work (California Art Preservation Act, 1979)⁸⁷ The case for Federally recognized visual artists’ rights was strengthened when in 2006 muralist Kent Twitchell was awarded \$1.2m from the U.S. government, a building owner, and nine other defendants for the illegal removal from a privately owned office building of his graffiti-scared six-story *Ed Rusche* mural in Downtown L.A. The suit followed Twitchell’s 1986 case brought under that California Art Preservation Act against hotel owners who whitewashed his iconic *Old Woman of the Freeway* on the Hollywood Freeway near Downtown. He was awarded \$175,000 in that case (Robinson, 2000).

Second, and most important in terms of applying VARA to street murals and graffiti-murals, an artist must prove that his or her art is a “work of recognized stature” (VARA, 1990). In general, traditional and Chicano murals possess an easily identifiable aesthetic and community following that has become widely recognized and accepted.

⁸⁶ For a complete list and summaries of VARA case law see Merryman, 2002.

⁸⁷ According to the California Art Preservation Act (CAPA), which is California’s further reaching version of VARA enacted in 1979, property owners must wait until the artist of a protected work has been dead for 50 years before action can be taken. However, CAPA is trumped by VARA in Federal Courts.

Furthermore, as courts, academics, and legal scholars have agreed (Robinson, 2000), it is easy to recognize the stature of murals given their long and recorded history, particularly in Latino communities (Bougdanos, 2002).

The case for recognized stature for murals has been made even more apparent in light of Chicano Park in San Diego—a center of mural activity dating from the beginnings of the Chicano mural movement—being found eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under a special criterion for public art (Talamantez, 2011). As Rosen and Fisher (2001, 96) point out, this park and its murals achieved a “local level of significance for their association (1) with political and cultural activities identified with the Chicano Civil Rights Movement and (2) with a growing recognition of the significance of muralism in mainstream art endeavors. The murals have deep transcendent values and constitute a historic resource for which the Barrio Logan community has an unusually strong associative attachment. The importance of the Chicano Park murals has been underscored by local, national, and international recognition of their artistic and social value.” According to such precedent and provision then, De La Loza’s mural would be legally eligible for VARA protection.⁸⁸ But where the application of VARA becomes more difficult and less legally defensible is as it pertains to graffiti-murals.

A large part of seeking VARA protection for graffiti-murals lies in their being recognized. As the specification relates to non-place-based and more mainstream works of visual art such as photography and sculpture, “recognized stature” can be proven “with the testimony of artists, dealers, curators, collectors, and others who are involved in the creation and appreciation of art” in addition to recognition of stature by “other members of the artists community, or by some cross section of society” (*Carter v. Helmsley-Spear, Inc.*, 1994). It is even difficult to transfer this stipulation for recognized stature to traditional murals, let alone graffiti-murals, due to the fact that they are often

⁸⁸ Although a case has not been brought to court asking that his mural be recognized under VARA, there is little doubt that it is protected under the Act for the reasons I am giving in this section based on the wording of the Act and legal precedence over the 20 years since VARA’s passage.

participatory—and therefore do not credit one artist— and are not sold or traded on the art market.

Discussing the legal difficulty in identifying a graffiti-mural's recognized stature, Michelle Bougdanos (2002, 560) argues for such recognition in her legal note on VARA, writing:

murals are often painted as a focal point for a community's sense of belonging and for the purpose of education. Los Angeles is a city famed for its graffiti murals. Most of the graffiti artists are Latinos who create murals to beautify their neighborhood, to stop gang graffiti, to create a sense of place, to celebrate the Latino culture and to educate the community about violence. Latino communities appreciate these murals, which are full of artistic merit, and the artists who created them have become cause *celebres*.

Bougdanos's argument in favor of finding recognized stature for graffiti-murals evokes "artistic merit," which is secondary to the importance that courts place on matters of widespread recognition as argued in *Carter v. Helmsley-Spear, Inc.* (1994). In fact, the measure of stature is evoked in court cases more than issues of aesthetic merit, but even stature is seen as relative. For example, as argued in *Carter* (1994, 324) "a plaintiff need not demonstrate that his or her artwork is equal in stature to that created by artists such as Picasso, Chagall or Giacometti. Nor must the trier of fact personally find that art to be aesthetically pleasing." But today the subjective nature of identifying aesthetic merit is moot given the huge rise in popularity and mainstream acceptance of graffiti in the form of "street art." For example, Banksy's illicit street art and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art's recent show on graffiti provides recognized stature to graffiti, making it far less difficult to prove to a court deciding on a VARA case.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ In terms of the stature of Banksy's work, in addition to being nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary for his *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010), Banksy's solo show near Echo Park in 2003 brought in over \$2m in sales of his street art stencils and prints. Banksy's work was also included in the 2011 "Art in the Street Exhibit" which broke the record for attendance to a show at the MOCA—by-passing the

Another issue related to a court recognizing a graffiti-mural's stature is the issue of legality. In *English v. B.F.C. & R. East 11th Street LLC* (1997), Judge Baer ruled on a case involving a community garden and murals produced without permission from the owner of a seemingly abandoned lot and building (Robinson, 2000). While Judge Baer ruled that the illegal work do not meet VARA criteria, the illegality of the mural was not the issue, but rather what she raised was the fact that the mural 1) had a problem in achieving "recognized stature" because of the stigma associated with its illegal status, and 2) because the art work was placed in harm's way and therefore could not be expected to receive due-diligent protection from the property owner.⁹⁰

Today however, given the popularity of street art, one can argue that a graffiti-mural's illegal status can in fact help it achieve credibility and therefore recognized stature thanks in part to what Heather MacDonal (2011) begrudgingly calls the "the graffiti-glorification industry." As Christopher J. Robinson (2002, 1968-1969) writes in the *Fordham Law Review* "if a work of art is widely recognized, it is either famous or notorious—either way it has recognized stature."⁹¹ In the example of the graffiti-murals painted on the Sunset retaining walls, which I address at length in the next chapter, these "technically illegal"⁹² murals have received widespread acceptance in the community regardless of their legal status. Recognized stature as defined in *Carter*, therefore, can arguably be established without regard to a mural's legality. Finally, to receive VARA protection, a work and/or its maker must be recognized as possessing the right to

Andy Warhol Retrospective in 2002 (<http://www.observer.com/2011/08/1-a-mocas-street-art-show-sets-attendance-record/>, last accessed February 2012).

⁹⁰ Regarding the question of whether or not illegally-produced murals have protection under VARA, speaking before the J. Paul Getty Conservation Institute in 2003, attorney Ann Garfinkle inconclusively stated that "[they] probably have no legal protection."

⁹¹ This is part of the reason why even established artists who came from the graffiti world often suggest that they still produce illegal graffiti. In a recent interview with well-known graffiti-muralists Retna and El Mac, one of the artists makes a point of revealing that they "still catch tags and do illegal graffiti whenever we get a chance" (mikeywally.com, 2011). Their outlaw status makes them, and by extension their work, more desirable.

⁹² Personal communication, DCA Murals Manager Pat Gomez, 2009.

“integrity” and be worthy of “attribution.”⁹³ The importance placed on giving credit to a known producer of art helps establish the “personality” and stature of the artist, which is an important aspect of identifying the applicability of VARA. Such a provision ensures that a VARA-protected work of art is not distorted, modified, or mutilated which would be considered “prejudicial to [the artists’] honor or reputation” (VARA, 1990). Given the scholarly and popular attention that has been paid to the role of fame and respect in the graffiti community, as well as the social importance placed on murals and “visual artifacts” in providing “community pride and cultural revitalization” (Laware, 1998), attribution should be easy to prove to a court in terms of its application to graffiti writers and their murals.

Encouraged by legal precedence which extends VARA protection to muralists and their murals, proponents of the act have sought to rely on VARA claims in an effort to save an increasing number of murals for undue harm. However, in doing so they have unwittingly contributed to the destruction of murals in Los Angeles and other cities across the U.S. As several cases were brought under VARA after 1990, municipalities became hesitant when it came to interacting with murals altogether—even abstaining from removing graffiti or providing restoration in any way. As Andrea Laguni, the general manager of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra who commissioned one of the largest murals in L.A.—Twitchell’s *Harbor Freeway Overture*—put it, “nobody wanted to do anything bad to a mural after 'Ed Ruscha'”—referring to Twitchell’s \$1.1-million settlement after his VARA-protected mural was painted over in 2006 (in Wada, 2011).

While cities were still combating graffiti through the use of law enforcement efforts, private graffiti abatement tactics, and painting over graffiti on white walls, many local governments claimed not to have the insurance needed to engage in proper mural cleaning. As a result, only poorly-trained private graffiti-removal companies took to the walls to clean VARA-protected murals. In the process, several works of public art were destroyed, not by vandals whose aerosol paint could be easily wiped away, but by buffers who used high-pressure sandblasting equipment, chemical solvents, and thick beige paint

⁹³ Attribution is a requirement in copyright law to acknowledge the use of another’s work in consideration of “decency and respect” for the artist or maker.

to remove graffiti from the surface of delicate murals. Most notably the city whitewashed one of L.A.'s first Chicano murals, *The Wall That Cracked Open* by Willie Herron.



Figure 5.28. *The Wall that Cracked Open* by Willie Herron is credited with being the first critical Chicano wall mural painted in Los Angeles. Herron incorporated existing *Chicano placas* in his mural, which are visible throughout the bottom portion of the piece. It is not clear if the buffers mistook the mural for unsanctioned graffiti, or were simply oblivious to the ramifications of their aggressive graffiti-removal tactics. The mural has recently been restored.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ I spoke before a council district meeting in my own neighborhood as to the destructive effect of overzealous graffiti removal. In many cases residents and city-contracted buffers

The increase in the production of graffiti, the removal of graffiti from white walls, and the effects of VARA played out most conspicuously on the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls. Whereas the freeway murals suffered the same fate as De La Loza's mural, *Inner City Kickin' It* was painted in a densely populated neighborhood as opposed to along the alienating sound walls of a busy freeway. Therefore the mural's demise and eventual replacement with graffiti-murals played out right in front of people's eyes—playing a role in people's changing perception of appropriate and accepted neighborhood aesthetics and illustrating a major shift in the generally accepted appearance of wall space.

Despite his mural's politically radical sub-text and display of leftist Chicano identity and indigenist themes, De La Loza was able to appease neighborhood boosters, city government, funders, as well as ostensibly secure legal protection for his mural under VARA and CAPA. However, he was not able to appease members of the graffiti community who in reality have direct control over the appearance of the Sunset walls regardless of a mural's legal, political, or mainstream acceptance. The continued writing of graffiti on *Inner City Kickin' It* may also have surprised those who looked to the mural as a form of graffiti deterrence.

Policy makers in particular often subscribe to the notion that, as Daniel Allen (2007, 23) writes in his study of graffiti in Minneapolis, "murals rank as one of the more popular [graffiti] prevention strategies, having been used in a number of cities." But as

have destroyed historical infrastructure including lamp posts, hardware along bridges, and WPA plaques while combating simple alcohol-based marker tags with splashes of thick paint or the use of heavy-duty solvents. As I argued at the meeting, tags from such markers would fade in the sun after a matter of weeks, or could easily be cleaned with soapy water or rubbing alcohol, whereas the materials most often used to cover the graffiti were leaving large destructive marks that were impossible to remove. In one example a historical street sign across from Walt Disney's first L.A. home near his original Disney Studios was completely painted beige by an elderly resident to cover a 6-inch marker tag. Many members of the Franklin Hills Resident's Association became irate that I would "defend gang members," informing me that "one tag will lead to thousands unless you combat it and make your anti-graffiti presence known." Councilmember Tom LaBonge was actually sympathetic to my concerns. He reminded the crowd that the removal of graffiti from public property was itself a misdemeanor, "so be careful and respectful out there" he smiled.

Taylor and Marais (2009, 68) add, “while murals can be effective when the graffiti sub-culture’s membership respect the skills of the mural artist(s)... [we] conclude that the commissioning of urban art murals are not a general panacea for solving the graffiti proliferation problem.”

When *Inner City Kickin’ It* started to get hit with graffiti after its completion, De La Loza says he remembers not understanding why “this young generation of Chicanos has lost respect for their elders and their community’s art forms and forms of expression” (personal interview, 2009). Similar to Baca’s comments regarding a change in the community in terms of young peoples’ respect for murals, De La Loza attributed the impending destruction of his mural to a larger socio-structural problem facing “taggers and vandals.” As he put it:

these kids have no respect. They are not taught respect in school, they have no art education, and they don’t know who they are as Chicanos or anything else. They just mindlessly walk the streets vandalizing other people’s property. I consider this mural my property because I did it and intended for it to stay here forever. (personal interview, 2009)

In addition to the effects of VARA and misguided graffiti removal policies that kept white walls white even as murals were getting buried under graffiti, the destruction of De La Loza’s mural was also the result of an sheer increase in the number of writers being attracted to Echo Park. As I discuss in the next chapter, it was the neighborhood’s status as an increasingly trendy place to be for young artists and street art shows that contributed to the Sunset walls became a highly sought-after location and known landmark for new and veteran graffiti writers from as far away as New York and London.



Figure 5.29. “Eroe OTR” over Wonder Bread and Gerber Baby section of *Inner City Kickin’ It*, 2000. www.50mmlosangeles.com



Figure 5.30. “Lyfer TKO” with “Jel” over De La Loza’s mural, 2000. www.50mmlosangeles.com



Figure 5.31. “Sever” over De La Loza’s depiction of a *trabajador*, 2000.
www.50mmlosangeles.com

However, not only has a large percentage of graffiti writers in L.A. identified themselves as white,⁹⁵ and to a lesser extent black, Asian, and “mixed,” most Latino graffiti writers do not identify themselves as “Chicano” (based on dozens of interviews and informal communications between 2006 and 2011). Therefore, De La Loza’s status as a long-time Chicano activist held little sway with the graffiti community. Additionally, De La Loza has been criticized by members of the muralist and local communities for his failure to restore his mural. As Eye One put it, “[De La Loza] is waiting for the City to give him \$20,000 to fix his shit. I paid for my paint myself and got to work painting on

⁹⁵ For example, a majority of members of the prolific MSK (Mad Society Kids) crew are upper-middle-class and wealthy art school educated white males from L.A.’s westside, northwest San Fernando Valley, and Ventura, Orange, and Riverside Counties. Upon the arrest of Gkae, MSK’s most active bomber during the 1990s, it became apparent that his nightly “all-city” bombing missions began only after he left the grounds of the exclusive gated community where his father’s mansion was located in Calabasas. Acceptance of Sever’s writing over a critical Chicano mural (Figure 5.31) is evidence of the complex configurations and alliances that exist within the graffiti community.

my days off” (personal interview, 2009). Eye One argues that pride for the community manifests in action, even if that action is illegal. Painting the wall, even while being self-promoting, is ultimately about promoting neighborhood identity. As Eye One put it when questioned about why he felt comfortable going over De La Loza’s critical Chicano mural with a graffiti-mural he said:

Obviously my message is not neutral with all the radical characters, but it is also not one-dimensional like some of the ‘traditional muralists,’ which is all about ‘*Chicano* pride.’ Me and Cache are technically ‘*Chicanos*,’ and we know how Anglos have tried to disrespect our people, but this is a new generation and we care about community pride which includes Jews, Muslims, gay people, and whatever other brothers and sisters live in the community. Part of the respect we have for this wall is like the respect we have for the people who live here and have to walk by these walls everyday... We don’t have beef with Ernesto, the cops, the community, or the city. These are just working-class folks doing their jobs, and we are doing ours. The difference between us and Ernesto is that nobody respects his work because he mouths off too much—talking shit about writers when in reality we are the ones with the energy and creativity to lock this wall down and speak out against gentrification, which is a bigger threat than working-class white folks or ‘the system.’ (personal interview, 2011)

As my research shows, given Eye One and Cache’s articulated sense of community and identity, combined with the widespread acceptance of their graffiti-mural on the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls, *Los Angeles: untitled* marks a discerning challenge to the cultural authority of the critical Chicano mural tradition, and evidence of the rise of the graffiti-mural movement in Los Angeles.

Chapter 6. *Los Angeles: untitled*, 2004.

In this final chapter I discuss the production of Cache and Eye One's *Los Angeles: untitled*. As I show, their widely accepted though unsanctioned graffiti-mural calls the laws and general perceptions regarding appropriate wall aesthetics into question. I begin the chapter with a discussion of how and why the Sunset walls were selected as a site for the painting of *Los Angeles: untitled*, followed by a discussion of neighborhood change and revitalization trends as a means of providing necessary social and spatial context to the production of the murals. I rely on personal interviews with those who have painted the Sunset walls in recent years, as well as original photography of the latest incarnation of Cache and Eye One's on-going work.

"I'm predicting a lot of stupid boneheaded moves that are going to destroy a lot of beautiful street art in our city in a misguided effort to 'stamp out graffiti.' They'll paint over beautiful pieces that have graced neighborhood walls for years, and once those pieces are gone, ugly tags will show up overnight, leading to yet more calls for police to crack down. It'll be a downward spiral of ugliness and self-fulfilling prophecy that has already become the hallmark of this decade."

— Mark Mauer, *L.A. Weekly*, 2008.

The destruction of Ernesto De La Loza's *Inner City Kickin' It* by graffiti writers signals, albeit paradoxically, the revitalization of the Echo Park neighborhood followed by the return of an active mural community. Contrary to the Broken Windows theory (Wilson and Kelling, 1982)—which posits that quality of life crimes signify community malaise and a loss of control—an increase in the production of illicit graffiti and graffiti-murals may indicate generally desirable neighborhood activity, particularly in neighborhoods undergoing revitalization.⁹⁶ Given the importance placed on cultural capital in distinguishing urban neighborhoods as "hip," the presence of graffiti—like other forms of "edgy" public art—may indicate the presence of a creative, vital, and

⁹⁶ Revitalization is one aspect of gentrification, socio-spatial reorganization, and the increased social and economic vitality typically associated with structural change (Zukin, 1991). While the term and the process to which it refers can have problematic implications, I use it to indicate locally driven social and economic activity at the scale of the neighborhood. As it is used by cultural anthropologists, "revitalization moments" indicates "innovation of whole cultural systems" (Wallace, 1956, 261), which is a "deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" (ibid., 265), and a "gestalt shift... in the restructuring of virtually all social and cultural relations (Carroll, 1975).

diverse community (Landry, 2000; Florida, 2003, 2005). As Cameron McAuliffe and Kurt Iveson (2011,136) point out:

it is now common for that cultural capital [which is established by writing illegal graffiti for an audience] to be leveraged for financial capital by individual graffiti writers... who themselves are often participating in municipal efforts to leverage graffiti's cultural capital for branding projects—including efforts to position corporations or places in relation to the so-called 'creative economy'.”

Therefore, unlike graffiti writers who during the 1990s engaged in daredevil tactics such as freeway bombing to avoid run ins with law enforcement, gang members, and vigilantes, and who often chose out of the way locations to produce their work (Philips, 1999), by the early 21st century graffiti writers were making forays into so-called up-and-coming high-profile neighborhoods, which may have been tacitly accepting the presence of graffiti and street art as an indicator of authenticity and vitality (Baudrillard, 1976, 1981b).

In his *Graffiti Lives* (2009, 47-53), Gregory Snyder illustrates this point through a personal observation of the prevalence of graffiti in parts of New York City. Observing tags on U.S. Mail boxes across the metropolitan area, he notes that the precinct reporting higher-than-average violent crime rates had less graffiti compared to far safer precincts in which there was a presence of far more tagging. Snyder's observation may indicate a sea change in terms of how neighborhoods attempt to maintain their “edge” as they encourage law enforcement to rethink their counterproductive fight against non-violent street activities and aesthetics. This idea runs contrary to the dominant “clean up the streets” approach taken by law enforcement and local government in punitive societies, but as cultural criminologist Jeff Ferrell (1996) puts it, graffiti is part of a non-violent “subversive space work” done by young people and those who are attempting to create alternative and positive uses for cultural space.

In the film *Infamy* (Pray, 2005), Ear Snot, a well-known graffiti writer from New York City, walks down the street with his marker in hand, writing on mail boxes, in door ways, on newspaper stands, and on trash cans in broad daylight. Despite the illegality of

his actions, he does not hide his activities from passers-by who seem either unmoved or simply uninterested in his activities. Far from menacing, in addition to engaging in illicit, Ear Snot identifies himself as a “collector of cool sneakers, a thief, a fan of art and music, a tough guy when need be, black, and gay.” Neighborhoods where Ear Snot tags are abundant provide an alternative aesthetic environment to New York’s financial district, industrial neighborhoods, and communities wherein vernacular forms of personal expression are not written on public space. As Jeff Ferrell and Robert D. Weide (2010, 53)—both of which identify themselves as graffiti writers—point out:

most attractive are areas of the city where heavy and diverse human traffic provides the largest potential audience for a writer’s graffiti... writers concentrate on those streets with the most pedestrian and vehicular traffic. More traffic means more audience exposure, more risk—and more status.

But more than simply producing distinction and allowing for the appreciation of aesthetic differences between neighborhoods, Ear Snot’s tags are revealing how “patterns of taste, lifestyle, location and the use of space... reveal the practices and judgments that constitute a [particular area]” (Podmore, 1998, 120). Such revelations can have the effect of attracting or detracting investors and potential residents—resulting in large-scale neighborhood restructuring (Mele, 2001).

Influenced by the Bourdivan concept of *Habitus*—the location in which class constitution is linked to aesthetic dispositions and social practices—Christopher Mele (2001) shows how that which is viewed by some residents, city officials, and investors as “blight,” and demonized by broken windows advocates as “unsafe,” is actually inviting to savvy speculators and some incoming residents. Put another way, a neighborhood’s “edge” may ultimately be its undoing. In his discussion of how countercultures and alternative expressions of taste and lifestyle may actually service urban capital, Mele (2001, 221) points out that “the symbols and images of abandoned buildings, empty lots, graffiti, and a thriving drug economy served as the foundation of an urban aesthetic inclusive of music, art, fashion, and literature.” These are the manifestations of cultural

capital that attract investors and middle class residents, and, according to traditional theories of gentrification, result in the displacement of those very traits.⁹⁷

However, whereas in the past “city policies sought to sanitize the area’s seamy reputation and to rein in the very same free-wheeling, chaotic social environment that initially gave impetus to the creative scene” (Mele, 2001, 240), in the last several years, in places such as Echo Park and Silver Lake, alternative aesthetic environments and offbeat social scenes may be exploited and therefore persevered to a greater extent. As Mele points out, exploitation instead of displacement of alternative lifestyles can be used to effectively sell place. In his study of neighborhood change in New York’s Lower East Side, Mele points out that it is actually smaller-scale neighborhood revitalization that relies on the maintenance of cultural forms of expression. Unlike redevelopment and revitalization projects in numerous U.S. cities that rely on the construction of sports venues and other large-scale “development catalyst projects” (Kayzar, 2006), neighborhoods such as Echo Park experience a form of revitalization that relies to a greater extent on the entrepreneurship of small business owners, property owners, existing residents, and local government who understand and seek to maintain local character.⁹⁸

After the initial round of large-scale redevelopment that took place during the 1930s, ‘40s, and ‘50s, culminating with the construction of Dodger Stadium, there have been no large-scale public works or privately-funded projects in the immediate Echo Park area.⁹⁹ Rather, in Echo Park revitalization has taken place from the ground up in many

⁹⁷ This process is similar to arguments made by postmodern theorists such as Fredric Jameson (1991) and Slavoj Zizek (2003) who point out the complexities and paradoxes inherent in late capitalism. As both theorist point out, even that which seems to challenge capitalism actually works in capitalism’s favor in the post modern age.

⁹⁸ Similar to the difference between “development catalyst projects” and locally-driven revitalization, Chris Hamnett (2010)—in a debate over the effects of gentrification with Slater (2010) and relying on Davidson and Lees (2005)—distinguishes between “new build” gentrification and locally-driven forms of neighborhood change that rely on existing infrastructure.

⁹⁹ There has been large-scale redevelopment of parts of downtown, four miles away from Echo Park, which including the Staples Center and \$2.5b, 5,600,000-square-foot mixed-

ways. While real estate prices have gone up dramatically over the last few years, two condominium complexes have been built on Sunset Boulevard, and local government has funded some public works and improvement projects such as the opening of a the Edendale Public Library branch on Sunset Boulevard in 2004 and is currently in the first phase of construction on a new traffic triangle at Sunset Junction in Silver Lake, revitalization has not arrived in a sterilized and prepackaged form that too often comes to dominant the appearance and feel of the local landscape.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, revitalization has transformed the neighborhood in some clearly discernable ways.

use L.A. Live complex and Nokia Theater owned by the Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG). Pending the completion of an environmental impact report, proposed plans for additional development adjacent to the Ritz-Carlton and ESPN studies include the development of an NFL football stadium. Also, Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) project zones abut the Echo Park/Silver Lake districts to the west in East Hollywood and to the east in Bunker Hill, Boyle Heights and along the Arroyo Seco (www.crala.org). Note: at the time of completion of this dissertation CRAs in California have been abolished as per ABx1-26. However, as stated on the crala.org website, “ABx1-26 does not abolish the City’s 31 existing Redevelopment Plans, which will continue to be administered by a Designated Local Authority (“DLA”) that oversees projects of the former Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles. The land-use authorities granted in the Redevelopment Plans remain effective and will continue to be administered by the DLA starting on February 1, 2012.”

¹⁰⁰ Also upon the completion of this dissertation, the Sunset Triangle Park in Silver Lake—“Los Angeles' first 'street-to-plaza' conversion” (Bloomekatz, 2012)—has been put in place by the Planning Commission and City Councilperson Eric Garcetti’s office. The small pedestrian triangle consists of an existing small park space and recently-closed adjoining side-streets. The surface has been painted lime green with polka dots and planters have been placed to close the access points off to cars. According to Garcetti, for a development cost of \$25,000 “this new plaza reveals the hidden potential of our public spaces, and shows how we can bring transformative change even during tough economic times” (ibid.).

Neighborhood Change in Echo Park

“Poor people like coffee too, we even like art.”

— Graffiti writer Ism One commenting on the contested opening of cafés and galleries in Echo Park. (personal interview, 2006)

Some residents saw the opening of new cafes, fashion boutiques, bookstores, and art spaces in Echo Park beginning in about 2000 as a sign of gentrification. Others saw these changes as part of revitalization spilling over from the neighboring bohemian enclave of Silver Lake. Some saw the arrival of hipsters on their fixed-gear bikes, wearing tight jeans, and sporting shabby-chic haircuts as a threat to existing low rents. Others saw the presence of this new class of resident as a sign that the neighborhood was becoming safer after decades of gang violence and police brutality. Some people worried that the community redevelopment project in East Hollywood would spread to Echo Park and ruin the neighborhood’s traditional, and sometimes counter-cultural, Chicano character. Others saw in redevelopment increased economic opportunity and social progress. Despite the different perspectives of large-scale neighborhood restructuring and the desired fate of Echo Park, it was the spray-painted chickens that more than anything else seemed to capture the community’s collective consciousness.

Colorfully painted chickens began appearing on neglected walls and the sides of boutiques alike in about 2001. These spray painted caricatures quickly became a symbol for Echo Park. They were both a source of anger and a point of pride depending on which side of the gentrification debate one stood. The person painting them was unknown to the general public, including law enforcement and city officials—that is, until the chickens appeared on the Sunset Boulevard retainer walls in 2004 as part of a larger and seemingly sanctioned mural project by Eye One and Cache.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ “Cache,” pronounced “Catch-Ay” comes from the Spanish for “stylish.”



Figure 6.1. Chicken character on a section of the Sunset wall in Echo Park, by Cache, 2004.

Although Cache, a long-time graffiti writer in the area, was signing the illegal murals, most people saw the so-called cryptic scribbles and tags next to the colorful chickens as independently produced and stylistically distinct. But those of us in the graffiti community knew that Cache was painting these chickens, but the reasons—other than the typical motivations for doing graffiti such as fame and adventure—were unclear. Likewise, when Cache collaborated with Eye One on the Sunset walls, we knew they were both members of the local art scene and graffiti community, but the circumstances concerning the mural's production and legal status were ambiguous. It was not until I sat down with Eye One and Cache for a formal interview that I was able to situate their mural within the larger debates over graffiti, post-graffiti, identity politics, and gentrification. The general public was right—the chickens, the mural, and graffiti in general were part of the gentrification process, but not in the way most people thought.

By 2005, with the growing popularity of his chicken characters among community members and the local media, Cache found himself in the middle of a debate that implicated his chickens for contributing to largely unwanted gentrification. Among

those who were fighting the negative effects of neighborhood change was a misconception that not only were these chicken characters replacing indigenist and Chicano murals such as De La Loza's *Inner City Kickn' It*, thereby erasing the community's ethnic identity—but that they were being painted by a new artist living in Echo Park who was abetting gentrification with his “hipster art” (personal interviews, Echo Park resident, 2006). The misconception was based on the belief that the style, content, and placement of Cache's murals signaled the “arrival” of new urban sub-cultures, new forms of cultural expression, and the incipient stages of gentrification. But as Cache—a Guatemalan immigrant and long-time resident of Echo Park—argued, “my murals are a message to those hipsters that we are already here. We live here and have families, this is our art, and we control the walls” (personal interview, 2009).

Gentrification

Coined by Ruth Glass in 1964, the term gentrification was used to describe a “new and distinct process of urban change” whereby members of the “middle-class gentry” were invading the lower-class quarters of London. Gentrification is now typically understood as an economic process by which members of the middle class move into an economically depressed neighborhood and thereby initiate and/or influence socio-economic and structural changes. Such changes result in the eventual displacement of existing lower-class residents. This displacement is the result of increased rents caused by greater demand for housing stock by those who are able to pay more, and on whose behalf property owners and local government are willing to invest more in infrastructural improvements that raise property values and increase local property taxes, thereby spurring a further increase in rents.

But in taking a longer view of the gentrification process, investment strategies are, first, dependent on years of systematic divestment of capital from neighborhoods by property owners and local governments. Divestment renders communities derelict, therefore creating a vacuum into which capital can later enter, allowing developers and “urban pioneers” to maximize returns on their investments (Jakle and Wilson, 1992). Some social scientists view this system of profit extraction as inextricably built into the

capitalist system of private property ownership (Harvey, 2001). When not viewed through an economic lens, social scientists still understand gentrification as part of the “organic” life-cycle of cities and neighborhoods, contingent upon a system of urban renewal and redevelopment.

Sharon Zukin (1982) focuses on the artists who, through their need for expansive work/live space, re-use manufacturing sites in New York’s SoHo district as artist lofts, thereby transforming an industrial district into a high-rent artist enclave. She argues that in the case of loft development, “the real victims of gentrification... are not residents at all,” but are actually “displaced small manufacturers, distributors, jobbers, and wholesale and retail sales operations” (5). In this scenario gentrification is first and foremost “committed” by practicing artists against the commercial sector.

Taking a decidedly Marxist perspective, Neil Smith (1996) sees gentrification in terms of class conflict. For Smith gentrification is a form of conscious, even vengeful, direct action taken by members of the middle- to upper-classes against the lower-classes and people of color. While he shows the vast variation between gentrifying groups—progressive “proto-yuppies” in the U.S., fiscally conservative and socially conscious “trendies” in Australia, and “trendy-lefties” who span the political spectrum in England—they each contribute to the making of the “revanchist” city. According to this view, gentrification is built in to the logic of capitalist consumption, profit extraction, racism, and class warfare.

For David Ley (1996, 2003), however, gentrification stands in for a complex and diverse series of urban movements and migrations, not all of which entail displacement. Disdain for suburban life, changing political affiliations, and novel consumption patterns have resulted in the creation of a new urban middle class and a “return to the city” movement. The new urban middle class looks to inner city areas as spaces of emancipation, tolerance, creativity, and as sites of contestation against “hierarchical lines of authority” (Ley, 2003). Gentrification, in Ley’s view, is therefore the social and spatial manifestation of a new, politically progressive, socially inclusive, culturally sophisticated, urban middle class. This approach focuses on human agency over

structural determinants of socio-spatial change, and highlights neighborhoods as sites of production rather than places of “vengeful” consumption.

Still other scholars have theorized that classical forms of gentrification have mutated, arguing that the process now must be understood in the context of the creative city, the emancipatory city, the global(ized) city, and the neo-liberal(ized) city (Freeman, 2006; Lees, Slater, Wyly, 2008). Like the diversity of approaches to understanding gentrification in the academic literature, there is no consensus among residents regarding who is really a gentrifier, where gentrification actually takes place, what are the pros and cons of gentrification, or how to distinguish it from related processes such as revitalization (Freeman, 2006). Yuppies, venture capitalists, urban pioneers, hipsters, artists, gay men, students, young families, returning suburbanites, members of the avant-garde, developers, real estate agents, and neo-liberals have all fallen into the category of “gentrifier,” just as derelict neighborhoods, ethnic enclaves, depressed inner cities, immigrant communities, defunct industrial zones, historical districts, and edgy parts of town are all seen as ripe for gentrification.

Given the history and particularities of the Echo Park neighborhood—and regardless of whether or not “gentrification” is the named outcome—I see neighborhood change as a process that is dependant on various manifestations and expressions of cultural capital. Combining Dick Hebdige’s (1979) discussion of style, and Pierre Bourdieu’s (1993) notion of non-economic forms of capital, I understand cultural capital as consisting of distinguishing characteristics and socially designated practices, objects, styles, and aesthetics that demand recognition and elicit valorization. In Echo Park cultural capital is visually manifested by artists, hipsters, and bohemians as the signs, symbols, tastes, activities, and new sets of values that indicate and initiate socio-spatial change at the scale of the neighborhood.

As David Harvey (2012, 90) contends in his discussion of gentrification and “monopoly rent,” “cultural producers themselves [are] usually more interested in affairs of aesthetics,” however even when artists, hipsters, and bohemians have little interest in, or have access to, economic capital, they possess high amounts of cultural capital. It is their cultural capital that distinguishes them as members of the dominant social classes

(Bourdieu, 1993). Theories of gentrification state that members of the dominant class disproportionately have their needs and desires responded to by law enforcement, government officials, and planners, in addition to being able to elicit favorable responses from the market, real estate agents, and developers. But in his book *There Goes the Hood: Views of gentrification from the ground up* (2006), Lance Freeman discusses what some see as “the conspiratorial tone of the narratives” of gentrification and what some interpret as a “far-fetched equation that white people = better services” (115). Citing the literature, Freeman (2006, 115) writes:

skeptics would probably concede the numerous empirical studies of neighborhood conditions strongly suggest that the proportion of whites in a neighborhood is positively correlated with the level and quality of amenities and services (Helling and Sawicki 2003; Logan and Alba 1993; Logan et al. 1996; Massey, Condran, and Denton 1987). But the skeptics would also point to institutional inequalities and the cumulative effect of individual decisions rather than an active choice to deprive black neighborhoods. Moreover, empirical studies that have attempted to document disparities between neighborhoods in levels of municipal services have found mixed results. Some studies have found that low-income minority neighborhoods receive lower levels of service, but other studies have found no such pattern (Sanchez 1998).

As Freeman argues, the privileged position of some neighborhoods does indeed allow its residents to take full advantage of the economic opportunities otherwise not afforded to most people living in areas of economic, educational, and infrastructural neglect.

The privileges afforded to up-and-coming neighborhoods pose a conundrum for artists, hipsters, and bohemians in that these groups receive increased police protection, bike lanes,¹⁰² street lighting, and trash removal, but may also unwittingly inspire, for

¹⁰² Because of their characteristic shabby-chic attire, close-knit social circle, death-defying methods of riding, and radical leftist politics, the bike scene has been read by some as an elitist phenomenon. Part of this perception results from how these radical elites, as Bourdieu (1993) puts it, possess a social distinction that affords them political

example, the removal of aesthetically desirable graffiti, offbeat housing stock, and romanticized existing ethnic communities. Furthermore, the very existence and accompanying aesthetic of these incoming residents attracts attention from corporate institutions and developers that seek to capitalize on and ultimately undo the very “alternative” neighborhood character they find so attractive in the first place (Ley, 2003). Thus one can argue that regardless of their intentions, and given the ways in which cultural capital gets translated into economic capital, artists, hipsters, and bohemians can rightly be seen as culpable agents in the gentrification process.

Consequently, the process by which cultural capital—in the form of visual indicators of taste and distinction—becomes economic capital—in the form of increasing rents and land values—is often attributed to those who inspire gentrification instead of those who actually orchestrate it. But given the complexity of how cultural capital works, it is difficult to hold artists, hipsters, and bohemians culpable for what is in reality a process of urban (re)development perpetrated by those who hold and actively wield the power to make economic and legal decisions that affect the fate of neighborhoods. As Ley (2003, 2541) puts it, gentrification is “scarcely the ‘fault’ of the cultural producer. So, too, to blame artists for the gentrification that so often follows their residency in a district is a misplaced charge.”

Like the changes that took place in the Melrose district during the 1980s—the neighborhood moving from off-center destination for new wavers and punk rockers, to a trendy high-priced shopping area popular with international tourists—Echo Park also became popular for graffiti writers interested in having their tags, pieces, and graffiti-murals seen by a wide audience. Whereas graffiti-murals in the Melrose area were produced on private businesses along public alleys by members of the CBS crew, Echo

clout. The political clout possessed by these incoming residents on fixed-gear bikes was manifested in the new bike lanes painted along Sunset Boulevard through Echo Park in 2002 at the behest of bike enthusiast and Councilmember Eric Garcetti. But while the lane paint was still drying, Garcetti relocated his local field office to East Hollywood to make way for a modern furniture store selling “real Indian bus benches” for several thousand dollars each (personal interview, Steve Mendez, 2008). The conflation of bikes and “ethnic” bus benches became part of the gentrification debate.

Park had more available public wall space and a greater diversity of writers moving through the area. As sanctioned graffiti became part of the mainstream “hip” aesthetic along Melrose, those writers, taggers, and street artists still looking for edgy neighborhoods in which to produce their work came to Echo Park.

Graffiti-murals in Echo Park.

In 2001, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ Book Store and Art Collective hosted Banksy’s first L.A. show. Before becoming internationally well-known and making millions on the sales of his stencils and mock-art canvases, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ sold Banksy’s work next to graffiti supplies and implements, Eye One’s ‘zine LOST, locally made art pieces, and handmade clothing. During Banksy’s first show at 33 $\frac{1}{3}$, the major attraction was not what he hung on the walls or was placed in the display cases, but his billboard alterations and stencils painted around the neighborhood.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Soon after his showing at 33 $\frac{1}{3}$, Banksy’s illegal stencils on the Israeli West Bank Barrier and his uninvited hanging of Peckhem Rock at the British Museum in 2005 attracted the world’s attention and increased the value of his work. After acquiring international fame, even Banksy’s illegal street art became sought after. At the 33 1/3 show, Banksy’s stencils sold for \$25 each. Five years later, Frank Sosa, the store’s founder, sold his *Laugh Now, but One Day I’ll be in Charge* stencil painted on drywall for \$100,000 (personal communication, 2010).



Figure 6.2. Banksy's satirical rat stencils painted in L.A. during the time of his first gallery show, 2001. www.50mmlosangeles.com

But more than the memory of Banksy's activities in the neighborhood, it is Mear's mural on the outer wall of 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ that seems to stick in residents' minds and which I mark as the beginning of a new era of mural making in Echo Park.

Mear One

Mear is perhaps the world's most famous graffiti writer. He made his name as a member of the CBS and WCA (West Coast Artists) crews during the early 1990s as much for his three dimensional letters as for his notoriously outrageous behavior. A self described "wild man," his run-ins with police and daredevil antics in and around the Melrose neighborhood—a famed shopping district and hot spot for graffiti since the 1980s—became as talked about as his realistic characters and innovative lettering styles. He was also known for his larger-than-life illegal spots along L.A. freeways, streets, and the L.A. River (see Figure 1.3).

Mear had been painting graffiti-murals for over 15 years when he was politicized by the September 11 attacks and the U.S. invasion of Iraq. He replaced his spiritual musings, urban themed landscapes, and visual commentaries on social life into critiques

of national and global politics. As he put it, “that bullshit in Washington is out of control. I need to be educating these fools her in L.A.” (personal interview, Mear One, 2003).



Figure 6.3. Mear One with *Thought Control* on canvas, 2006.

Mear’s 2002 overtly political and explicitly didactic graffiti-mural *Who’s World are You Buying Into* depicted President George W. Bush giving a Nazi salute as a skeletal Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld addresses the media from a podium. Above Rumsfeld, Vice President Dick Cheney hikes a bomb with clenched teeth. The background shows a plane crashing to the ground from a fiery sky, military aircraft dropping hypodermic needles onto a village, a tank rolling over human bones, and oil-fields in the distance emitting mushroom clouds of smoke. On the right side of the wall, and amide the chaos, protestors advance toward the politicians. Caught in the middle of the protestors and American politicians stood a woman wearing a head covering. In one hand she holds a baby with its own fist raised, and in the other hand she holds an M-16 rifle. The bottom of the mural depicted a news reporter holding a CBS microphone (a play on the CBS media corporation, but indicating the CBS graffiti crew) in front of a monitor that read the satirical tagline “Lies and Deception at 11.”

I spoke to Mear as he painted the side of 33½. When I asked him how he responded to criticisms from members of his own crew about the apparent hierarchy of his having painted corporate murals and “selling out” in the past he said:

I let Disney pay my bills for doing their shit, and then I fuck shit up. I tell those motherfuckers who we are... we're the motherfucking people. If Mickey-motherfucking-Mouse is what people need to see when they drive around, fine. But I am going to spit some truth at them on the very next block. Bam! These fools who criticize me consume all of this shit—Nike, Disney, Nintendo, but then they call me a hypocrite. Fuck them... fuck everyone. (personal communication, 2002)

Then motioning to the traffic on Alvarado and Sunset and to the title of his production he continued:

check this out you motherfuckers driving in your coffins. People are dying for your lifestyle and your government's deception. Yo, what type of world are you buying into? Boycott your lifestyle! (ibid).



Figure 6.4. *What Type of World are You Buying Into?* by Mear One, 2002, painted on 33½ Books and Art Collective at Alvarado and Sunset Blvd. in Echo Park. Photo by Stefano Bloch.



Figure 6.5. *What Type of World are You Buying Into?* detail. Photo by Stefano Bloch

Notwithstanding Mear’s spirited narrative about his mural, *What Type of World are you Buying Into* initially created little controversy or debate in the neighborhood. From the business owners’ perspective, the mural, content aside, was a positive contribution to an already edgy and politically left-of-center neighborhood. While some residents did express concern that the mural would attract “taggers” (personal communication, owner of the Silver Lake Film Academy, 2002), it was seen as generally good for business. To at least one resident with her child waiting for the bus just feet away from the mural, the mural was simply “*bonita y con muchas colores*”¹⁰⁴ (personal communication, anonymous resident, 2003).

Furthermore, it appears Mear’s mural was welcomed by some local residents for what it was not—it was not “*graffiti por los clickas y gangas*”¹⁰⁵ (personal communication, anonymous resident, 2003). While residents may not always be able to distinguish between gang graffiti and street art—let alone between gang writing and

¹⁰⁴ “Beautiful and with many colors.”

¹⁰⁵ “Graffiti by/for gang members.”

graffiti—most of my respondents on the street welcomed any wall art or mural that covered “ugly” gang writing. Many of my respondents were far more concerned with the graffiti-mural’s ability to cover gang writing than with the mural’s effect on local commerce, its reflection of revitalization, or its expression of cultural capital.

In 2004 Mear collaborated with famed street artists Shepard Fairey—creator of the Barack Obama “Hope” poster—and Robbie Conal on an anti-Bush/anti-war sticker campaign entitled “Be the Revolution.” The dominant theme of the art campaign, like the expressed theme of his illegal mural production, was what he called an attack on “straight-out American Bullshit” (personal interview, Mear One, 2004).



Figure 6.6. Robbie Conal’s *Read My Apocalips*, Shepard Fairey’s *Hug Bombs and Drop Babies*, and Mear One’s *Let’s Play Armageddon*, “Be The Revolution” anti-Bush/anti-war campaign, 2004.

Despite the popularity of the campaign and the legitimacy he was receiving, he returned to local neighborhood walls to produce his *Third Eye Woman* (figure 6.8). The western-most portion of the Sunet Walls on which he painted his newest graffiti-mural had been painted by Ernesto De La Loza in 1996 (figure 6.7.). Like the main section of his *Inner City Kickin’ It*, this part of the wall had also been covered with graffiti. Furthermore, this shorter section of retaining walls receives far more water damage, so the parts not covered with graffiti were peeling as result of rain water seeping through

from behind. It was partially the decrepid state of the walls that attracted Cache who would soon turn the Sunset walls into local landmarks of questionable legality.



Figure 6.7. The western-most sections of the Sunset retaining walls as it appeared soon after De La Loza painted it in 1996.



Figure 6.8. “Mear” with *Third Eye Women* on one of the western-most sections of the Sunset retaining walls, 2001.

When Cache started to paint the Sunset walls he incorporated Mear's character into his graffiti-mural. However, being aware that most people identify text with vandalism, he painted over Mear's letters. However, the images he used to cover Mear's letters were far from politically neutral. On his first painted section of the wall, he depicted his chicken characters stopping the wheels of industrial production. Soon after he started, Eye One joined him, adding Zapatista characters holding wrenches and raising their fists.



Figure 6.9. Cache painting his first section of the Sunset walls, 2004. Courtesy of Eye One.



Figure 6.10. Mear's character incorporated into Cache and Eye One's graffiti-mural. 2004.
Courtesy Eye One.



Figure 6.11. The only alteration of the mural aside from a few errant tags that appeared sporadically was a black rectangle painted over the character's third eye, presumably by someone upset by the image's religious iconography. Photo by Stefano Bloch, 2006.

Despite Eye One's long resume as an artist, it was Cache who suggested they collaborate on the large-scale mural at the Sunset wall. As Eye put it, "Cache brought me into approaching walls that way. I saw him around enlivening walls that were all jacked up. He pulled me out of waiting for a legal wall to show up, so I appreciate his drive" (personal interview, 2009). Cache, a long-time member of the K4P crew (Kill For Pride), has been known in the L.A. graffiti scene since the early 1990s for his illegal tags and throw-ups. Cache had made it one of his trademarks to write on, or "hit," the base, or "stems," of newspaper stands in L.A.'s Northeast neighborhoods of Los Feliz, Silver Lake, Echo Park, Temple Beaudry, and Pico Union just west of Downtown. But after a bicycle accident in 2001 in which he fractured his shoulder, the physical demands of bombing were too great. He turned to producing no-less-illegal, though relatively less physically demanding, mural productions.

Cache began painting his now iconic chicken characters on long-neglected walls around the Echo Park neighborhood in about 2003. He depicted his large, cartoonish, brightly colored chickens engaging in regular human activities—playing ball, riding bikes, praying, and even spray painting on walls.¹⁰⁶ When the chicken characters began appearing around Echo Park most people did not make a connection between the cute creatures and the Cache tags "scribbled" across infrastructure. Ironically, and evidently unacknowledged by most people, each chicken came with a small, covertly placed, spray-painted "Cache K4P" tag. For many, the thematic work on the wall was far more sophisticated than individual scrawls produced by taggers. One of the reasons for the aesthetic coherence of the chicken characters and their colorful surroundings was a result of Cache deciding to paint with impunity. As Cache expressed it to me in an personal interview (2008), "if you look like you are supposed to be painting a wall, then no one bothers you and you can actually do some beautiful work."

¹⁰⁶ Cache has said that "the chicken thing started as a joke," he says, "but once I started reading and exploring the socioeconomic spiral, I figured there's a way to open people's minds. Carlos Castaneda wrote about *humaneros*—human coops. I realized we're no different than chickens" (quoted in <http://www.mymodernmet.com/profiles/blogs/from-political-to-pop-caches>, last accessed March 2012).

Figure 6.12. Cache's chicken on bike. Photo by Stefano Bloch.

Legality aside, it is the type of imagery that Cache is producing that is indeed the most readily accepted style of graffiti. While Cache is still technically “vandalising” wall space, his work is seen as preferable to the text-based tags that he is believed to be covering. As Halsey and Pederick (2010, 82) point out, “the ‘best’ graffiti, bureaucratically speaking,” is that which functions as its own form of erasure. In their study of graffiti-murals they point out that large-scale graffiti produced with the right balance of imagery to text, when covering a wall with apparent purpose, is seen by bystanders as far more attractive than “graffiti on the go” or what Ferrell and Weide (2010, 56) call the “liquidity” of urban graffiti.

Like many graffiti writers defending themselves against mainstream attacks, Cache has argued that writers tend to move from being simple taggers to sophisticated piecers and even accomplished mainstream muralists. In an interview published in *East Side Living Los Angeles* he says, “graffiti led to a progression from outright vandalism to legitimate art... Seeing [younger] artists go from simple tags to intricate murals is

amazing!” (Alegría, 2009). This use of the evolutionary or single-trajectory metaphor also implies that along with a graffiti writer’s stylistic transformation comes a personal evolution in terms of maturity and talent (see also Snyder, 2009). Therefore, according to this argument, over time taggers go through a typical growth cycle, becoming something more akin to traditional artists who produce acceptable aesthetics and engage in appropriate art-making tactics.

This evolutionary fallacy is what helps legitimize street art and allows people to romanticize legal graffiti art and “hip hop artists,” while simultaneously calling for the criminalization of “taggers” who are perceived as being less artistically inclined and less socially responsible members of the graffiti community. Consequently, the graffiti community is thought of as comprised of two sets of graffiti writers operating independently but simultaneously. However, in reality, “ugly, simple tagging” and “beautiful, intricate street art” is being produced by the very same members of the graffiti community, such as Cache. The very same graffiti writer may be treated as an artist in one moment and as an offender in the next—praised for stimulating cultural capital and community, and demonized for destroying urban economic vitality.

***Los Angeles: untitled* by Cache and Eye One, 2004-2011**

“Most of my murals are illegal. But what is defacing public property anyway? Come on, most of these walls are painted like shit. Look at the colors that they use to get rid of graffiti, they’re like prisons of the mind. Who wants to live in a gray and beige world?”

— graffiti-muralist Cache, 2009.

Los Angeles: untitled runs along a quarter-mile stretch of the Sunset retaining walls, just east of Mear’s *Third Eye Women* painted in 2004. This main section depicts cartoonish chickens riding bicycles and small masked Zapatista characters raising their fists in playful defiance. Various incarnations of the central mural have depicted L.A.’s skyline, the Hollywood Sign, and cat characters painted by recent collaborator Atlas from the CBS (City Bomb Squad) graffiti crew. Visually striking, they are also in the words of Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) Murals Manager Pat Gomez, “technically vandalism” (personal interview, 2009). However, since no one has complained about the murals to Gomez’s office or to the Department of Building and Safety that oversees the public walls on which they are painted, no action has been taken to paint over the murals or criminalize the artists who painted them.

Given their large size and placement on a busy stretch of Sunset Boulevard, these unsanctioned “graffiti-murals” appear to be legally produced. And because they are a welcomed alternative to the tagging that had previously covered the walls, they have been tacitly tolerated, if not outright welcomed, by law enforcement, local business owners, and, most importantly for Cache, “*Señoras* with their kids who have to walk by these walls everyday.”



Figure 6.13. Detail, Zapatista character, “Los Angeles: untitled,” 2011
Photo by Christian Guzman.

Unlike previous muralists who legally painted the Sunset walls, Cache and Eye One are able to actively call the laws regarding wall aesthetics into question with the support of a paradoxical alliance of local interest groups. This is an alliance of strange bedfellows—including existing residents, hipsters, gentrifiers, law enforcement, business owners, local governmental agencies, and graffiti writers—each member seeing something different in the murals, even disparate, to accept. As Pat Gomez’s statement suggests, the laws regarding “vandalism” have not changed, but the neighborhood has, along with what type of murals its residents and stakeholders see as suitable.



Figure 6.14. “Throw ups” by graffiti writers Otis and New York natives Rime and MQ among others on De La Loza’s “Inner City Kickin’ It” in 2001. De La Loza’s Gerber Baby image is still visible to the right of wheat-pasted street art posters of artist Frida Kahlo. Photo by Stefano Bloch

By 2004, after several years of graffiti and street art accumulating on the surface of the Sunset walls and local freeways, Echo Park became a full-fledged destination in the so-called new economy, with the neighborhood helping L.A. to rank high on Richard Florida’s (2002, 2005) bohemian index.¹⁰⁷ The graffiti covering the Sunset walls was produced by some of the most prolific writers who were themselves attracted to the neighborhood’s burgeoning bohemian amenities and existing cultural capital. As Ferrell and Weide (2010, 53) point out, based on their reading of Snyder (2009), “in the same way that Soho’s restaurants, bars and high-end retail shops attract New Yorkers and tourists, they attract writers intent on having their graffiti seen by this population.

¹⁰⁷ According to Florida (2005, 59), the bohemian index is a “location quotient that measures the percentage of bohemians in a region compared to the national population of bohemians divided by the percent of population in a region compared to the total national population.”

Similarly, “getting up” in Echo Park assured increased exposure and recognition from local street artists and exhibitors, hip crowds, and people with attractive social capital and clout.

However, despite the social benefits of revitalization afforded to attention-seeking graffiti writers, as Echo Park underwent the initial stages of gentrification, many community members pleaded with the small Echo Park Chamber of Commerce and Councilmember Eric Garcetti—founder of Uniting Neighborhoods to Abolish Graffiti (UNTAG)—to clean up the neighborhood, the huge Sunset walls in particular. But because De La Loza’s buried mural was still protected under VARA/CAPA, and because there was no funding to pay him to restore it, the Sunset walls could not legally be touched. But neither De La Loza nor the walls’ legal veneer stopped Cache and Eye One from producing their graffiti-mural. Literally overnight the crowded wall was covered with a series of Cache’s trademark colorful chickens.¹⁰⁸

Soon after the chickens arrived, Eye One’s Zapatistas showed up next to a “Los Angeles” written in large graffiti-style lettering. These graffiti writers-cum-artists said they were at once trying to “show the incoming hipsters who we are already living in this neighborhood,” as well as show “the old guard [traditional Chicano muralists such as De La Loza] that we don’t need no fucking money or permission to paint on walls in our community, we just do it” (personal interview, Cache, 2009).

¹⁰⁸ With his characters Cache is alluding to the historical significance of chickens in Los Angeles. What were once seen as a nuisance and backyard pet for immigrant and Chicano families are now being embraced by hipsters as part of the urban homestead movement. Also, “chicken corner”—an intersection in Echo Park near Dodger Stadium where chickens once roamed free and a mural was painted in their honor—has been one of the epicenters of contention between established residents and perceived gentrifiers. In future research I plan to explore the trends in the keeping of live chickens and painting of chicken iconography in Echo Park.

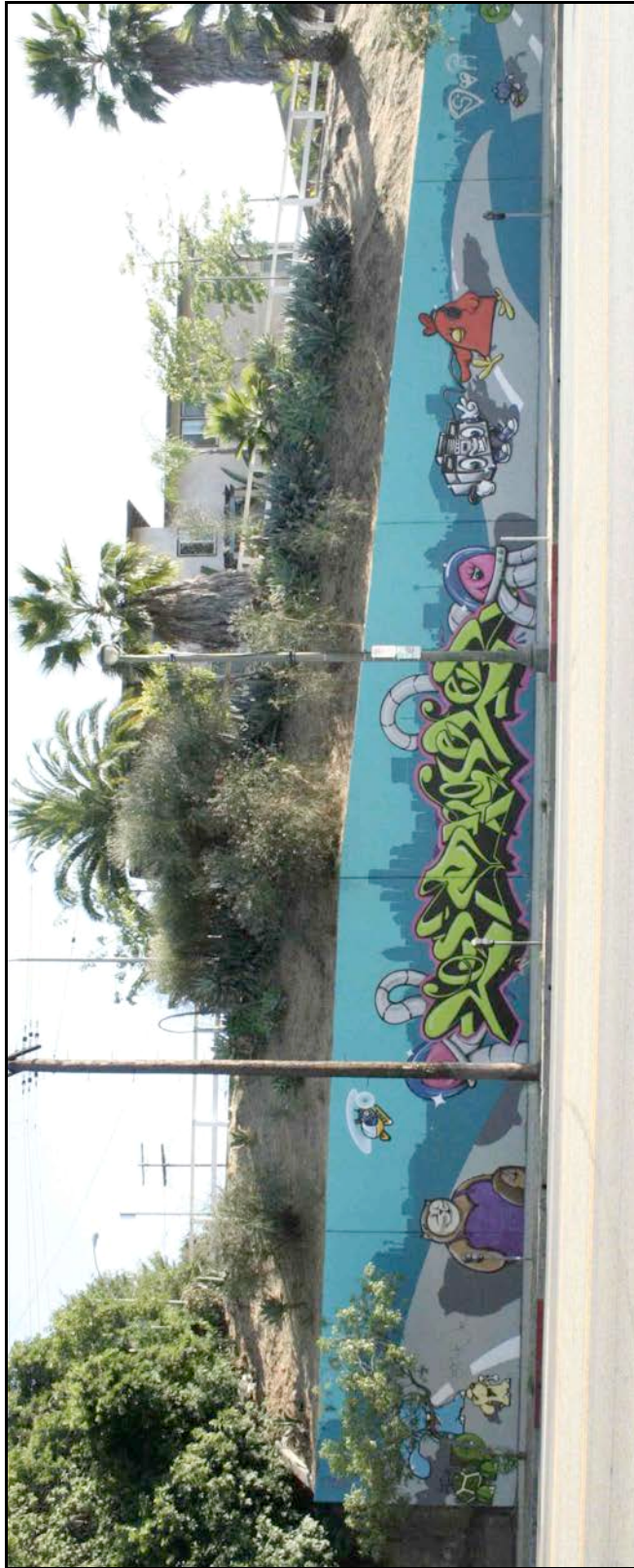


Figure 6.15. Main section, *Los Angeles: untitled*. Photo by Christian Guzman, 2011.

With a disregard for the draconian laws making the production of unsanctioned public art a felony offense, the Sunset walls and the neighborhood, in the words of local shop owner Steve Melendrez, “have never looked better” (personal interview, 2008). “The funny part is,” Eye One recently said as he touched up the black boarder around the wall’s original WPA. plaque, “we could get arrested for this when it comes down to it. Don’t forget writers and artists are actually getting incarcerated for trying to express themselves even when it is fundamentally good for the neighborhood” (personal interview, 2011).



Figure 6.16. Eye One illegally touching up his mural in 2011.
Photo by Stefano Bloch

Despite a consideration for what is best for the neighborhood and “fundamentally good for the community”—a concern reminiscent of the motivations for producing critical and Chicano community murals—Cache and Eye One continue to adhere to many of the tenets of the graffiti community in terms of social practice. While preservation of

the original WPA plaque is a priority for Eye One—the plaque being a representation of the type of emblematic infrastructure that Hermer and Hunt (1996) consider “official graffiti of the everyday”—his own name is included on the wall alongside the images painted in his mural. Unlike the producers of Chicano murals, personalization of public space remains a priority for graffiti-muralists.



Figure 6.17. The WPA plaque, now covered in pink paint, alongside Cache, Eye One, and recent collaborator Skypager’s name stenciled onto one section of the Sunset Boulevard retaining wall. Photo by Stefano Bloch, 2011.

Eye One’s concern for the plaque challenges the popular notion that graffiti writers seek to destroy private and public property with their personalized inscriptions and monikers. Rather, graffiti writers actually possess an uncanny interest in the preservation of public space and meaningful infrastructure. Part of this interest in preserving and personalizing public space is an overlapping respect for urban landmarks and other meaningful places on which to write—what graffiti writers call “spots” (Bloch, 2000, 2005; Ferrell and Weide, 2010). In the case of their names stenciled adjacent to the

WPA plaque, Cache, Eye One, and recent collaborator Skypager are simply laying claim to the walls while acknowledging those who have come and laid claim before them.

In addition to his concern for the upkeep of the WPA plaque for posterity, Eye One has also expressed concern for the wall in general (personal interview, 2011). After higher-than-normal rainfall totals in 2005 and 2010-2011,¹⁰⁹ the sandstone hills once again began to crumble and slide down toward Sunset Boulevard. Part of Eye One's concern was that the impassible mess left behind after the slide would draw the attention of the city who would white-wash the illegal murals after making hillside repairs. In fact, there has been a recent call by city engineers and community planners to rock bolt and "shotcrete" the cliff together—the application of a textured surface-coating that bonds hillsides, a technique often used in tunnels and on many newer freeway embankments. As local historian Rory Mitchell (2011) put it, this would eliminate the "oppressive nature of a 30-foot-high cement retaining wall looming over Sunset Boulevard... [and] preserve the natural beauty of the sandstone cliffs, while preventing a house from sliding down into the westbound lanes of Sunset Boulevard during rush hour." To date, however, aside from general clean-up, no repairs have been made to the fragile hillside. Such weather events and evidence of nature's will illustrate the natural environment's continued resistance against L.A.'s attempted, but never permanent, triumph over nature.

¹⁰⁹ Rainfall totals in 2005 were measured at almost 40 inches—the highest total since 1884. In 2005 overall rainfall totals were average—measuring in at 20 inches—but arrived in a record breaking 7-day burst between December and January (<http://www.climatestations.com/los-angeles/>, last accessed February 2012).



Figure 6.18. A landslide adjacent to one section of the Sunset retaining wall (a portion of *Los Angeles: untitled* is visible at left), 2011. Notice also the presence of graffiti tags on the exposed sandstone hillside. Photo by Stefano Bloch.

Figure 6.19. As part of maintaining their mural—painting over sporadic tags, touching-up sections of peeling paint—Eye One and Cache also provide rudimentary landscaping and cleaning around the walls, as well as maintenance of the growing foliage. Here vines encroach upon one of Eye One’s Zapatista characters, 2011. Photo by Stefano Bloch.

Tolerance for Cache and Eye One’s series of graffiti-murals is indicative of people’s changing perceptions of what constitutes appropriate wall aesthetics. Unsanctioned art placed on public infrastructure has always been illegal in L.A., but it is the social and cultural context that determines what gets criminalized and what gets romanticized, and by whom. In Echo Park, a neighborhood with a long history of conflict over the legal right to occupy and aestheticize public space, Cache and Eye One are able to appeal to multiple publics simultaneously with an art form and spatial practice that merges the transgressive with the traditional.

Cache and Eye One’s graffiti-murals are therefore forcing people to reconsider how the dichotomies of legal/illegal, artistic/destructive, collective/personal, and cultural/profitable come to bear on what should be considered, to use Tim Cresswell’s (1998) phraseology, “in or out of place.” Cache and Eye One, like other graffiti-muralists and street artists, are thereby actively determining the appearance of public space regardless of wavering public sentiment, legal code, or top-down prescriptions for acceptable aesthetic production. While traditional graffiti writers are still being criminalized for their work, greater tolerance for alternative aesthetics and practices may

be the result of a general desire among residents, business owners, local government, and other interest groups for increased social and cultural capital at the scale of the neighborhood. Perhaps it is this sort of counterintuitive coalition building between strange bedfellows that it takes to help preserve our collective right to the city.



Figure 6.20. A bike rider on Sunset Boulevard passes Cache's chickens and backgrounds painted by graffiti-muralist and recent collaborator Kofie. Photo by Stefano Bloch

Conclusion

As I have attempted to show in this dissertation, graffiti-murals represent, in appearance and practice, a conflation of traditional community-oriented muralism and illegally produced and personalized street writing. However, given the complexity of contemporary neighborhood dynamics, graffiti-murals manage to appeal to multiple publics and interest groups simultaneously, while challenging the traditional dualisms between what is perceived as an acceptable or unacceptable use of public space. Graffiti-muralists achieve such a widespread acceptance of their work by, paradoxically, operating illegally, thereby refusing to rely on private sponsorship or funding

bureaucracies, or subscribe to the regulations and directives of civic and public arts organizations. As such, graffiti-murals are a perfect backdrop and producer of space in the contemporary urban environment, which exhibits these same characteristics of simultaneously bound and unbound place-making.

With the use of in-depth and extended fieldwork among members of the graffiti community I have shown how graffiti-muralists are motivated more by fame and personal expression than identity politics and a monolithic sense of community. Therefore, contemporary graffiti-muralists are able to move beyond the mural as singularly a medium of representation that appeals directly to the culturally and ideologically entrenched. I therefore provide a broader understanding of graffiti-murals *in situ* as one way to gain a better understanding of the complex socio-political configurations of the neighborhoods in which we work and live.

Secondary to this analysis of graffiti-murals, I provided case studies on mural productions on the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls in terms of their particular historical social and spatial context. As part of this historical analysis I presented a reading and ethnographic study of the changing face of wall space as it occurred over the course of 71 years. I treat the Sunset walls—and the murals and graffiti that have appeared on them—as a centerpiece around which discussions of past and present neighborhood dynamics can take place. I argue that to gain a better understanding of neighborhood dynamics, scholars must also investigate and learn how to read a mural not just in terms of its aesthetic content, but in terms of how it was produced and by whom, and how it was, and is, received by various interest groups.

In making the case that the appearance of wall space is an important aspect of the study of neighborhoods, I provided literature reviews of the applicable academic writings on contemporary neighborhood change, data from extended fieldwork with members of the mural and graffiti communities in the Echo Park and Silver Lake neighborhoods, and a discussion about the transformation of graffiti in Los Angeles.

My goal in writing this dissertation is to encourage scholars, students, policy makers, and community members to consider the ways in which multiple and overlapping interest groups contribute to and interpret the appearance of wall space in

always-changing neighborhoods. Such a consideration for the changes in vernacular aesthetics and for how multiple publics conceive, perceive, and enliven the appearance of public space are paramount to increasing inclusivity and democracy at the scale of the neighborhood. With this research I also hope to contribute to the academic literature on historical urban geography, as well as inform new ways of thinking about muralism, graffiti, graffiti-murals, and contemporary qualitative research methods.

Coda

Aside from issues related to VARA and the unofficial acceptance of Eye One and Cache's *Los Angeles: untitled*, one of the reasons the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls may not have received a new mural upon the death of De La Loza's *Inner City Kickin' It* is the fact that funding for the production of new murals on public property has been all but officially suspended since the late 1990s. While the DCA can still rely on various art funds and grants in their effort to manage the preservation and painting of walls already under their purview, they have been unable to support the production of new murals on virgin walls.

In another matter, the production of murals on private property has been illegal since 2002 as part of the city's ban on the installation of new signage aimed at stopping the proliferation of LCD and LED super-graphic billboards. This, however, may soon change.

While concluding this dissertation, Los Angeles' moratorium on the production of new murals on private property was on uncertain legal ground. In 2009 the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the City of Los Angeles, saying that the ban on the construction and/or implementation of any new outdoor advertising was not a limitation of a sign company's right to free speech (Zahniser and Wilson, 2009). However, the struggle to distinguish between what is a sign—which is produced to generate profit and is sanctioned under the sign ordinance—and what is a “fine art mural”—which is matter of “artist expression” and is protected under the 1st Amendment—continues. Currently the city appears to be ready to allow for the production of “original works of art” on private property pending oversight by the DCA

and final approval by the Arts Commission (Winton, 2011; Winton, 2012).

In protest of the mural moratorium, Saber, a graffiti writer and artist who has been one of the most outspoken critics of the policy, took his protest to the sky. He, with backing from Shepard Fairey, hired skywriting monoplanes to express his message, as well as sign his name. For almost an hour on September 19, 2011, the planes produced white streaks across the sky high above City Hall and the Echo Park/Silver Lake neighborhoods spelling out the names of members of the MSK graffiti crew, the word “Obey,” and the statements “Art is Not Crime,” and “End Mural Moratorium.” As muralist Judith Baca commented, “[Saber’s] graffiti made a wonderful statement: They can’t write on walls. The only place to express themselves is the sky” (quoted in Cella and Wilson, 2011).



Figure 6.21. “End Mural Moratorium,” 2011. Photo by Stefano Bloch.

Chapter 7. Summary of Findings

Chapter 1

In this historical geography of the changing appearance of wall space in and around the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, I have shown how the proliferation of graffiti-murals indicates the rise of a new form of practice in the production of urban aesthetics. I relied on data gathered through empirical and qualitative research—specifically, ethnographic methods that include archival image analysis, original photography, personal and participant observation, and extensive formal and open-ended interviews with members of the graffiti and mural communities. Throughout this dissertation I discussed the production and destruction of murals and graffiti-murals in the context of over 70 years of socio-spatial change in and around Echo Park. I relied on the writings of geographers, sociologists, urban theorists, and art theorists who understand public art and urban aesthetics as necessarily political, participatory, and place-based.

Chapter 2

In this dissertation I defined graffiti as the systematically produced and stylized markings of monikers, images, and symbols on infrastructure by self-acknowledged members of the graffiti community with implements such as markers and spray paint. Graffiti adheres to the conventions for style, form, and placement established by the socially cohesive, though geographically dispersed, graffiti community.

Graffiti in its multiple forms has become a device used to help attract, not repel, a new class of residents, shoppers, and investors. Furthermore, as business owners and various neighborhood boosters attempt to co-opt the graffiti aesthetic at one end, law enforcement, policy makers, and some residents rely on the rhetoric and implementation of quality-of-life policing that threatens the very same aesthetic that may be needed to distinguish and promote place at the other end. It is within these disparate visions of the city that graffiti writers operate and wherein lies the graffiti paradox whereby graffiti writers navigate co-optation and romanticization as well as criminalization.

Chapter 3

In this dissertation I defined graffiti-murals as 1. wall murals produced by self-described, acknowledged, and active members of the graffiti community, 2. wall murals painted in public view and on public infrastructure with, primarily, the use of aerosol spray paint, and 3. wall murals that are visually thematic in that they cover the entire surface of a wall with a balance of letters, characters, and/or images painted against fully painted backgrounds. I also negatively define graffiti-muralists against self-described traditional, critical, and Chicano muralists in that 1. graffiti-muralists are often motivated to produce their works for the sake of fame and personal expression above their concerns for community and aesthetics, 2. graffiti-muralists are driven by a do-it-yourself ethic as opposed to traditional, Chicano, and critical muralists who rely on public and/or private funding and/or support for legal and logistical reasons.

I also argue that the physical destruction of the Olympic Art Festival freeway murals beginning in the mid-1990s signaled the beginning of the end of the Chicano mural tradition as it once existed—that is, as the primary visual representation of a politically-charged and cohesive community bound to barrio space.

Chapter 4

Many of the public works and redevelopment projects that took place in and around the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles over the past 75 years were initiated to provide more driving room, sellable plots of land, and parking spaces to mostly white middle-class commuters and incoming wealthy speculators. Many of the abstract and utilitarian spaces produced during this time—including the newly concretized Arroyo Seco, L.A. River bed, and sandstone hillsides along Sunset Boulevard—have since been reinterpreted and reused by sub-groups such as gang members, graffiti writers, and muralists as platforms on which to express the discontents of community upheaval that accompanies restructuring.

Chapter 5

Despite his mural's politically radical sub-text and display of leftist Chicano identity and indigenist themes, Ernesto De La Loza was able to appease neighborhood boosters, city government, funders, as well as ostensibly secure legal protection for his mural under VARA. However, he was not able to appease members of the graffiti community who in reality have direct control over the appearance of wall space regardless of a mural's legal, political, or mainstream acceptance. The continued writing of graffiti on his *Inner City Kickin' It* may also have surprised those who looked to the mural as a form of graffiti deterrence.

As my research shows, given Eye One and Cache's articulated sense of community and identity, combined with the widespread acceptance of their graffiti-mural on the Sunset Boulevard retaining walls, *Los Angeles: untitled* marks a discerning challenge to the cultural authority of the critical Chicano mural tradition, and evidence of the rise of the graffiti-mural movement in Los Angeles.

In this chapter I also argued that given the global popularity of street art and the role graffiti-murals play in establishing neighborhood identity, one can argue that graffiti-murals can in fact achieve recognized stature under the Visual Artists Right Act (VARA) regardless of their legal status.

Chapter 6

Contrary to the Broken Windows theory, an increase in the production of illicit graffiti-murals may indicate generally desirable neighborhood activity, particularly in neighborhoods undergoing revitalization. Given the importance placed on cultural capital in distinguishing urban neighborhoods as "hip," the presence of graffiti—like other forms of "edgy" public art—may indicate the presence of a creative, vital, and diverse community. As my research shows, such is the case in Echo Park—a neighborhood with a long history of conflict over the right to occupy and aestheticize public space and in which Cache and Eye One's illegally produced graffiti-murals force people to reconsider how the dichotomies of legal/illegal, artistic/destructive, collective/personal, and cultural/profitable come to bear on what should be considered in or out of place. Cache

and Eye One, like other graffiti-muralists and street artists, are thereby able to actively determine the appearance of public space regardless of wavering public sentiment, legal code, or top-down prescriptions for acceptable aesthetic production.

While traditional graffiti writers are still being criminalized for their work, greater tolerance for alternative aesthetics and practices may be the result of a general desire among residents, business owners, local government, and other interest groups for increased social and cultural capital at the scale of the neighborhood. It is this sort of counterintuitive coalition building between strange bedfellows that it takes to help preserve our collective right to the city.

Bibliography

Selected personal interviews with graffiti writers

Anger, 2006-2012
Atlas, 2009-2011
Axis, 2006-2012
Cache, 2006-2012
CBS Crew, 2003-2012
Duce, 2011-2012
Eye One 2006-2012
Ism 2003-2012
Kofie, 2009-2012
KRS Crew, 2003-2012
Man One 2009
Mear One 2003-2012
Oiler 2009-2010
Panic 2007
Swan, 2009
Trixster 2009
TUGK Crew, 2003-2012
Unit 2009
Wisk 2007-2012
Yem 2011-2012

Selected personal interviews with Wisk One and Relax

125, 2007
Bruin, 2009
Chaka, 2009
Colt .45, 2008
Dove, 2007
Eklips, 2007
Else, 2008
Eskape, 2007
Feevo, 2006
Haze, 2007
Hex, 2010
Nuke, 2008
Omega, 2009
Pranks, 2011
Skill, 2009
Tempt, 2008
Volt, 2009

- Abu-Lughod, J. (1999). *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's global cities*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Acuña, R.F. (1995). *Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in contemporary Los Angeles*. Verso.
- Adamson, N. and B. Fellowes, (2010). "My Adventures Up & Down the Ladders: Interview with Mear One." *Find Art Magazine*, 10 August.
- Adler, P. and P. Adler. (1987). *Membership Roles in Field Research*. Sage.
- Albin, A. and J. Kamler. (2008). *Written on the City: graffiti messages worldwide*. How Books.
- Alegria, A. (2009). "Political Chickens in Whimsical Worlds." *Eastside Living Los Angeles*, 16 March (<http://ofmananddogs.blogspot.com/2009/03/political-chickens-in-whimsical-worlds.html>, last accessed February 2012).
- Allen, D. (2007). "Fighting Graffiti: an investigation of causes and solutions." A report (NPCR 1252) conducted through the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), University of Minnesota.
- Alva, R. "Wisk" and R. "Relax" Reiling, ed. by S. Bloch. (forthcoming). *The History of Los Angeles Graffiti Art, volume 2, 1989-1994*. A&R Publishing.
- Amador, J. (2000). "El Muralismo ha Muerto: la crítica estadounidense Shifra Goldman." *Proceso*, 66.
- Anderson, T. and E.M. King. (2007). *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (DVD). USA, NBC Universal Home Video.
- Arroyo, J.C. (2010). *Culture in Concrete: art and the re-imagination of the Los Angeles River as civic space*. Masters thesis, Department of City Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Austin, J. (2001). *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York*. Columbia University Press.
- Alvelos, H. (2002). "The Desert of Imagination in the City of Signs: cultural implications of sponsored transgression and branded graffiti." *Cultural Criminology*, 1(5), 193-207.
- Baca, J.F. (2001). "Birth of a Movement: 30 years in the making of a sites of public memory." Working paper, UCLA Cesar Chavez Center of Interdisciplinary Studies. Los Angeles.
- , 2005. "The human story at the intersection of ethics, aesthetics and social justice." *Journal of Moral Education*, 34(2), 153-196.
- Baldassare, M. (1994). *The Los Angeles Riots: lessons for the urban future*. Westview Press.
- Banksy. (2005). *Wall and Piece*. Century Books.
- , (2010). *Exit Through the Gift Shop*. USA and UK. Paranoid Pictures
- Baudrillard, J. (1976). *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Trans. by I. H. Grant. Sage.
- , (1981a). *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. Trans. by C. Levin. Telos.
- , (1981b). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. by S.F. Glaser. University of Michigan Press.
- Becker, H. (1982[2008 ed.]). *Art Worlds*. University of California Press.

- Berman, M. (1983). *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: the experience of modernity*. Penguin.
- Bhimji, F. (2010). "Struggles, Urban Citizenship, and Belonging: the experience of undocumented street vendors and food truck owners in Los Angeles." *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, 39(4), 457-471.
- Blankstein, A., R. Winton, and D. Ng, (2011). "Tagging outside an L.A. street art exhibit fuels debate." *Los Angeles Times*, 20 April.
- Blazak, R. (1995). *The Suburbanization of Hate: an ethnographic study of the skinhead subculture*. Doctoral dissertation, Emory University.
- Bloch, S. (2012a). "Considering the Photography of Leonard Nadel." *Association of Pacific Coast Geographers Yearbook*, 74.
- (2012b). "The Illegal Face of Wall Space: graffiti-murals on the sunset boulevard retaining walls." *Radical History Review*, 113.
- (2005). "City Space." *Adbusters VRENG* (Norway), 4, 25-26.
- (2000). "Civic Spots." Unpublished seminar paper and winner of the Humanities Undergraduate Research Award—Bertha N. Melkonian Prize for top proposal, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA.
- Bloomekatz, I. (2012). "Silver Lake gets an Unusual New Park Space." *Los Angeles Times*, 11 March.
- Blum, W. (2003). *Killing Hope: U.S. military and CIA interventions since World War II*. Common Courage Books.
- Bondi, L. (1993). "Locating Identity Politics." In M. Keith and S. Pile eds. *Place and the Politics of Identity*. Routledge.
- Borden, I. (2001). *Skateboarding, Space and the City: architecture and the body*. Berg.
- Bougdanos, M. (2002). "The Visual Artists Rights Act and Its Application to Graffiti Murals: whose wall is it anyway?" *N.Y.L. Sch. J. Hum. Rts. XVIII*.
- Bourdieu, P. (1980). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press.
- (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Harvard University Press.
- (1993). *The Field of Cultural Production*. Columbia University Press.
- Braudy, L. (2011). *The Hollywood Sign: Fantasy and Reality of an American Icon*. Yale University Press.
- Braun, B. and N. Castree. 2001. *Social Nature: Theory, Practice, Politics*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- (1998). *Remaking Reality: nature at the millennium*. Routledge.
- Brenner, N. and N. Theodore. (2002). *Spaces of Neoliberalism*. Blackwell.
- Briante, S. (2011). "Utopia's Ruins: seeing domesticity and decay in the Aliso Village Housing Project." *The New Centennial Review* 10(1), 127-39.
- Bright, B.J. and L. Bakewell eds. (1995). *Looking High and Low: art and cultural identity*. University of Arizona Press.
- Bryan, B. (1995). *Graffiti Verité*. (DVD) USA
- Burawoy, M. (2002). "The Extended Case Study Method." *Sociological Theory*, 16(1).
- Burns, Ric. (2001). *New York: a Documentary Film*. (DVD). PBS.

- Buttimer, A. and D. Seamon eds. (1980). *The Human Experience of Space and Place*. St. Martin's Press.
- California Art Preservation Act of 1979 (CAPA). California Civil Code §987.
- Carroll, M.P. (1975). "Revitalization Movements and Social Structure: some quantitative tests." *American Sociological Review*, 40(3), 389-401.
- Carter v. Helmsley-Spear, Inc., 852 F. Supp. 228 (SDNY 1994).
- Castleman, C. (1982). *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. MIT Press.
- Cella, T. and S. Wilson. (2011). "Carmen Trutanich's War on Art Murals." *L.A. Weekly*, 13 October, (<http://www.laweekly.com/2011-10-13/news/trutanich-s-war-on-art-murals/>), last accessed March 2012).
- Chalfant, H. and J. Prigoff. (1987). *Spraycan Art*. Thames and Hudson.
- Chandler, R. (1942). *The High Window*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Chastanet, F. and H. Gribble. (2009). *Cholo Writing: Latino gang graffiti in Los Angeles*. Dokument.
- Chávez, E. (2002) "¡Mi Raza Primero!" (My People First!): nationalism, identity, and insurgency in the Chicano movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978. University of California Press.
- Chavez, L. (1991). *Out Of The Barrio: toward a new politics of Hispanic assimilation*. Basic Books.
- Cherbo, J.M., R.A. Stewart, & M.J. Wyszomirski, eds. (1998). *Understanding the Arts and Creative Sector in the United States*. Rutgers University Press.
- Clark, W.A.V. and V. Ledwith. (2005). "Mobility, Housing Stress and Neighborhood Contexts: evidence from Los Angeles." *Working Paper Series*, California Center for Population Research, UCLA.
- Clifford, J. (1983). "On Ethnographic Authority." *Representations*, 2, 118-146.
- Clifford, J. and G. E. Marcus, (1986). *Writing Culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. University of California Press.
- Clough, N.L. (2011). *Constituent Space: re-theorizing the geographies of contestation and control*. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Geography, University of Minnesota.
- Cockroft, E.S. and H. Barnet-Sánchez. (1993). *Signs from the Heart: California Chicano murals*. University of New Mexico Press.
- Cole, C.K. and K. Kobayashi. (1996). *Shades of L.A.: Pictures from Ethnic Family Albums*. New Press.
- Colt .45. (2010). "Our Culture is your Crime." *City*, 14(1-2), 156-157.
- Cooper, M. and H. Chalfant. (1984). *Subway Art*. New York, Owl.
- Conal, R. (1992). *Art Attack: the midnight politics of a guerrilla artist*. Harper Collins.
- (2003). *Arburn*. RDV Books.
- Conrad, D. (1995). "Community Murals as Democratic Art and Education." *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 29(1), 98-102.
- Crang, M. and I. Cook. (1995). *Doing Ethnographies*. Geobooks.
- Cosgrove, D. (1984). *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. University of Wisconsin Press.

- Craw, P.J., L. Leyland Jr., M.G. Bussell, S.J. Munday, & K. Walsh. (2006). "The Mural as Graffiti Deterrence." *Environment and Behavior*, 38(3), 422-434.
- Cresswell, T. (1992). "The Crucial 'Where' of Graffiti: a geographical analysis of reactions to graffiti in New York." *Environment and Planning D: Space and Society* 10, 329-44.
- (1996). *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*. University of Minnesota Press.
- (2003). "Landscape and the Obliteration of Practice." In Anderson, K., M. Domosh, S. Pile, & N. Thrift, eds. *The Handbook of Cultural Geography*. Sage.
- Cronin, A. (2006). "Urban space and entrepreneurial property relations: resistance and the vernacular of outdoor advertising and graffiti." Lancaster University, Department of Sociology on-line papers.
- Cronon, W. (1992). *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. W.W. Norton and Co.
- Cuff, D. (2001). *The Provisional City: Los Angeles stories of architecture and urbanism*. MIT Press.
- Davidoff, P. (1965). "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning." *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 31(4), 331-338.
- Davidson, M. and L. Lees. (2005). "'New-build' Gentrification and London's Riverside Renaissance." *Environment and Planning A*, 37, 1165-1190.
- Davis, M. (1990). *City of Quartz: excavating the future in Los Angeles*. Vintage.
- (1996). "How Eden Lost its Garden: A political history of the Los Angeles landscape." In In Scott, A, J. and E.W. Soja. *The City: Los Angeles and urban theory at the end of the Twentieth Century*. University of California Press.
- (1998). *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the imagination of disaster*. Verso.
- (2000). *Magical Urbanism: Latinos reinvent the US big city*. Verso.
- (2002). *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino famines and the making of the Third World*. Taylor & Frances.
- DCA Mural Production Guide*. (2002). Published on-line by the Department of Cultural Affairs, accessed at <http://www.culturela.org/publicart/murals/murals.html>.
- Dear, M. (2000). *The Postmodern Urban Condition*. Blackwell.
- Dear, M. and S. Flusty. (1997). "The Iron Lotus: Los Angeles and postmodern urbanism." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 551, 151-163.
- Dear, M., S. Shockman, and G. Hise. (1996). *Rethinking Los Angeles*. Sage.
- Deitch, J., R. Gastman, and A. Rose. (2011). *Art in the Streets*. Skira Rizzoli.
- Del Castillo, R.G. (2007). *Chicano San Diego: cultural space and the struggle for justice*. University of Arizona Press.
- Desfor G. and R. Keil, 2004. *Nature and the City: making environmental policy in Toronto and Los Angeles*. University of Arizona Press.
- Deutsche, R. (1996). *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*. MIT Press.
- Deutsche, R. and C.G. Ryan. (1984). "The Fine Art of Gentrification." *October*, 31, 91-111.

- Dew, C. (2007). *Uncommisioned Art: an A-Z of Australian Graffiti*. The Miegunyah Press.
- Dickens, L. (2008). "Finders Keepers': Performing the Street, the Gallery and the Spaces in-Between." *Liminalities: a Journal of Performance Studies*.
- (2008). "Placing Post-Graffiti: The Journey of the Peckham Rock " *Cultural Geographies*, 15, 471–496.
- (2010). "Pictures on walls? Producing, pricing and collecting the street art screen print." *City*, 14(1-2), 63-81.
- Docuynan, F. (2000). "Governing Graffiti in Contested Urban Spaces." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review (PoLAR)*, 23(1), 103-121.
- Dovey, K., S. Wollen, and I. Woodcock. (2012). "Placing Graffiti: creating and contesting character in inner-city Melbourne." *Journal of Urban Design*, 17(1), 21-41.
- Dunitz, R.J. (1993). *Street Gallery: guide to 1000 Los Angeles murals*. RJD Enterprises.
- (1994). *The African-American murals of Los Angeles*. *American Visions*, 9, 14-18.
- (1998). *California Murals*. RJD Enterprises.
- Dunitz, R.J. and J. Prigoff. (1997). *Painting the Towns: murals of California*. RJD Enterprises.
- England, K.V.L. (1994). Getting Personal: reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research." *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 80-89.
- English v. BFC&R East 11th Street LLC, No. 97 Civ. 7446 (HB 1997).
- Estrada, W.D. (2008). *The Los Angeles Plaza: sacred and contested space*. University of Texas Press.
- Eye One (2008). *Lost*. Los Angeles, self-published 'zine.
- Fairey, S. (2006). *Obey: Supply & Demand, the art of Shepard Fairey*. Gingko Press.
- (2008). *E Pluribus Venom*. Gingko Press.
- (2010). *MAYDAY: the Art of Shepard Fairey*. Gingko Press.
- Ferber, M. (2006). Critical Realism and Religion: objectivity and the insider/outsider problem." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 96(1), 176–181.
- Ferrell, J. (1993[1996]). *Crimes of Style: urban graffiti and the politics of criminality*. Garland.
- (1995). "Urban Graffiti: crime, control, and resistance." *Youth and Society*, 27, 73–92.
- (1999). "Cultural Criminology." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25, 395-418
- (2001). *Tearing Down the Streets: adventures in urban anarchy*. Palgrave.
- Ferrell, J. and M. Hamm. (1998). *Ethnography At The Edge: crime, deviance, and field research*. Northeastern.
- Ferrell, J., K. Hayward, and J. Young. (2008). *Cultural Criminology*. Sage.
- Ferrell, J. and R.D. Weide. (2010). "Spot Theory." *City*, 14(1–2), 48-62.
- Finkelpearl, T. (2000). *Dialogues in Public Art*. MIT Press.
- Fiore, F. (1990). "L.A. Youth, 18, Seized, Accused of Being City's Most Prolific 'Tagger'." *Los Angeles Times*, 13 December.
- Fitzsimmons, M. (1989). "The Matter of Nature." *Antipode*, 21(2), 109-120.

- Fitzsimmons, M. and R. Gottlieb. (1998). "Bounding and Binding Metropolitan Space: the ambiguous politics of nature in Los Angeles." In Scott, A, J. and E.W. Soja. *The City: Los Angeles and urban theory at the end of the Twentieth Century*. University of California Press.
- Florida, R. (2002a). *The Rise of the Creative Class: and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. Basis Books.
- (2002). "Bohemia and Economic Geography," *Economic Geography* 2, 55-71.
- (2005). *Cities and the Creative Class*. Routledge.
- Flusty, S. (1997). "Building Paranoia: the proliferation of interdictory space and the erosion of spatial justice." Reprinted in Ellin, N. ed. *Architecture of Fear*. Princeton Architectural Press.
- (2000). "Trashing Downtown: Play as Resistance to the Spatial and Representational Regulation of Los Angeles." *Cities* 17(2), 149-158.
- , 2002. *De-Coca-Colonization: Making the Globe from the Inside Out*. Routledge.
- Fogelson, R.M. (1967). *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930*. University of California Press.
- Folgarait, L. (1998). *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ford, L. (2003). *America's New Downtowns: Revitalization or Reinvention?* Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Freeman, L. (2006). *There Goes the 'Hood: views of gentrification from the ground up*. Temple University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin.
- Friedman, J. (2008). "The Uses of Planning Theory: a bibliographic essay." *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 28, 247-257.
- Fulton, W. (1997). *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Futch, D. (2008). "Echo Park's Gentrification Woes." *L.A. Weekly*, 25 June.
- Gandy, M. (2006). "Riparian anomie: Reflections on the Los Angeles River." *Landscape Research*, 31(2), 135-145.
- Ganz, N. (2004). *Graffiti World: Street Art from Five Continents*. Abrams.
- Garfinkle, A. (2003). "The Legal and Ethical Consideration of Mural Conservation: issues and debates." Symposium of the the Getty Conservation Institute.
- Gastman, R. (2007). *Saber: Mad Society*. Gingko Press and R77 Press.
- Gastman, R. and C. Neelon. (2001). *The History of American Graffiti*. Harper Design.
- Gastman, R., D. Rowland, and I. Slatter. (2006). *Freight Train Graffiti*. Abrams.
- Gastman, R. and S. Teri. (2007). *Los Angeles Graffiti*. Batty Publishing.
- Geertz, C. (1988). *Works and Lives: the anthropologist as author*. Stanford University Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. (1996). *The End of Capitalism (as we know it)*. Blackwell.
- Gilbert, M. (1994). "The Politics of Location: Doing Feminist Research at 'Home'." *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 90-96.

- Goldman, S.M. (1974). "Siqueiros and Three Early Murals in Los Angeles." *Art Journal*, 33(4), 321-327.
- (1976). "Affirmations of Existence: Barrio Murals of Los Angeles." *Revista Chicano-Riqueria*, 3.
- (1977). "Resistance and Identity: street murals of occupied Aztlán." *Latin American Literary Review*, 5(10), 124-128.
- (1982). "Mexican Muralism: its social-educative roles in Latin America and the United States. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 13(1), 111-133.
- (1984). "A Public Voice: fifteen years of Chicano posters." *Art Journal*, 44(1), 51-57.
- (1993). "How, Why, Where, and When It All Happened." In Cockroft, E.S. and H. Barnett-Sanchez eds. *Signs from the Heart: California Chicano murals*. University of New Mexico Press and SPARC.
- (1995). *Dimensions of the Americas: art and social change in Latin America and the United States*. University Of Chicago Press.
- Goldman, S.M. and T. Ybarra-Frausto (1985). *Arte Chicano: a comprehensive annotated bibliography of Chicano art, 1965-1981*. Chicano Studies Library Publications Unit, University of California.
- Gonos, G., V. Mulkern, and N. Poushinsky. (1976). "Anonymous Expression: a structural view of graffiti." *The Journal of American Folklore*, 89(351), 40-48.
- Good, M. (2011). *Vigilante, Vigilante: the battle for expression*. (DVD) USA.
- Goodall Jr., H.L. (2000). *Writing the New Ethnography*. AltaMira Press.
- Gottdiener, M and R. Hutchison. (2006). *The New Urban Sociology*. West View.
- Gottlieb, M. (2007). *Reinventing Los Angeles: nature and community in the global city*. MIT Press.
- Greenberg, D., K. Smith, and S. Teacher. (1977). *Big Art: megamurals and supergraphics*. Running Press.
- Griffiths, M., B. Light, and S. Lincoln. (2012). "'Connect and create': young people, YouTube and graffiti communities." *Continuum: Media and Cultural Studies*
- Grody, S. (2007). *Graffiti L.A.: street styles and art*. Abrams.
- Gruen, J.P. and P. Lee (1999). "Arroyo Seco Parkway." *The Historic American Engineering Record* (HAER No. CA- 265).
- Guérin, D. (1970). *Anarchism: from theory to practice*. Trans. by M. Klopper. Monthly Review Press.
- Gumprecht, B. (1999). *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Haapala, A. (2005). "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: familiarity, strangeness, and the meaning of place," in Light, A. and J.M. Smith eds. *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*. Columbia University Press.
- Haithman, D. (2008). "New coat is costly." *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May.
- Hall, P. (2002). *Cities of Tomorrow: an intellectual history of urban planning and design in the twentieth century*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hall, S. ed. (1975). *Resistance Through Rituals: youth subcultures in Post-War Britain*. Routledge.

- Hall, T. and I. Robinson. (2001). "Public Art and Urban Regeneration: advocacy, claims and critical debates." *Landscape Research*, 26(1), 5–26.
- Halsey, M. and B. Pederick. (2010). "The Game of Fame: mural, graffiti, erasure." *City*, 14(1-2), 82-98.
- Halsey, M., and A. Young. (2006). "'Our Desires Are Ungovernable:' writing graffiti in urban space." *Theoretical Criminology*, 10(3), 275-306.
- Hamnett, C. (2010). "On Gentrification: 'I am critical. You are mainstream': a response to Slater." *City*, 14(1-2), 180-186.
- Hansen, N. (2005). *Rash*. (DVD) Australia.
- Haraway, D.J. (1997). *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_Onco-Mouse: feminism and technoscience*. Routledge.
- Harcourt, B. E. (2001). *Illusion of Order: The False Promise of Broken Windows Policing*. Harvard University Press.
- Harvey, D. (1985). *The Urbanization of Capital: studies in the history and theory of capitalist urbanization*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- (1989). *The Condition of Postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Blackwell.
- (1996). *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Blackwell.
- (2003). *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. Routledge.
- (2006). "Space as a Key Word." In Castree, N. and D. Gregory, eds. *David Harvey Reader: a critical reader*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- (2012). *Rebel Cities: from the right to the city to the urban revolution*. Verso.
- Harvey, S. (2009). "The Colorful Saga of Los Angeles' First Subway Tunnel," *L.A. Then and Now, Los Angeles Times*, 8 February.
- Hayden, D. (1995). *The Power of Place: urban landscapes as public history*. MIT Press.
- Headland, T.N., K. Pike, M. Harris, eds. (1990). *Emics and Etics: the insider/outsider debate*. Sage.
- Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: the meaning of style*. Routledge.
- Herbert, S. (1997). *Policing Space: territoriality and the Los Angeles police department*. University of Minnesota Press.
- (2001a). "From Spy to Okay Guy: trust and validity in fieldwork with the police." *Geographical Review*, 91(1-2), 304-310.
- (2001b). Policing the Contemporary City: Fixing Broken Windows or Shoring Up Neo-liberalism? *Theoretical Criminology*, 5(4), 445-466.
- (2006). *Citizens, Cops, and Power: recognizing the limits of community*. University of Chicago Press.
- (2007). "The 'Battle of Seattle' revisited: or, seven views of a protest-zoning state." *Political Geography*, 26(5), 601-619.
- Herbert, S. and K. Beckett. (2008). "Dealing with disorder Social control in the post-industrial city." *Theoretical Criminology*, 12(1), 5-30.
- Herbert, S., J. Carr, and M. Brown. (2009). "Inclusion under the law as exclusion from the city: negotiating the spatial limitation of citizenship in Seattle." *Environment and Planning A*, 41(8), 1962–1978.

- Hermer, J. and A. Hunt. (1996). "Official Graffiti of the Everyday." *Law & Society Review*, 30(3), 455-480.
- Hernandez, D. (2004a). "Old Tunnel May Be Tagged as a Landmark." *Los Angeles Times*, 15 September.
- (2004b). "Graffiti Art Park Brushed Aside." *Los Angeles Times*, 16 September.
- (2005). "Mural or Graffiti? City Draws Line." *Los Angeles Times*, 25 August, A1, A23.
- Heynen, N. and E. Swyngedouw and M. Kaika. (2006). *In the Nature of Cities: urban political ecology and the politics of urban metabolism*. Routledge.
- Hill, N. (2006). *Piece by Piece*. (DVD) USA.
- Hise, G. (1997). *Magnetic Los Angeles: planning the Twentieth Century metropolis*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- (2003). *Teaching Community: a pedagogy of hope*. Routledge.
- Hooper, D. (1988). *Colors*. USA, Orion Pictures.
- Hornish, M.E. (1993). *Belmont Tunnel: ethnography of an empty lot*. Masters thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Southern California.
- Hou, J. ed. (2010). *Insurgent Public Space: guerrilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*. Routledge.
- Hundertmark, 'C100' C. (2005). *The Art of Rebellion: world of streetart*. Gingko.
- Isenberg, A. (2004). *Downtown America: a history of place and the people who made it*. University of Chicago Press
- Iveson, K. (2010). "The Wars on Graffiti and the New Military Urbanism." *City*, 14(1-2), 115-134.
- Ivey, Bill. (2008). *Arts Inc.: how greed and neglect have destroyed our cultural rights*. University of California Press.
- Jackson, P. (2005). "Gender." In Atkinson, et al. eds. *Cultural Geography: A critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*. Tauris.
- Jacobs, J. (1961). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Random House.
- Jakle, J. and D. Wilson. (1992). *Derelict Landscapes: the wasting of America's built environment*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press.
- Janis, S. (1983). "Post-graffiti." Janis Gallery exhibition catalogue, New York.
- Johnston, R.J., D. Gregory, G. Pratt, & M. Watts. (2000). *The Dictionary of Human Geography, 4th edition*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kan, E. (2010). "Arrested Motion: Saber interview." *Hypebeast Digital Magazine*. 28 April (<http://hypebeast.com/2010/04/arrested-motion-saber-interview/>, last accessed December 2011).
- Kant, I. (1790 [1987]). *Critique of Judgment*. Vintage.
- Katz, C. (1994). Playing the Field: questions of fieldwork in geography, *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 62-72.

- Kayzar, B. (2006). "Analyzing revitalization outcomes in downtown San Diego." Doctoral dissertation, Department of Geography, University of California, Santa Barbara and San Diego State University.
- Kerns, G. and C. Philo. (1993). *Selling Place: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present*. Pergamon Press.
- Kester, G. (2006). "Crowds and Connoisseurs: Art and the Public Sphere in America." In Jones, A., ed. *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*. Blackwell.
- Kim, S. (1995). *Chicano Graffiti and Murals: the neighborhood art of Peter Quezada*. University of Mississippi Press.
- (1997). *Vital Signs: signage, graffiti, murals, and "sense of place" in Los Angeles*. Doctoral dissertation, Folklore Department, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Klein, N.M. (1997). *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the erasure of memory*. Verso.
- Knight, C.K. (2008). *Public Art: theory, practice and populism*. Blackwell.
- Kramer, R. (2010). "Painting with permission: legal graffiti in New York City." *Ethnography*, 11(2), 235–253.
- Krikorian, M. (1996). "Bouncing Back: Players turn a graffiti-scarred downtown lot into a field for pelota Tarasca, a traditional Mexican ballgame." *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April.
- Kwon, M. (2001). *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. MIT Press.
- Labonte, P. (2003). *All City: the book about taking space*. ECW Press.
- Lachman, R. (1988) "Graffiti as Career and Ideology." *American Journal of Sociology*. 94, 229-250.
- Lacy, S. ed. (1995). *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Bay Press.
- Landry, C. (2000). *The Creative City: a toolkit for urban innovators*. Earthscan Publications.
- Lathan, S. (1984). *Beat Street*. (DVD). USA.
- Latour, B. (1993). *We Were Never Modern*. Harvard University Press.
- Law, R. and J. Wolch. (1991). "Homelessness and Economic Restructuring." *Urban Geography*, 12(2), 105-136.
- Laware, M.R. (1998). "Encountering Visions of Aztlán: arguments for ethnic pride, community activism and cultural revitalization in Chicano murals." *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 34.
- Lee, R.M. (1994). *Dangerous Fieldwork*. Sage.
- Lees, L., T. Slater, and E. Wyly. (2008). *Gentrification*. Routledge.
- Lefebvre, H. (1974 [1991]). *The Production of Space*. Trans. by D. Nicholson-Smith. Blackwell.
- (1996). *Writings on Cities*. Trans. and ed. by E. Kofman and E. Lebas. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Leitner, H., E.S. Sheppard, K. Sziarto, & A. Maringanti. (2007). "Contesting Urban Futures: decentering neoliberalism." In Leitner, H., Peck, J. and E.S. Sheppard, eds. *Contesting Neoliberalism: urban futures*. Guilford Press.

- Leo, R.A. (1995). "Trials and Tribulations: courts, ethnography, and the need for an evidentiary privilege for academic researchers." *American Sociologist*, 26, 113-134.
- Leopold, S. (2011). "MOCA's 'Art in the Streets' Artist Roll Call." *L.A. Weekly*, 7 April (http://blogs.laweekly.com/arts/2011/04/exclusive_mocas_art_in_the_str.php, last accessed August 2011).
- (2011). "Street Art at MOCA." *L.A. Weekly*, 7 April (www.laweekly.com/2011-04-07/art-books/street-art-at-moca/, last accessed August 2011).
- Levick, M. and S. Young. (1998). *The Big Picture: murals of Los Angeles*. Thames and Hudson.
- Lewisohn, C. (2008). *Street Art: the graffiti revolution*. Abrams Press.
- Ley, D. (1996). *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City*. Oxford University Press.
- (2003). "Artists, Aestheticization and the Field of Gentrification." *Urban Studies* 40(12), 2527-2544.
- Ley, D. and R. Cybriwsky. (1974). "Urban Graffiti as Territorial Markers." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 64, 491-505.
- Lippard, L. (1997). *The Lure of the Local: senses of place in a multicentered society*. New Press.
- Loukaitou-Sideris, A., and G. Sansbury. (1996). "Lost streets of Bunker Hill." *California History*, 74(4), 394-407.
- Low, S., ed. (2005). *Theorizing the City: the New Urban Anthropology Reader*. Rutgers University Press.
- Lull, J. (1987). "Thrashing in the pit: an ethnography of San Francisco punk subculture." In T.R. Lindlof ed. *Natural Audiences: qualitative research of media uses and effects*. Adlex.
- Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of the City*. MIT Press.
- Macdonald, N. (2001). *The Graffiti Subculture: youth, masculinity and identity in London and New York*. New York, Palgrave.
- MacGillivray, L. and M.S. Curwen (2007). "Tagging as a Social Literacy Practice." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50(5), 354-369.
- Mailer, N., M. Kurlansky and J. Naar. (1974). *The Faith of Graffiti*. Praeger Publishers.
- Manco, T. (2002). *Stencil Graffiti*. Thames and Hudson.
- (2004). *Street Logos*. Thames and Hudson.
- Mares, T.M. and D.G. Peña. (2010). "Urban agriculture in the making of insurgent spaces in Los Angeles and Seattle." In Hou, J. ed. *Insurgent Public Space: guerrilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*. Routledge.
- Markusen, A. (2008). "Arts and Culture in Urban/Regional Planning: a review and research agenda." Working Paper 271. Project on Regional and Industrial Economics, University of Minnesota.
- Markusen, A. and G. Schrock. (2006). "The Artistic Dividend: urban artistic specialization and economic development implication." *Urban Studies*, 43(10), 1661-1674.

- Martin, D. and J. Inwood. (2012). "Subjectivity, Power, and the IRB." *The Professional Geographer*, 64(1), 7-15.
- Martin, H. and J. Schwada. (1995). "Good Neighbor' Believes Masters Is More Worthy of the Honor." *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December.
- Martin, J. (1978). *Recycling the Central City: the development of a new town-in town*. Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota.
- Massey, D. (1994). *Space, Place, and Gender*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Mattley, C. (1998). "(Dis)Courtesy Stigma: fieldwork among phone fantasy workers." In J. Ferrell and M. Hamm, eds. *Ethnography At The Edge: crime, deviance, and field research*. Northeastern.
- Mauer, M. (2007). "CBS Yard, Melrose, 1-2." L.A. Weekly blog, December (http://blogs.laweekly.com/lurker/2007/12/cbs_yard_melrose_part_1.php, last accessed September 2011).
- (2008). "Echo Park Murals and the Chickens." *L.A. Weekly*, 8 April, blog post at http://blogs.laweekly.com/lurker/2008/04/echo_park_murals_the_chickens.php, last accessed February 2012.
- (2008). "Last Chickens in Echo Park." L.A. Weekly blog, 14 April (http://blogs.laweekly.com/lurker/2008/04/last_chickens_in_echo_park.php, last accessed January 2010).
- (2008). "L.A. River Along the Golden State, 1-3" L.A. Weekly blog, March (http://blogs.laweekly.com/lurker/2008/03/la_river_along_the_golden_stat_1.php, last accessed December 2011)
- (2008). "OBEY SABER collaboration in Echo Park." L.A. Weekly blog, May (http://blogs.laweekly.com/lurker/2008/05/obey_saber_collaboration.php, last accessed August 2011).
- (2008). "Beautiful Silver Lake Mural Defaced." L.A. Weekly blog, 26 June (http://blogs.laweekly.com/lurker/2008/06/beautiful_silver_lake_mural_de.php, last accessed January 2012).
- (2008). "Big River Work." *L.A. Weekly blog*, 8 August (http://blogs.laweekly.com/lurker/2008/06/big_river_work.php, last accessed December 2011).
- (2008). "Cache Bicycle Mural Destroyed." *L.A. Weekly blog*, 8 August (http://blogs.laweekly.com/lurker/2008/08/cache_bicycle_mural_destroyed.php, last accessed March 2012).
- McAuliffe, C. and K. Iveson. (2011). "Art and Crime (and Other Things Besides...): conceptualizing graffiti in the city." *Geography Compass*, 5(3), 128-143.
- McCarthy, T. (2000). "The L.A.P.D. Blues." *Time Magazine U.S.*, 27 November.
- McDowell, L. (1999). *Gender, Identity, and Place: understanding feminist geographies*. University of Minnesota Press.
- McKinzie, R.D. (1973). *The New Deal for Artists*. Princeton University Press.
- Mechner, J. (2004). *Chávez Ravine: A Los Angeles story*. (DVD) USA, Bullfrog Films.
- Mele, C. (2000). *Selling the Lower East Side: culture, real estate, and resistance in New York City*. University of Minnesota Press.

- Merryman, J. (2002). *Law, Ethics, and the Visual Arts (4th edition)*. Kluwer Law International.
- Miles, M. (2007). *Cities and Culture*. Routledge.
- Mitchell, D. (2002). "Cultural Landscapes: the Dialectical Landscape: Recent Landscape Research in Human Geography." *Progress in Human Geography*, 26(3), 381-391.
- (2003). *The Right to the City: social justice and the fight for public space*. Guilford Press.
- (2010). "Battle/fields: Braceros, agribusiness, and the violent reproduction of the California agricultural landscape during World War II." *Journal of Historical Geography* 36(2), 143-156.
- Mitchell, R. (2011). "A Look into Landslides Reveals Sunset Boulevard's Rocky Past." *The Eastsider*, 26 February, (<http://www.theeastsiderla.com/2011/02/a-look-into-landslides-reveals-sunset-boulevards-rocky-past/>, last accessed March 2012).
- Mohan, G. (2003). "Tag This One Tough Battle for Chief Bratton." *Los Angeles Times*, 14 April.
- Morrison, P. (2010). Judy Baca: Muralista. *Los Angeles Times*, 28 August.
- Mumford, L. (1938). *The Culture of Cities*. Mariner Books.
- Murray, James T. and K.L. Murray. (2009). *Broken Windows: graffiti NYC*. Gingko Press.
- Naar, J. (2007). *The Birth of Graffiti*. Prestel.
- Nagourney, A. (2011). "Cities Report Surge in Graffiti." *New York Times*, 18 July.
- Nast, H.J. (1994). "Women in the Field: critical feminist methodologies and theoretical perspectives." *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 54-66.
- Neef, S. (2007). "Killing Kool: the graffiti museum." *Art History*, 3(30), 418-431.
- New York Times*, editorial. (1971). "'Taki 183' Spawns Pen Pals." *New York Times*, 21 July.
- Norte, M. (2007). "Gronk." *Bomb*, 98.
- Normark, D. (1999). *Chávez Ravine, 1949: a Los Angeles story*. Chronicle Books.
- Ollman, B. (1971). *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society, 2nd ed.* Cambridge University Press.
- Olney, W. (2008). "Which Way L.A.: interview with Judith Baca" 89.9 KPCC, Pasadena, CA. (www.savelamurals.org/images/stories/Which_Way_LA_3_6_08_kcrw.mp3, last accessed September 2011).
- O'Neill, A.W. (1995). "Latino Lawyers, Garcetti Meet Over Tagger's Death: Protest: Prosecutor reaffirms decision not to charge man who shot teen-ager. Some attorneys say racist pattern exists." *Los Angeles Times*, 11 February.
- Parson, D. (1993). "The Search for a Centre: the recomposition of race, class and space in Los Angeles." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 17(2), 232-240.
- Peck, J. (2005) "Struggling with the Creative Class." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(4). 740-770.
- Peck, J. and A. Tickell. (2002). "Neoliberalising Space." *Antipode*, 34(3), 380 - 404.
- Peralta, S. (2001). *Dog Town and Z-Boys*. (DVD) USA.

- Perloff, H. (1967). "New Towns In Town." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 32:3, 155-161.
- Pettinger, J. (2005). "Representing Shop Work: a dual ethnography." *Qualitative Research*, 5(3), 347-364.
- Podmore, J. (1998). "(Re)Reading the 'Loft Living' *Habitus* in Montreal's Inner City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 22, 283-301.
- Powers, S. (1999). *The Art of Getting Over: Graffiti at the Millennium*. St. Martin's Press.
- Phillips, S. (1999). *Wallbangin': Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* University of Chicago Press.
- Pincetl, S. (1999). *Transforming California: a political history of land use and development*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Pray, D. (2005). *Infamy*. (DVD) USA.
- Prigoff, J. and R.J. Dunitz. (2000). *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American murals*. Pomegranate Communications.
- Pulido, L. (2006). *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: radical activism in Los Angeles*. University of California Press.
- Rahimian A, J.R. Wolch, and P. Koegel. 1992, "A Model of Homeless Migration: homeless men in Skid Row, Los Angeles" *Environment and Planning A*, 24:9, 1317-1336.
- Rahn, J. (2002). *Painting without permission: hip-hop graffiti subculture*. Bergin & Garvey.
- Reiss, Jon. (2007). *Bomb It!* (DVD) USA.
- Riccardi, N. (1995). "Death of a Tagger a Typical Street Mystery for Police." *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April.
- Riccardi, N. and J. Tamaki. (1995). "1 Tagger Killed, 1 Hurt After Confrontation Over Graffiti." *Los Angeles Times*, 1 February.
- Richardson, H.W. and P. Gordon. (2005). "Globalization and Urban Development." *Advances in Spatial Science*, 3, 197-209.
- Riis, J. 1890 (2010). *How the other half lives: studies among the tenements of New York*. Bedford.
- Robinson, C.J. (2000). "The 'Recognized Stature' Standard in the Visual Artists Rights Act." *Fordham Law Review*, 68, 1935.
- Rocco, R.A. (1998). "Latino Los Angeles: reframing boundaries/boarders." In Scott, A, J. and E.W. Soja, eds. *The City: Los Angeles and urban theory at the end of the Twentieth Century*. University of California Press.
- Rojas, J. (2010). "Latino Urbanism in Los Angeles: a model for urban improvisation and reinvention." In Hou, J. ed. *Insurgent Public Space: guerrilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*. Routledge.
- (2003). "The Enacted Environment: examining the streets and yards of East Los Angeles." In Wilson, C. and P. Groth, eds. *Everyday America: cultural landscape studies after J.B. Jackson*. University of California Press.
- Rose, G. (1997). "Situating Knowledges: positionality, reflexivity and other tactics," *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3), 305-320.
- (2007). *Visual Methodologies*, 2nd ed. Sage.

- Rosen, M.D. and J. Fisher (2001). "Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals: Barrio Logan, City of San Diego, California." *The Public Historian*.
- Rosette, A. (2009). *Critical Muralism*. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Education, University of California, Santa Cruz.
- Rowe, M. and F. Hutton. (2012). 'Is your city pretty anyway?' Perspectives on graffiti and the Urban Landscape. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 45(1), 66-86.
- Ruddick, S. M. (1996). *Young and Homeless in Hollywood: mapping social identities*. Routledge.
- Sampson, R. J. and S. W. Raudenbush. (2004). "Seeing Disorder: Neighborhood Stigma and the Social Construction of "Broken Windows." *Social Psychological Quarterly*, 67(4), 319-342.
- Sanchez-Tranquilino, M. (1991). *Mi Casa No Es Su Casa: Chicano Murals and Barrio Calligraphy as System of Signification at Estrada Courts, 1972-1978*. Master's thesis, University of California, Los Angeles.
- (1995). "Space, Power, and Youth Culture: Mexican American Graffiti and Chicano Murals in East Los Angeles" in B.J. Bright and L. Bakewell, *Looking High and Low: art and cultural Identity*. University of Arizona Press.
- Scarce, R. (1995). "Scholarly Ethics and Courtroom Antics: where researchers stand in the eyes of the law. *The American Sociologist*, 26(1), 87-112.
- Schrank, S. (2008). *Art and the City: civic imagination and cultural authority in Los Angeles*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Scott, A.J. (1988). *Metropolis: From the Division of Labor to Urban Form*. University of California Press.
- (1990). "The Technopoles of Southern California." *Environment & Planning A*, 22:12, 1575-1605.
- (2000). *The Cultural Economy of Cities*. Sage Publications.
- (2005). *On Hollywood: the place, the industry*. Princeton University Press.
- (2006). "Creative Cities: Conceptual Issues and Policy Questions." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Volume 28, Number 1, pages 1-17.
- Scott, A.J. and E.W. Soja. (1998). *The City: Los Angeles and urban theory at the end of the Twentieth Century*. University of California Press.
- Senie, H and S. Webster. (1989). "Critical Issues in Public Art." *Art Journal* 48/4, 287-290.
- Sennett, R. (1970). *The Uses of Disorder: personal identity and city life*. Norton Publishers.
- Silver, T. (1983). *Style Wars*. (DVD) USA.
- Silberg, J. (1984). *Breakin'*. (DVD). USA.
- Simpson, E. (1980). "Chicano Street Murals: a sociological perspective." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 13(3), 516-525.
- Skelton, T. and G. Valentine. (1998). *Cool Places: geographies of youth cultures*. Routledge.
- Slater, T. (2010). 'Still missing Marcuse: Hamnett's foggy analysis in London town', *City*, 14(1-2), 170-179.

- Soja, E.W. (1986). "Taking Los Angeles apart: some fragments of a critical human geography." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 4:3, 255–272.
- (1989). *Postmodern Geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory*. Verso.
- (1994). "Los Angeles 1965-1992: Six Geographies of Urban Restructuring." Colloquium on The City, Center for Social Theory and Comparative History, Institute for Social Science Research, UCLA.
- (1996a). *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. London, Blackwell.
- (1996b). "Los Angeles, 1965-1992: From Crisis-Generated Restructuring to Restructuring-Generating Crisis," in *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*. University of California Press.
- (2003). "Writing the City Spatially." *City*, 7(3), 269-280.
- (2010). *Seeking Spatial Justice*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Soja, E.W., R. Morales, and G. Wolff. (1983). "Urban Restructuring: an analysis of social and spatial change in Los Angeles." *Economic Geography*, 59, 195-230.
- Smith, N. (1996). *The New Urban Frontier: gentrification and the revanchist city*. New York, Taylor and Frances Publishing.
- Snyder, G.J. (2006). "Graffiti Media and the Perpetuation of an Illegal Subculture." *Crime, Media, Culture*, 2(1), 93–101.
- (2009). *Graffiti Lives: beyond the tag in New York's urban underground*. New York University Press.
- Sorkin, M. (1992). *Variations on a Theme Park*. Hill and Wang.
- Spalding, S. (1992). "The Myth of the Classic Slum: contradictory perceptions of Boyle Heights Flats, 1900-1991." *Journal of Architectural Education* 45: 2, 107-19.
- Spry, T. (2001). "Performing Autoethnography: an embodied methodological praxis." *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6), 706-732.
- Staheli, L.A. and V.A. Lawson. (1994). "A Discussion of 'Women in the Field': the politics of feminist fieldwork." *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 96-102.
- Starr, K. (2004). *Coast of Dreams: California on the edge, 1990-2003*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Stern, M.J. and S. Seifert. (2007). "From Creative Economy to Creative Society." *Progressive Planning*, 17(1).
- Stevens, E.W. (2009). *Radical LA: from Coxey's Army to the Watts Riots, 1894-1965*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- Stewart, S. (1987). "Ceci Tuera Cela: graffiti as crime and art." In Fekete, J. ed. *Life After Postmodernism: Essays on Value and Culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Storper, M. and S. Christopherson. (1986). "The City as Studio; the World as Back Lot: the impact of vertical disintegration on the motion picture industry." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 4(3), 305-20.
- Street, R.S. (2005). "Everyone had cameras: photographers, photography and the farmworker experience in California: a photographic essay." *California History* 83(2), 8-25.
- Sturken, M. (2001). "Desiring the Weather: El Niño, the media, and California identity." *Popular Culture*, 13(2), 161-190

- Suderberg, A. (2000). *Space, Site, Intervention: situating installation art*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Suplee, C. (1999). "El Niño/La Niña: nature's vicious cycle." *National Geographic Magazine* on-line (<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/elnino/mainpage.html>, last accessed December 2011).
- Swyngedouw E. and M. Kaika. (2000). "The Environment of the City... or the Urbanization of Nature." In Bridge, G. and S. Watson, eds. *A Companion to the City*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Talamantez, J.S. (2011). "Chicano Park and the Chicano Park murals: a National Register nomination." MA project, Public History, California State University, Sacramento.
- Taylor, M. and I. Marais. (2009). "Does Urban Art Deter Graffiti Proliferation?" Papers from the British Criminology Conference, 9, 57-70.
- Thomas, M. (2005). "Girls, Consumption Space and the Contradictions of Hanging out in the City." *Social and Cultural Geography*, 6(4).
- Till, K.E. (2011). "Ethnography." *International Encyclopedia of Geography*.
- Tschinkel, P. (1984). *Graffiti/Post-Graffiti*. (DVD) USA.
- Tuan, Y-F. (1977). *Space and Place*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Umemoto, K. (2006). *The Truce: lessons from an L.A. gang war*. Cornell University Press.
- Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990 (VARA), 17 U.S.C. § 106A.
- Viesca, V.H. (2000). "Straight out the barrio: Ozomatli and the importance of place in the formation of Chicano/a popular culture in Los Angeles." *Cultural Values*, 4(4), 445-473.
- (2004). "The Battle of Los Angeles: the cultural politics of Chicana/o music in the Greater Eastside." *American Quarterly*, 56(3), 719-739.
- Vigil, J.D. (1988). *Barrio Gangs: street life and identity in Southern California*. University of Texas Press.
- Wacquant, L. (2002). "Scrutinizing the Street: poverty, morality, and the pitfalls of urban ethnography." *American Journal of Sociology*, 107(6), 1468-1532.
- Wada, K. (2011). "Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra to mark mural's 20th anniversary." *Los Angeles Times*, 8 December.
- Wainwright, J. (2007). "Spaces of Resistance in Seattle and Cancun." In H. Leitner et al. *Contesting Neoliberalism: urban futures*. Guilford Press.
- Wallace, A. (1956). "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist*, 58, 264-281.
- Ward, C. (1973). *Vandalism*. Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Weide, R.D. (2008). "Gang Graffiti: East Coast vs West Coast." In Kontos and Brotherton eds. *Encyclopedia of Gangs*. Greenwood.
- White, R. (2001). "Graffiti, Crime Prevention & Cultural Space." *Criminal Justice* 12(3), 253-68.
- Whiting, C. (2006). *Pop L.A.: art and the city in the 1960s*. University of California.
- Wilson, J. Q, and G. L. Kelling. (1982). "The police and neighborhood safety: Broken Windows." *The Atlantic Monthly*, March, 29-38.

- Winton, R. (2009). "7 alleged members of L.A. tagging crew arrested." *Los Angeles Time, Metro/California*, A-1, 29 January.
- (2011). "L.A. to Draw a Finer Line on Murals as Art, Not Ads." *Los Angeles Times*, 24 October.
- (2012). "Artists to Discuss Proposed L.A. Law that Would End Ban on Murals." *Los Angeles Times*, 7 February.
- Wirth, L. (1938). "Urbanism As A Way of Life." *American Journal of Sociology*, 44.
- Wolch, J.R. and S. Rowe. (1992). "On the Streets: Mobility Paths of the Urban Homeless." *City and Society*, 6(2), 115-140.
- Wolch, J.R., A. Rahimian and A.P. Koegel. (1993). "Daily and Periodic Mobility Patterns of the Urban Homeless." *The Professional Geographer*, 45(2), 159-169.
- Wyatt, E. (2006). "In the Land of Beautiful People, an Artist Without a Face." *New York Times*, "Art and Design" section, 16 September.
- Young, A. (2010). "Negotiated consent or zero tolerance? Responding to graffiti and street art in Melbourne." *City*, 14(1-2), 99-114.
- Yudice, G. (2003). *The Expediency of Culture: uses of culture in the global era*. Duke University Press.
- Zahniser, D. (2006). "Welcome to Gentrification City" *L.A. Weekly*, 24 August.
- Zahniser, D. and P. Willon. (2009). "U.S. court upholds L.A. ban on billboards" *Los Angeles Times*, 7 January.
- Zamudio-Gurrola, S. (2009). "Housing farm workers: Assessing the significance of the Bracero labor camps in Ventura County." Master's thesis, Department of Historic Preservation, University of Southern California.
- Zizek, S. (2003). "Welcome to the Desert of the Real!" *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101(2), 385-389.
- Zukin, S. (1982). *Loft Living: culture and capital in urban change*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- (1991). *Landscapes of Power: from Detroit to Disneyland*. University of California Press.