Environmental Communication in Street Art: Motivations & Messages of Reverse Graffiti Creators

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Graffiti is not a novelty; on the contrary, painting on walls has a long history starting with the cavemen markings, evolving into spray-can calligraphy and illustrations on trains in Philadelphia and New York in the 1970s, and eventually into a growing number of forms all around the world including onto canvases now hanging in art museums. The motivations for doing graffiti are manifold, however, there is no denying that graffiti works to communicate messages. First and foremost, graffiti serves as a venue for individual expression of artists' thoughts and ideas, and it communicates their identities from surfaces to the society (Jorgenson & Lange, 1975; Bowen, 2010). As such, graffiti is eligible for media analysis.

In addition to being a creative personal outlet, graffiti has proven to be a popular form of public address for socio-political issues: despite the disagreement on graffiti as art or vandalism, the creative effort in it marks graffiti as an "an intellectual answer to resistance emotions" and its alternative nature places its original messages outside the mainstream politics and media (Nicholls, 2012, p.252). Politicized environmental communication has become one of such socio-political issues. Over the last two decades, deterioration of our natural environment and cumbersome ways of dealing with it have secured the presence of eco issues in political discourse and it does not look like they are going away any time soon: with the world population heading toward 10 billion this century, our needs for more food, living places, transportation and energy are rapidly increasing and pushing the Earth into a state of "unprecedented emergency" (Emmott, 2013). Since eco communication has seen a growing mistrust when coming from the government and industries (Peters, Covello & McCallum, 2006), and graffiti is supposedly a socio-political commentary free of mainstream influences, street art could be a potential channel of environmental communication. Eco-graffiti in particular could be a *green* medium by its content as well as its application – non-chemical materials used in the process of their creation, such as mud, water and moss, leave a minimum if any impact on the environment (Elizah, n.d.). As outlined above, no affordances can be made in undermining actions that attempt to remedy and prevent further damage to the planet's ecosystem, therefore, all forms of environmental communication, eco-graffiti among them, are important channels of information to mobilize the public and to buttress pro-action.

Reverse graffiti, is of special interest in this paper – this topic has been only briefly referred to in the existing scientific literature about modern street art and culture but no academic

works systematically examine reverse graffiti in depth or provide a well-developed definition of it. To take matters even further, currently reverse graffiti is in a legal grey area which is confusing both for its creators as well as for the managers and monitors of public spaces. Finally, since this unconventional type of street art is an eco-friendly way to disseminate messages to the public, it has a great potential in environmental communication. Since graffiti is a form of public address, it is important to know what is being communicated to the urban citizens and why, especially if it concerns an issue as sensitive as environmental wellbeing. The ambiguity about the definition of reverse graffiti itself, however, prevents the analysis of its messages. Therefore, first and foremost, the research question of this paper asks: How do graffiti creators define reverse graffiti? It is addressed using the existing literature and theories about graffiti to see if they can explain the phenomenon at hand. Halsey and Young's (2006) motivational model of graffiti writers provides a basis for tackling causes behind the graffiti works, and spot theory (Ferrell & Weide, 2010) complements it from a more anthropological angle as graffiti locations and surfaces are part of graffitists' reasoning to do it there. At the same time, the communication model of environmental action and perception theory (Appleyard, 1979) helps to assess the green aspect of reverse graffiti content. The gap in the existing literature provides an opportunity to analyze an understudied phenomenon so as to better integrate the articulations of graffiti creators into the academic and public spheres: this qualitative exploratory study could be a stepping stone on the way to understanding how well reverse graffiti fits into the existing theories and models of both traditional graffiti and environmental communication, and it could facilitate clearer articulation of reverse graffiti's legal status.

To this day few people associate the technique of graffiti with anything else than a felt marker or a spray-can. New bigger category graffiti methods include stencils, paste-ups and organic materials, such as water and moss, to name a few. Unlike the other graffiti techniques, application of natural substances to the surfaces does not leave a permanent mark, damage the environment or is unequivocally illegal in public when not commissioned – the reverse graffiti is one of such forms of place marking that is not accounted for by the traditional graffiti literature. Truman (2010) briefly defines reverse graffiti as "a practice of creating temporary graffiti by removing dirt from a surface and leaving a clean trace behind" (p.8). Notwithstanding Truman's straightforward definition, different terms exist in urban art lingo, such as "green graffiti", "pollugraphy", "grime art", "re-facing", and "clean tagging" amongst others, which can refer to

different techniques of environmentally-friendly graffiti (Elizah, n.d.; Randazzo & Lajevic, 2013). In addition to that, Randazzo and Lajevic (2013) prescribe an eco value to reverse graffiti by categorizing it under reverse pollution which aims to rectify harm done to nature and prevent its further contamination: "Reverse graffiti […] is a technique used to create ecological artworks relating to reverse pollution" (p.3). The two definitions associate reverse graffiti with two qualities respectively: first, it is carried out in dirt, and second, it pertains to ecological issues. Both traits serve as cornerstones in the initial research of the phenomenon but they are also put to a test in the development of the term through spot theory, motivational and environmental communication models because they do not come from individuals inside the street art community and thus are more susceptible to misinterpretations. Moreover, neither description is based on any theoretical grounds which leaves a possibility of singular conclusions independent of a consistent pattern.

On the one hand, reverse graffiti is celebrated for its environmentally friendly methods: "A single 140-centimeter-square, or 55-inch-square, green graffiti impression requires 15 to 20 liters, or four to five gallons, of water. That is about 30 times less than is needed to produce a paper poster of comparable size" (Brenhouse, 2010), "Unlike graffiti, which often utilizes spray paint to illegally draw images or 'tag' text on public surfaces, reverse graffiti involves a reductive process of cleaning and removing layers of dirt from polluted surfaces" (Randazzo & Lajevic, 2013, p.3). But on the other, its definition as *graffiti* is problematic as reverse graffiti misses the rebelliousness in its nature: its relatively short-lived results put it somewhere inbetween vandalism and a harmless creative expression which both allow the brands to advertise themselves in a cool way, and eradicate the need for artists to hide when performing reverse graffiti (Truman, 2010, p.8). Ergo, it is crucial to develop a carefully weighted definition of the term in order to place it in the broader debate of graffiti's public and personal utility. The first part of the paper presents an overview of the existing forms of graffiti and the discussions around it as a point of departure to place the reverse graffiti in this discourse, while the second part focuses on the existing information about grime art to introduce the most contentious points in its definition: methods, a clash with traditional graffiti, and its supposed eco value.

The following passages address the notions of reverse graffiti as a medium. Even the most simplistic forms of graffiti, such as tagging or latrine scribbling, carry the messages of the writer, either by simply marking his/her territory or by quickly denoting one's views. A study

carried out as early as 1967 showed that restroom graffiti in separate faculties represented the subjects taught there, which indicates that graffiti writers manifest their respective life views in writing and/or drawing (Jorgenson & Lange, 1975). Graffiti's saturation with personal meanings is also evident in the fact that their authors do not regard it as something unacceptable, immoral or anti-social as opposed to the policy and media discourses of graffiti criminality (Rowe & Hutton, 2012). Individual expressions in graffiti practices, while performed relatively secretly, are meant to be seen and interpreted by their onlookers and in some cases even interacted with by means of erasing it or adding to it (Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012). Visual statements and observations in the public eye which invoke interpretations and reactions clearly manifest graffiti as a medium. Even though reverse graffiti creators may lack the law outcast status of the more traditional street marking representatives, their innovative approaches to message dissemination in public are worth exploring because they may disclose new findings about public communication, especially if it addresses the sensitive issue of environmental change. Hence, the first research sub-question tackles the motivations of reverse graffiti creators by examining the reason why they choose this medium – a question that complements the understanding of reverse graffiti world and juxtaposes it with the reasons outlined by traditional graffiti creators in motivational model and spot theory.

Socio-political issues are inseparable from the milieu that the artists live in, these issues are a part of their identities and thus get transcribed in their works. Take, for example, the graffiti cases of Kenyan rebels who express their political frustrations and make public calls for change in street writings (Ombati, 2013, p.239). Hence, graffiti is not only a channel of personal communication, it also can reflect broader societal concerns. In contrast to the institutional publications and digital messages, hand-made creations stand out as genuine counter discourses in the public sphere (Nicholls, 2012). Reverse graffiti in particular has the element of surprise which attracts the attention of passers-by because this practice is still relatively new and unknown outside the graffiti community. For instance, a Brazilian graffiti artist Alexandre Orion cleaned the images of skulls on the dirty surface of a car tunnel in Sao Paulo to draw attention to the deadly affects of pollution (Reverse Graffiti – Top Artists, 2009), while a Dutch marketing firm GreenGraffiti uses reverse graffiti to advertise brands because it is a "hard-hitting and unusual" method (GreenGraffiti, 2012). Owing to its eco-friendly application, by and large grime art has been associated with environmental communication. Previous research has shown that

public risk perceptions are subject to verbal, textual as well as visual information about environmental problems as the latter can be emotionally compelling from the first look and is easy to remember (Leiserowitz, 2006; Nicholson-Cole, 2012, p.258-61), which means that graffiti in general is a potent tool to disseminate powerful environmental messages. In order to investigate what reverse graffiti creators are conversing about in their works, the first research sub-question "What motivates reverse graffiti creators to produce reverse graffiti?" leads to the second sub-question "What messages do reverse graffiti creators communicate?" The expectation that reverse graffiti creators mediate green concerns by default (Randazzo & Lajevic, 2013, p.3) is scrutinized through the environmental communication model.

The definition of reverse graffiti together with motivations and messages of its creators are examined against the backdrop of a mixed theoretical framework to provide an inclusive approach to the very fluid subject of grime art. Incorporated into the literature review, the three complementary elements of the theory are: graffiti writers' motivation model by Halsey and Young (2006), spot theory (Ferrell & Weide, 2010), and the communication model of environmental action and perception theory (Appleyard, 1979). While the first two add to each other in terms of motivations, kinds and ways of doing graffiti, the latter lays out the guidelines for assessing reverse graffiti as a medium that alters the environment. By means of analyzing reverse graffiti through these approaches, one can see if theories and models of traditional graffiti as well as environmental communication actually explain this phenomenon, and if so, how well, since there is no separate theory tailored specifically for reverse graffiti.

Together the three theoretical elements were used to develop an interview question guide as well as the three main answer patterns in the data analysis to answer the research question and its sub-questions, as specified in the methods part of the paper. The research design and the methods also give an overview of who was interviewed and why – semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of data collection for its flexible approach to the subject to ask reverse graffiti creators, eco and traditional graffiti artists for their perspectives about the phenomenon in question as they are all part of the street art culture. The reasons for interviewing not only reverse graffiti creators are to, first, analyze its relation to the green street art, and second, to hear the opinion of people who are in the graffiti culture as there are not many who engage in the relatively novel activity of grime art. The interview transcripts are assessed using thematic analysis with primary deductive and secondary inductive coding of the text. The

methods part is followed by the interview results, then analysis and conclusion which reveal that reverse graffiti is neither solely tied to dirt cleaning nor is it only communicating green issues, rather, it is a subtractive technique that people use to comment on the current state of urban spaces, an artistic expression or a carrier of corporate messages. Its eco value, however, is mostly evident in its environmentally friendly application.

2. Literature Review and Theory

2.1. A Word on Graffiti

What is an elaborate large-scale wall drawing with colorful stylized letters and images and what is a quick magic marker signature on the side of a bus seat? In short, both instances are graffiti but there are different ways of perceiving it. Broadly treated as illegal writing on walls, the criminalizing discourse of graffiti has its roots in the 1970s to late 1980s zero tolerance policies of New York – the cradle of modern street art – where the city mayors labeled graffitists as vandals and blamed subway crime on writings rather than on poor social conditions (Snyder, 2006, p.93). Contrary to the somewhat unfair generic treatment (and rejection) of all graffiti writers as law breakers, academics recognize the plethora of graffiti functions and conceptualize it in a more objective manner. According to Chmielewska (2007), the abstraction of singular graffito occurrences to a broad graffiti term has come to symbolize "the specific contemporary phenomenon of youth contestation and the attendant stylistic norms of expression rooted in the hip-hop culture" (p.162). This definition introduces three prominent notions to modern graffiti: creative expression, youth rebellion and hip-hop subculture. In addition to that, Cudmore (2012) focuses on graffiti as a medium: "a design exercise that encourages stewardship with the urban landscape by finding luminal spaces as opportunities for communication" (p.633). These three explanations (out of many) of graffiti show that the various interpretations of graffiti prescribe the different treatment of it, ranging from its removal to its study as a dignified form of art or public commentary. Therefore, first and foremost the research question of this paper attempts to establish the meaning(s) of the term reverse graffiti by asking: What is reverse graffiti?

A more politically correct way of categorizing graffiti perhaps could be looking at the style and the method of its application. The most commonly acknowledged types in graffiti lingo are "tags" and "throw-ups", "stencils" and "paste-ups", and "(master)pieces" and "productions" (Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012, pp.23-25; Verel, 2013, p.5). The first two are the fastest to execute and require little skill: tags refer to quick signatures and throw-ups are generally bigger outlines that can be empty or filled in with a color. The second pair is also quick to apply but unlike tags and throw-ups, stencils and paste-ups are pre-prepared and that can be a lengthy process depending on the design. While stencils are sprayed on surfaces usually through a carton silhouette, paste-ups are glued on. Finally, masterpieces, or pieces in short, and productions, also known as murals, are the most intricate, elaborate, colorful and time consuming textural and

graphic works. They are both bigger than the other types but a production fully covers the whole given spot making a large scale coherent illustration (Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012, pp.23-25; Verel, 2013, p.5). Obviously, there is a whole world of smaller sub-categories out there in the graffiti culture but these major stylistic and methodological types serve as examples when looking for the street art variations encompassed by the concept of reverse graffiti.

Pictures 1 & 2. Left – tags and stickers, right – throw up. Source: Veronika Norvaisaite, authors: unknown.

Pictures 3 & 4. Left – paste up. Right – stencil. Source: Veronika Norvaisaite, authors: unknown.

Pictures 5 & 6. Top – piece. Bottom – production/mural. Source: Veronika Norvaisaite, authors: unknown.

The dynamic nature of street art has breathed life into other forms of creative urban displays: who is to say if graffiti ends with drawings and writings on surfaces and does not extend to scratching them, growing organic material on them, "cup-rocking" fences or even "yarn-bombing" objects with guerrilla knitting. The task of placing reverse graffiti in this colorful and chaotic culture which by Chmielewska's very definition constantly pushes the boundaries of established norms is a challenge. McAuliffe (2012) lends a helpful hand by making a distinction between graffiti and street art but not treating them as mutually exclusive: whereas the first one refers to texts and imagery that are by and large illegible to those outside the graffiti community and thus render it "an egocentric form of private communication", street art is constituted by a wide set of practices that convey messages to the general public and are less subject to subcultural codes of conduct and principles. The latter, however, can also be carried out without an official granting and by individuals from the graffiti community (p.190). For this reason, the terms graffiti and street art are used interchangeably throughout the paper as the concept of reverse graffiti is put under scrutiny.

2.2. Placing Reverse Graffiti

When asked if they know what reverse graffiti is, most people outside the street art culture usually shrug their shoulders in silence or make a hesitant reference to the graffiti removal policies. The situation does not get that much better when one starts researching the subject extensively: not because there is no information or examples of reverse graffiti works (a simple Internet search proves quite the opposite), but because the term is coarsely used among other graffiti practices that deviate from Truman's brief definition of reverse graffiti as dirt cleaning. It has been categorized as a type of eco-graffiti by an online green web-blog *WebEcoist* together with mud stencils, moss three-dimensional graffiti, second-hand fur applications in the streets and even laser graffiti (Elizah, n.d.). Not only do some of these street art examples hardly fall under the category of graffiti, but others incorporate spray paint with the elements of nature – a practice that questions the whole notion of environmentally-friendly graffiti and raises the question if eco-graffiti only disseminates environmental messages, or is necessarily a zero-impact medium, or both. Hence, calling reverse graffiti a type of eco-graffiti is an inadequate label, and the current confusion begs for a clarification of the term at hand as well as for an analysis of its relationship with environmentalism. For the purposes of this paper, street art that is entirely sustainable or includes temporary/natural elements is referred to as eco-graffiti, even though a whole new study ought to establish its clear definition too.

At the same time, *Urban Art Core* (UAC), an independent street art magazine, touches upon the different points of contention when discussing reverse graffiti. For one, the instruments of grime cleaning differ from the most widely known high-pressure water cleaners to a bucket of water with a simple sponge and soap, to brushes, pens, and even fingers (Reverse Graffiti – Top Artists). The variety of tools accounts for the different methods of graffiti (namely, writings, images, and stencils) and for a myriad of their intended purposes, both of which are a personal choosing of individual reverse graffiti creators and depend on their motivations. While a quick tagging of your name on a dirty car surface might be a way to mark your territory and spread your name, the more elaborate works demand much more artistic effort and creativity, which bring us to the issue of grime cleaning as a form of graffiti art. As subjective as art is, a certain amount of talent and skill is necessary to produce an aesthetical piece of graffiti that in some cases is also a sharp public comment. In that sense, reverse graffiti is even more demanding as it is limited color-wise and somewhat minimalistic in shape – even an amateur observer can tell

that achieving two and three dimensional effects by the different surface scraping techniques is more challenging than doing so with different layers and shades of spray paint. Hence, grime graffiti definitely has an element of creativity to it, but it is up to its creators to exploit it in order to serve their personal purposes.

Both UAC and *Treehugger*, another blog concerned with sustainability issues, refer to reverse graffiti as public art but also as a guerilla marketing technique (Richard, 2008). For the latter reason, some traditional graffiti artists are quick to reject reverse graffiti from being a part of their subculture. Surely, the lack of criminalizing discourse around reverse graffiti as well as its wide use by companies stands in stark contrast to the principles of rebelliousness and non-mainstream socio-political counter discourse of graffiti (Truman, 2010, p.8), but history has shown that in its early days even the now hugely popular stencil art has also been condemned by some graffiti artists as an "idiot proof" technique for people with no spray-can control skills (Hopkins, 2010, p.3). Moreover, the critics are quick to forget that traditional graffiti is also successfully employed by businesses to advertise themselves on their buildings, and by governments to promote public campaigns (Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012, pp.29-30). On the other hand, an alternative interpretation of the application of reverse graffiti in broad daylight and in the public eye could be that it actually aids the reputation of traditional graffiti because the 'no harm done' principle of clean tagging clears the graffiti name off vandalism. The notion of this tension between reverse and more conventional graffiti artists once again stems from the initial reason to do it, be it for sustainable marketing or shedding a more positive light on graffiti culture, and is worth exploring as are the messages of grime artists. Hence, the reasons behind the reverse graffiti creators' actions are important to know before tackling their messages.

The commercial use of reverse graffiti deserves attention in its own right – already catching the eye of both the news media and academia, albeit limited in numbers which could possibly be explained by the relative novelty of the issue. The potential of companies to establish a brand loyalty among the green-minded customers by exposing them to their logos washed out on the surfaces has been acknowledged in papers by Truman (2010) and Barrows (2009). *The New York Times* supported their claims by identifying reverse graffiti as a quickly spreading trend in the brand marketing world and pointed to a Dutch firm GreenGraffiti as a prominent player in that field. In-deed the authors of such outdoor ad campaigns in the Netherlands are one of the forerunners of brand marketing in grime, and are rightfully called a reverse graffiti

company (Brenhouse, 2010). However, on their official website, GreenGraffiti representatives name other natural materials, such as milk, chalk, moss and sand, which they use to create logos and messages for their clients (http://greengraffiti.nl/). Does that mean that the definition of reverse graffiti as primarily cleaning a dirty surface no longer holds? This uncertainty of employed materials connects back to the aforementioned problem of identifying what reverse graffiti actually is.

Despite the different approaches to reverse graffiti in various sources, there is one overarching theme – environmental impact. Whereas an eco angle could have been expected from the green web-blogs *WebEcoist* and *TreeHugger*, the street art magazine UAC also featured reverse graffiti as a transformative street art provocation in its section about a creative activism magazine called *Mašta* (Mašta – Magazine for Creative Activism, 2011). Finally, the academics as well as mass media confirm the inextricable nature of environmentalism in reverse graffiti by pointing to its success in marketing due to its sustainability. It has been even incorporated in the art education curriculum for students as a technique which "aims to undo previous contamination and reduce further pollution by raising awareness" (Randazzo & Lajevic, 2013, p.2). Judging from this link made in the current sources about clean tagging, it could be postulated that due to their choice of method, reverse graffiti creators are communicating ecological messages either by the method itself and/or by the content. Therefore, the development of reverse graffiti's definition and in this paper is crowned by the analysis of its creators motivations that subsequently could help explain their messages. After all, graffiti artists express their identities and beliefs in their works for the broader public to read and evaluate (Bowen, 2010), and since street art is a form of public address, it is important to know what reverse graffiti creators are communicating, especially if they speak about the blight of modern society – environmental problems.

2.3. Artists' Motivations and Spot Theory

The theoretical framework of this paper needs to aid answering the *what*, *how*, *where* and *why* questions in reverse graffiti. For this reason, different approaches are combined to define the term, explain creators' motivations and their messages – the inextricable aspects of grime art. Few academic works about street art go about their subject without a reference to the work of Halsey and Young (2006), and this paper is no exception for a very simple reason – these

scholars have tackled the very core motivations of graffiti writers. By interviewing the artists, Halsey and Young probed the inner world of their reasoning and inclinations as opposed to the external interpretations of graffiti works that are more often than not very bipolar due to the judgments of it as either art or vandalism. Since interviews with reverse graffiti creators are also the main source of empirical data in this paper, the analysis of the results is based on Halsey and Young's approach to motivations, and scrutinized further through a spot theory lens, which "supplements existing understandings of graffiti as a subcultural endeavor and urban phenomenon, and emphasizes the liquidity of urban space and its meaning" (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, p.48). Spot theory is a crucial addition because reverse graffiti works are predominantly carried out on dirty surfaces, thus, bringing the choosing of a place into focus and setting it apart from the more traditional methods of graffiti.

The motivation and spot approaches are not alien to each other; au contraire, they complement each other on a number of occasions. To begin with, graffiti artists perceive their activities as "an affective process that *does things* to writers' bodies (and the bodies of onlookers) as much as to the bodies of metal, concrete and plastic, which typically compose the surfaces of urban worlds" (Halsey & Young, 2006, pp.276-77). Ergo, the graffiti practices entail a three-dimensional relationship between the artists, the public and the exterior of urban landscapes. While the reactions and interpretations of graffiti works by the audiences is behind the scope of this paper, writers 'bodies' and 'surfaces' remain the two major points of departure for the analysis, which also tie together motivations and graffiti spots that help define the overall phenomenon of reverse graffiti. Since the current explanation of grime art limits it to dirty places (Truman, 2010, p.8), the location of reverse graffiti is a crucial element of it. For this reason, it is just as important to ask reverse graffiti creators where they do it as it is knowing why they engage in this type of street art. The personal motivations of graffiti writers can be further divided into the pleasures they derive from their acts, and their desires. The matter of pleasure is recognized by Halsey and Young as being both emotional and physical: graffiti artists run the danger of being caught and penalized, a risk which produces adrenaline in their bodies; they also perfect their skills with every piece they make, which accounts for both a better spray-can control and satisfaction of producing a visually pleasing piece of work (pp.279-83). While mastering their craft is still applicable to reverse graffitists, the ill-defined legal status of their works allows them to circumvent the anonymity of graffiti culture which leaves a partial gap in

understanding the pleasures derived by the reverse graffiti creators – an issue addressed by the question about their motivations.

Finally, the street artists consider graffiti as a righteous practice (Halsey &Young, 2006, p.283) – a motive that is perhaps the most difficult to explain to someone outside the graffiti community but supported nevertheless by Rowe and Hutton (2012) who argue that graffiti writers are not in conformity with the idea of graffiti as criminal or anti-social. Obviously, certain cases of graffiti, such as the notorious All Cops Are Bastards (ACAB) spray-ons, signal dissatisfaction with the existing legal order and its enforcers, however, the anarchistic notions are no strangers to a broad spectrum of subcultures, including expressions in their song lyrics, posters, tee slogans, and tattoos, among others that constitute a separate cohort of individuals with their respective experiences and motives. At the same time, research on the drives behind the acts of modern graffiti writers has revealed that a conscious law breaking is by and large not their purpose, rather, it is a 'sense of purpose' or a calling that makes them devote their time and effort on the streets (Castleman, 1982, p.19). The urban places with their different functions and designs have a power to evoke reactions to them, and graffitists simply mark their "mentally mapped experience" there (Cudmore, 2012, p.634). By doing so, they assign new meanings to those landscapes – a practice that is discussed more in detail in the following paragraph.

The justification of graffiti as feeling right to its authors brings us to their desires. If defacing a building, for example, is deemed to be fitting and appropriate by the artists, then there must be a reason why graffiti writers felt the need to leave their mark on that building. To help explain urban spaces and what they entail, Deleuze and Guattari (1996) make a distinction between 'striated' and 'smooth' places, the first one being a well-ordered, structured and governed space, and the second one representing dynamic and experiential rather than a measured space (pp.361-70; 479). In order to rupture the sterile striated spaces controlled by the governments, corporations and social norms, graffiti writers do graffiti to introduce the more fluid, sensational smooth spaces into the modern urbanity (Halsey and Young, 2006, p.296). The rebellious desire to fight the established system in cityscapes is very closely interconnected with the spot theory, which according to Ferrell and Weide (2010) means "Spots are, after all, not simply static physical locations; they are moments in the social process through which the city and the world of graffiti develop in a dialectic relationship" (p.50). By turning striated places

16

into smooth ones, graffiti artists elevate physical localities to the status of such social processes which ignite public commentary.

The struggle to overcome the overstandardization, strict planning and rules that current systems employ to govern urban lifestyles – an idea that bears resemblance to the dystopian fear of being boxed in mass production Levittown houses – could also be linked to a desire to humanize places that are otherwise overlooked. Without further philosophical stipulations about the meaning of humanization, here it is referred to as an attempt to add a personal touch, start a dialogue and breathe culture into the sites of low attachment. In his book about supermodernity, Augé (1992) calls these spots 'non-places': the products of globalized world order that do not possess distinctive or traditional marks, usually serve to store or transport goods and people, and can be found in the majority of countries. Railways stations and stops, airports, ship docks and the alike fit the profile of non-places which exhibit similar infrastructure (even the shop brands inside!) worldwide and thus are rarely identified with by the locals. Cudmore (2012) extends the definition of sites of low attachment to locales that are poorly designed, of unclear use and need maintenance – more tags can be found in such places and they function both as an invitation to interact and as a notice of underuse (pp.634-35). The pleasures and desires of graffiti writers could also help to answer the question if reverse graffiti creators carry out their works to start a conversation in neglected places and to bring attention to the accumulation of filth there, since dirty places are usually not the most attractive and inviting ones.

Clearly, artists' motivations and the selection of places are closely tied; spot theory provides an additional set of points to consider in the analysis. First and foremost, it assigns great importance to the artists' knowledge of spots: the public and private places, high and low visibility, static and dynamic, guarded by police and commissioned, prohibited spots within the graffiti culture, and gang territories, to name the major ones. However, the choice of particular spots rests firmly on graffiti writers' motivations. The very innate human desire for recognition and personal artist's taste determine both his/her audience and the visibility of his/her works. If the writer seeks approval only from his/her fellow graffiti artists, then the graffiti works are more likely to be done in less publicly-frequented places, or "yards" and "cutty places" in graffiti vocabulary, such as under bridges, inside and outside empty buildings and on the walls of underground tunnels. If, however, the writer wants to reach the broader audiences, his/her selected spots are going to have much higher public exposure, like those in the main streets,

shopping areas and on the major fences. Sometimes the two types of intended audiences can overlap, especially when graffitists choose very dangerous spots, such as roof tops, billboards, highway signs, to name a few, which are highly visible but also earn a lot of respect from their graffiti peers (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, pp.50-54). Picture 7 exemplifies graffiti in a "cutty place" that is also visible for the broad audiences. Hence, spot theory facilitates the better understanding of reverse graffiti placement which is undoubtedly a strategic choice.

Spot theory has yet another motivational dimension to the physical location – that is liquidity. It encompasses the time and place of graffiti's visibility, its longevity and durability.

Picture 7. Graffiti piece under a bridge. Source: Veronika Norvaisaite, author: unknown.

Graffiti works are temporal since they can be hidden under a new layer of paint, overwritten by other artists or even destroyed with the demolition of the surfaces (like those in construction sites), thus, places where graffiti can endure the longest are generally preferred (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, p.53). Durability is a particular issue in reverse graffiti as its natural substances can be easily erased; even if no one in particular makes an effort to remove it, reverse graffiti can be washed down by rain or disappear under the footprints of passers-by. The temporality and spatiality of graffiti works also manifest themselves in mobile spots, such as on cars, trucks, trains and even lift-up fences. Works done on moving objects reach even bigger audiences and/or are intentionally related to the places and times they appear (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, p.57), tying graffiti messages closely to their context.

As observed by Chmielewska (2007), all graffiti works are loaded with local history and circumstances; even though the language in graffiti inscriptions is predominantly hip hop English and the power of illustrations is universal, the works incorporate "culturally specific pseudonyms or captions referencing the local cultural scene" (pp.159-63), and so they would make little sense taken out of their contexts, be it spatio-temporal or social. The analysis of 'globalized fences' by

Feigenbaum (2010) is a compelling example of how separation walls on the borders of Israel-Palestine, USA-Mexico, and fences surrounding either detention or superpower centers serve as canvases and informational communication technology to express struggles behind the fences by means of graffiti images and texts. The protest messages would lose their emotional appeal if people were free to cross those fences as they would no longer rely on a concrete medium to communicate. In a similar vein, a purposeful etching into the dirty surfaces could bring to attention the issue of, for instance, pollution in the immediate locale just because of the clean versus dirty contrast that it creates – spot theory aids the determination of the extent to which reverse graffiti is embedded in the local ambiences to communicate the different types of messages as intended by their creators.

Finally, although, the context of digitized graffiti examples might be lost on remote audiences, capturing graffiti works by camera immortalizes them in a digital world (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, p.59). As mentioned above, a short life span is acute reality to reverse graffiti works, thus, taking photos or "flicks" – as they are known in the graffiti community – is probably the only way to preserve them for individual and/or public references. Even though spot theory does not cover the digital realm (it is safe to assume that strategic posting of graffiti pictures on specialized websites and social media sites yield different amounts of attention), the reasons behind reverse graffiti creators' decisions to upload the pictures of their works online are tied to their different motives: the desire to show and seek recognition as well as popularity, a wish to contribute to the public knowledge about (reverse) graffiti and serve as an example of new techniques for beginners, and even to 'decriminalize' it by robbing the viewers of information about the location of a particular graffiti piece and its relationship with the law there (Snyder, 2006, pp.94-96). Of course, the dissemination of reverse graffiti pictures on the Internet is subject to uncontrolled sharing by third parties on a vast variety of pages with their own respective agendas as well as to tweaking with photo editing tools, both of which have a potential to give new meanings to reverse graffiti works. They add a whole new world of dimensions to the typology of reverse graffiti messages that ought to be researched in the future, but are not the focus of this paper. Instead, the digital aspect of recording street art is introduced here to address the perception of temporality by reverse graffiti authors.

Collectively the frameworks of writers' motivations and spot theory help to answer the what, how, where and why questions of reverse graffiti which provide a more comprehensive

picture of this street art practice and facilitate the development of its definition as well as give a glimpse into the motivations and messages. The supposedly inherent eco quality in clean tagging, however, requires a more issue-based approach, thus, it is analyzed through the communication and environmental action lenses in the subsequent section.

2.4. Communication in Reverse Graffiti Messages

The aforementioned examples of faculty-specific scribbles at the university latrines, political slogans in the streets of Kenya, and messages on the walls of separating 'globalized fences' only go to show that graffiti is a means of communication. Granted, the word *media* has a different ring to it than a chunk of concrete wall covered with a jumble of tags, throw-ups and pieces. People tend to think of the latest informational technologies and gadgets, social media and traditional press, professional journalists and citizen news when they seek information or wish to publicly exchange opinions. Despite this rather rudimental understanding of media, however, graffiti works perfectly fit the profile of mediated communication. Schulz (2004) sets three main functions of mediatization, or developments in human communication that overcome spatial and temporal limitations, namely:

a) Relay – a connection between realities that happen in different places and times as well as to people of various social and cultural backgrounds;

b) Semiotic – the condition for information to be successfully deciphered is its readability and reader's familiarity with the symbols;

c) Economic – messages have a bigger chance of reaching a wider public if they can be easily replicated, thus, the format might be standardized to facilitate mass production.

If graffiti is not done for a personal reference only in one's own private property behind closed doors, then its author's message has a potential to reach anyone who passes by, irrespective of their age, gender or race and it is visible round-the-clock. Of course, the longevity of graffiti pieces, especially the reverse ones, depends on natural and human factors but so do the other types of mediated communication. For example, outdoor posters are subject to wear-and-tear by the weather while articles online may be removed by moderators and interfered with by hackers. The second function, semiotic, is very much a reflection of graffiti writer's motivations: if graffiti pieces, such as those that comment on the society, are targeted at the general public, the letters, symbols and images will be easy to understand, but if they are meant for the judgment of

graffiti peers, such as the very intricate wildstyle pieces, only people who are familiar with this subculture and, perhaps, this particular style are able to decode it. Ferrell and Weide (2010) have correctly observed that such examples are more abundant in the "cutty places" away from the public eye because they require more execution time, are less likely to be removed by the city officials and thus can gain recognition among the other graffiti artists (p.50). The readability of reverse graffiti messages has yet to be explored: it would be tempting to assume that because of the rather simplistic dirt removal method suggested by Truman's definition and the arguable inherent connection with environmental issues, reverse graffiti ought to be easy to read. Nevertheless, that can only be determined by examining the intended messages of grime art as explained by their creators.

Finally, the economic function of mediatization dictates that graffiti must be accessible and affordable for a wider dissemination. Street art ticks this box twice as proven by the sheer number of graffiti works in and around the urban centers, and by the collection of graffiti flicks online. That is not to say that anyone with a spray can is automatically a graffitists but the re-usability of stencils, for example, lends itself to a fast and cheap multiplication of the same message. Whereas such economical application of graffiti is somewhat limited to cut-out silhouettes, the possibilities of copying digital samples (and their styles) are countless. The same goes for reverse graffiti messages, providing that they entail stencils in their making and/or are immortalized on the Internet. Ergo, grime graffiti qualifies as mediated communication but to avoid generalization with such a broad conclusion, it is further investigated below.

No matter if graffiti pieces are met by the onlookers with a glance of dissatisfaction, a jaw open with amazement, tools to remove it or even a magic marker to contribute to it, as long as they cause a reaction and individual interpretations, they interact with the public (Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012). It is worth noting, though, that it is not a direct verbal kind of interaction – graffiti creators do not express their views orally and in person. Instead, they use letters, symbols and imagery as well as specific tools and surfaces to impart their messages to the intended audiences. The decision whether to keep one's graffiti interpretation to him/herself or to take an active part in communicating with its creator and the rest of the society separates monological interaction from a dialogical one. The first one refers to mass information spread with no opportunities to talk back to the source, while the latter one encompasses a reciprocal relationship between the involved parties. The dialogue does not have to take place in one given

time and place but that means that some of the contextual value of the message may be lost (Tomlinson, 1999, pp.158-59). Both monological and dialogical types of interaction are never in control by the graffiti creators, rather, it is choice made by the audiences: hypothetically speaking, writers may want to isolate their works from alterations, misperceptions and criticism but there is nothing that stops observers from interpreting and reacting to them. Although reverse graffiti might prove to be substantially different from traditional street art in its application and objectives, it is hard to believe that the same interactivity principles would not hold in grime art.

Whereas accounting for all the possible objects that could serve as physical media carrying graffiti is practically impossible since it can be done on pretty much everything, Tomlinson (1999) makes a handy distinction between "time-biased" and "space-biased" media (p.153). The stationary graffiti canvases are time-biased as they are available at any time but only in one location. Making pictures as well as selecting a moving spot for graffiti, on the other hand, make it a space-biased medium because it travels beyond its location of origin. The artists' motivations and spot theory have shown that graffiti on mobile objects bridges different audiences and thus boosts the chances of wider interaction. Such mode of communication has the advantage of reaching and, to a certain extent, involving more people but the downside of it is that direct experiences take primacy over mediated ones: "Distant stories need to be told in a way which corresponds to local issues" (Tomlinson, 1999, p.179). This rule of effective mediated communication is useful when assessing if reverse graffiti creators actually incorporate environmentalism in their works; the questions to be asked are if the content of their messages on immobile surfaces reflects local or global eco issues, and if the ones on moving objects have a more universally appealing value.

Graffiti letters serve a double purpose as they count for text and image – the drive and peer pressure to develop one's own style has resulted in a colorful catalogue of street art calligraphy. That is of course not always the case as, for example, tags are rarely appreciated for their rich content and elaborate design (Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012, p.25). Nevertheless, the role of visuals alongside the morphology of graffiti has the potential to capture the imagination of passers-by: "guerrilla art can raise audience interest through its capability to contrast setting with message" (Mohrlang, 2012, p.14). Graphic images in particular have a propensity to be easily remembered, affect observers intellectually and emotionally, and concentrate complex concepts into one space. Consequentially, the power of creators to mediate

22

environmental views cannot be underestimated because they inevitably transplant their subjective visualizations and interpretations of the issue onto the public (Nicholson-Cole, 2012, p.258-61). Because reverse graffiti as a medium has influence on the onlookers, it is important to ask grime artists about the content of their texts and images.

2.5. Environmental Actions

The growing human population has already left its mark on all four components of our climate: the biosphere which consists of flora and fauna, the cryoshpere of ice sheets, the hydrosphere, or planet's water reservoirs, and the atmosphere, also known as the air that surrounds us. The grim forecast for the future is that the rate of resource exhaustion and pollution is only likely to accelerate and endanger all that lives on planet Earth (Emmott, 2013). The changes and their causes are not kept secret but the mixed messages about environmental problems stir confusion. In addition to refutation of man-caused climate change by some interest groups, the foundations of consumer and investor trust in the ecological responsibility of companies have been shaken by their disingenuous claims. Misleading advertising and corporate communication is driven by the growing market for environmentally friendly goods and services; a predicted $845 billion by 2015 is a strong incentive to tap into that market without actually committing to the green ideals – a practice known as *greenwashing*. Largely a consequence of clear law and punishment absence, greenwashing is "the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company (firm-level greenwashing) or the environmental benefits of a product or service (product-level greenwashing)" (Delmas & Burbano, 2011, pp.3-6).

Eco-communication, however, does not come solely from the corporations. In its traditional sense, environmental messages are disseminated by social actors in systems bound by social rules and powers; one can see communication coming from officials, companies, scientists, mass media, and prominent public figures. They all have cultural, economic, political and ideological agendas that either limit or encourage action toward environmental damage in their communications (Milstein, 2009, p.346). Informational communication technologies (ICTs) are praised by the eco advocates for their qualities of reaching global connected audiences and for enabling them to interact with each other which encourages deliberation and shapes informed opinions about the environment. What is more, reading news online is comparably

'greener' than doing so in a paper due to natural resource consumption (although traditional media can still spread awareness about eco issues). Or at least such is a popular perception of ICTs when in fact "rapid cycles of innovation and planned obsolescence accelerate both the production of new electronic hardware and the accumulation of obsolete and junk electronics, known as electronic waste" (Maxwell & Miller, 2011, pp.1-2). Moreover, the empathic power of communicating geographically distant problems over technology is questionable when compared to the much closer relation to local happenings (Tomlinson, 1999, p.179). Hence, the different means of spreading environmental messages have different conveying powers and limitations.

It is not to say that street art is the savior of environmental communication that is free of ideological agendas and pollution, and has a personal appeal to its onlookers, however, the potential of reverse graffiti to disseminate eco messages due to its sustainable method of application and perhaps its content is worth exploring because it is a form of mediated communication, as established above. Reverse graffiti does not leave permanent marks or promote the use of spray cans which is a clear divorce from the traditional graffiti application. Furthermore, graffiti creators also have their agendas but their alternative subculture gives them and their works a chance to break away from the socially accepted dogmas and possibly present a fresh approach to environmental issues (Nicholls, 2012). The understudied nature of grime art messages leaves a gap in a form of public address that needs to be filled in order to know how to handle it properly as its current legal status is unclear while it might be expressing potent ideas.

The media and academics seem to take the eco value of grime art for granted by pointing to its sustainability (Truman, 2010; Barrows, 2009; Brenhouse, 2010) but that is the judgment – no matter how well weighted – of outside observers. Only the authors of reverse graffiti pieces have the authority to tell if their works are actually a manifestation of a green practice and/or if they send environmental messages, or if the green value of their works are just a by-product of their intentions, which depend on their personal motivations and contribute to the understanding of reverse graffiti phenomenon in general. A theory of environmental action and perception provides a wider understanding of the environment by pointing that its physical meaning should not be treated separately from the social one: the physical milieu has surpassed the functions of mere shelter or food source and has become the subject of political and social struggles. Therefore, from the symbolic socialism point of view, environmental actions range from planting a tree to constructing a new highway, or anything that adds, alters, destroys or preserves the

environment (Appleyard, 1979, pp.143-48). In that sense, carrying out reverse graffiti is already an environmental act as it modifies the appearance of the urban landscape; the environmental significance of its content, however, is still obscure. Therefore, the communication model (Figure 1, Appleyard, 1979, p.144) of the environmental action and perception theory is used as a part of the theoretical framework to assess the messages of reverse graffiti creators because even if they do not focus primarily on eco concerns, they are still part of the environmental communication by the nature of their actions.
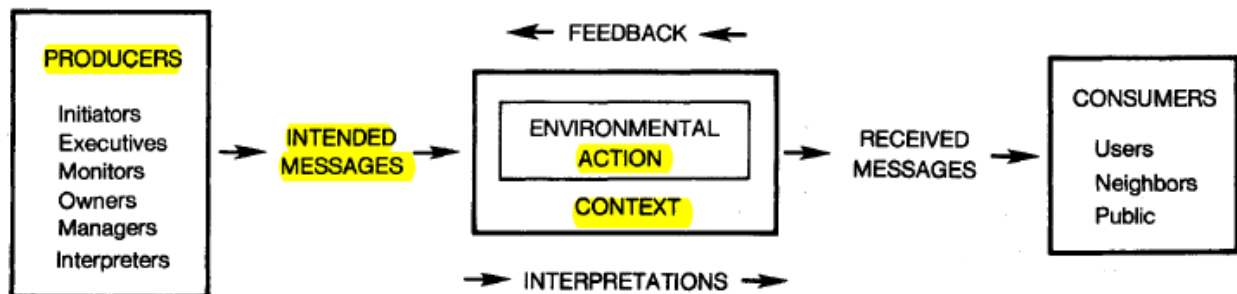

Figure 1. Communication model of environmental actions.

The yellow parts in Figure 1 mark the sections of the communication model that are used to examine the messages of reverse graffiti creators. The perceptions part is omitted because it deals with the audience which would be the next logical step in grime art analysis but not undertaken in this paper due to the size and time constraints of this research. The first part – producers – specifies the role of the environmental actors, or in this case, the creators of reverse graffiti. They can be initiating and executing the action of varying effectiveness to the milieu, monitoring those actions by means of regulations and law, owning or managing by possessing physical assets and exercising control over them, or interpreting the environmental actions of others for the public and by doing so form opinions (Appleyard, 1979, p.145). Clearly reverse graffiti creators are executives of environmental actions because they are the ones applying grime art to the surfaces. However, they could also qualify as any other type of producer simultaneously, if, for example, the creators were also politicians or journalists, which could put the understanding of reverse graffiti in a completely new light by breaking it away from a hip-hop youth subculture. Ergo, the communication model also facilitates the development of reverse graffiti definition besides examining its messages.

The second highlighted part of the model, intended messages, is very much connected to grime art creators' motivations and their choosing of spots. Depending on what they try to

achieve with their actions – mark a territory, prove themselves to peers, decorate spaces or sell products – the creators will place their messages in according locations for the targeted audience to see them, according to spot theory. The orientations of intentions behind environmental actions are summarized in Figure 2 (Appleyard, 1979, p.146): they can be directed for self-development, for utilizing or prettifying places or aimed at the consumers of the messages. The latter has two levels: "On the surface they may be attention-catching, informative, directive, caring, persuasive, or discreet. At a deeper level they may be oriented to selling a person (figuratively speaking), an agency, an idea, or a product; they may seek social control, education, or simply entertainment" (Appleyard, 1979, p.147). Once again, the types of intended messages can overlap.

Self (producers)	Action	Others (consumers)
Identity Power Status	Instrumental Aesthetic	Attention-catching Informative Directive Caring Persuasive Discreet

Figure 2: Orientations of intentions behind environmental actions.

Finally, all environmental actions are carried out in a certain context. In other words, personal beliefs, norms and values, or attitude towards eco issues, together with one's knowledge and skills to carry out a certain type of action and its place in the actor's daily schedule are influenced by the outside forces of governmental policies, societal restrictions, financial penalties or rewards and existing technology (Stern, 2000, pp.416-18). For instance, if they had full support of the police, the reverse graffiti creators could be less likely to communicate rebellious anti-law messages. Alternatively, the context of the reverse graffiti act itself is the location that can play into the messages: the calls for freedom mediated with the help of graffiti on separating political walls would make little sense where citizens have the liberty of moving. In this sense, graffiti creators' motivations, choice of location and the content of their communication collectively contribute to the better understanding of the overall reverse graffiti phenomenon. Developing the definition of reverse graffiti from its creators' point of view is the overarching objective of this paper followed by the sub-questions of what motivates them and what is the content of their messages.

3. Research Design and Methodology

In pursuance of developing the definition of reverse graffiti and exploring the motives and messages of its creators, semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews are employed as the method to collect first-hand data. Such a method provides insight into the reverse graffiti works directly from their authors – a source of information that is the most credible in assessing what grime art entails as it is not coming from someone unattached to the world of street art: "Research participants, local citizens, or those traditionally referred to as 'the researched' are able to participate in creating and expressing their own knowledge" (Cornish & Dunn, 2009, p.666). In addition to that, the merit of flexibility during the interviews serves to expand the range of research points in the process according to the individual answers, and permits an on-the-spot exploration of important issues in-depth (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003, p.148). For this reason, the interview question guide is used as the skeleton for the gathering of information; the respondents have a lot of freedom in their answers (as there are no rigid, right or wrong answers when talking about personal ties to reverse graffiti) but the main question themes guide them in order to address the most pressing issues of definition, motives and messages.

In the broad sense, the subjects of the semi-structured interviews are people who have a connection to street art in general. Reverse graffiti creators is the most desirable target group, however, due to the relative novelty of grime art and its questionable legality, the delegates of it are scarce and not easy to contact with. Even though the core of interviewees are reverse graffiti creators, including people/companies that do reverse graffiti for profit, the research is enriched by juxtaposing this group with people who use different eco-savvy methods, and with graffitists who choose the more conventional street art methods. The benefits of such an inclusive approach are twofold: first, it gives an insight into the explanation of reverse graffiti from those who are inside this culture but choose not to do it, and second, it helps to untangle the relationship between reverse graffiti and eco-graffiti as presented in some of the online sources (*WebEcoist*, *The New York Times*). Furthermore, the distinction lines between the individuals who do reverse graffiti strictly for art or for money, and who stick to traditional graffiti or employ environmentally friendly methods alone have proved to be blurred as graffiti creators identify themselves with more than one group of respondents. Ergo, interviewing people who are not bound by one definition has supplied the research with significant multifarious data about reverse graffiti. The respondents' category fluidity is illustrated in Figure 3.

Group / Name	Artist	Company	Reverse graffitist	Eco-graffitist	Traditional graffitist	Commissioned graffitist
Moose/Paul Curtis	✓	–	✓	✓	–	✓
GreenGraffiti (Jim Bowes)	–	✓	✓	✓	–	✓
Dutch Ink (Martin Pace)	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓
Scott Wade	✓	–	✓	✓	–	✓
Jesse Graves	✓	–	–	✓	–	✓
Vinchen	✓	–	–	✓	✓	–
TJ	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	–
DL	✓	–	–	✓	✓	–
Klaus Dauven	✓	–	✓	✓	–	✓
Mosstika (Edina Tokodi)	✓	✓	–	✓	–	–

Figure 3: Typology of respondents.

As the table shows, the vast majority of respondents identify themselves as artists, however, that does not prevent them from doing commissioned pieces of street art – in other words, these demographic categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, Martin Pace is a reverse graffiti artist who has established the Dutch Ink company with his business partners, while Paul Curtis, also known as Moose, has not institutionalized grime art but is available for individual projects. Mosstika, founded by Edina Tokodi, is an institutionalized collective of artists, therefore, it is also marked as a company. At the same time, Jim Bowes, the founder of GreenGraffiti company, was very clear about the fact that he is not an artist since the designs are outsourced but he is the one who applies reverse graffiti pieces to the surfaces. Due to the presence of the industrial element among the respondents, the word "artist" is purposefully avoided in the research question of this thesis and replaced with "creator" to account for individuals *creating* reverse graffiti works, either for personal or corporate reasons. It is used synonymously with *graffitist* because that also indicates someone doing graffiti, be it reverse, traditional or eco. The latter category, eco-graffiti, represents street art that entails zero-impact

methods or techniques that leave a small environmental footprint as opposed to spray-cans, felt-markers, glue and posters in traditional graffiti.

Because reverse graffiti is not widely practiced (or well known for that matter), the number of potential interviewees who are engaged in such activity is very limited. Consequently, the data was collected in a variety of ways to reach a broad public and increase the chances of interviewing more reverse graffiti creators and graffiti culture representatives. First of all, an extensive Internet search was carried out because the better known artists usually have their personal websites with their contact details as so do the reverse graffiti companies. Due to its popularity, the social networking site Facebook was frequently browsed for reverse graffiti groups. Messages[1] have been posted in "The Reverse Graffiti Project" and "Reverse Graffiti Movement" groups as well as in the much bigger online graffiti communities: "Street Art Berlin", "urbanartcore.eu - Urban Art, Graffiti, Street Art & Urban Culture" and "Mosstika", to name a few. The visitations of these groups led to more similar communities on Facebook. Moreover, messages were also distributed in personal circles of online contacts to spread the word about the ongoing study further, especially since the trust factor plays a big role in the relatively secret graffiti community. Nevertheless, no interviewee was a personal contact or even an acquaintance which ensured the impartiality of their answers. The interviewed graffitists were helpful by indicating the names of other possible interviewees – the snowball sampling was employed due to the limited number of reverse graffiti creators; they were added to the list of artists who have their own websites. Such chain-referral method was helpful to reach a scarce group of people "while maintaining privacy and confidentiality" (Penrod, Preston, Cain & Starks, 2003, p.101). Finally, a Hip Hop House in Rotterdam as well as local graffiti and skateboard shops were visited for networking with the geographically close graffiti communities.

Since getting in contact and maintaining it with reverse graffiti creators, a scarce group, and regular graffiti artists, who are likely to be hiding their true identities and contacts, is a very fickle business, the time period for communicating with them started in December 2013 and continued until the mid May 2014. Facebook and email messages which stated the purpose as well as the status of the interviewer as a Master student at Erasmus University were used to make the initial contact; the templates of these messages can be found in Appendix B. Regrettably, not all messages received a response or led to an interview. Ten graffitists were interviewed in total

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[1] Message templates are available in Appendix B.

from a great variety of countries: four from the US, one from the UK, one from Canada, one from South Africa, two from the Netherlands and one from Germany. In case of companies, the country of foundation was marked rather than the nationality of the interviewee because, as the communication model of environmental action dictates, reverse graffiti creators operate in the context of local laws (Appleyard, 1979, p.144); so in case of GreenGraffiti which is based in Amsterdam and represented by an American national Jim Bowes it is placed under the Netherlands in the demographic overview. The same goes for Mosstika in New York even though its founder is Hungarian. The geographical diversity accounts for rich data, however, the demographic statistics show that English speaking countries are in favor. This linguistic inequality could be explained by the fact that the search for the potential respondents (as well as the interviews) was carried out in English. The results could be also possibly gender biased as only two of the interviewed street art creators are a female – TJ and Edina Tokodi. That was not a conscious choice, rather a reflection of male dominance in street art culture. It is worth noting, though, that the gender of Vinchen is unknown as the artist preferred to stay incognito. Three of the respondents either did not disclose or requested to hide their true identities, instead, only a pseudonym and the first name letters are visible in the results and in Figure 3: Vinchen, TJ and DL.

Whereas online interviews allow for a better self-impression and performance management (Broom, Hand & Tovey, 2009, p.52) and are less time consuming when transcribing (in case of emails or any other written form), face-to-face interviews have the advantage of spontaneous responses and personal interaction. Given the geographical proximity, the interviews were conducted face-to-face. However, since foreign respondents comprised the majority, they were interviewed either via email or via Skype online call, depending on their preferences. Once again, the mixed approaches are a result of the uncommon reverse graffiti practice – both an intriguing trait and a limitation. When applicable, all foreign respondents were asked to do a Skype interview instead of emailing the answers in order to allow for some spontaneity. On the down side, an online call always had the risk of technical glitches and poor communication quality; luckily, these problems were experienced only once and were not detrimental to the results. Only two respondents insisted on giving feedback via email and Jesse Graves followed up the interview with a short written clarification. All verbal interviews were recorded (30 minutes the shortest and 1,5 hour the longest) and transcribed verbatim for the

analysis – the language of the respondents was not corrected and their answers were not paraphrased in order to preserve their original meanings and to ensure the validity of results (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p.305). Due to a cultural idiosyncrasy of the interviewer, "amm" marks the sound "um" in the transcripts of the interviews as well as in the respondents' quotes that are used as empirical data in the results.

As mentioned above, the respondents were asked similar yet not identical questions because not all of them could be grouped under one specific occupational category. The semi-structured interview method also allowed posing questions in a succession that suited respondents' individual situations best rather than sticking to a predetermined order. In a few cases, the interviewees suggested looking at their biographies, Q&A sections and previous interviews on their websites which meant that some of the questions were personalized based on their background research – the same applies to graffitists who had information about them available online. Despite the flexibility and slight customization of the questions to the artists, companies and traditional graffiti creators, all interviews addressed the core issues of reverse graffiti definition, the creators' motives and messages; full interview question guide is provided in Appendix A. The rapport was established with the help of the main themes which were developed within the theoretical framework and accompanied by supporting introductory, connective and conclusive questions:

- Background – serves as an introduction and establishes what activities the respondents are taking part in and how they identify themselves, which helps to place them in the "Producers" part of the communication model of environmental actions and adds to the context of their actions (Appleyard, 1979, p.144; Stern, 2000, pp.416-18);

- Techniques and Methods – reveal the practical side of the respondents' graffiti works and directly ask for their interpretations of reverse graffiti. This theme is based on skills/physical pleasures part of Halsey and Young's (2006) motivation model as well as touches upon spot theory (Ferrell & Weide, 2010) since the methods of grime art are inherently tied to specific surfaces;

- Motivations – explores the reasons behind carrying out reverse graffiti and the content of its messages. This theme connects the graffitist's desires of motivational model (Halsey & Young, 2006) with the intended messages of environmental action and perception theory (Appleyard, 1979, p.146);

31

- Location – addresses the relevance of location and surfaces which consequently lead to questions about the targeted audiences. The foundations of this theme are built on the spot theory and its emphasis on the importance of different spaces (Ferrell & Weide, 2010). However, it is inextricable from the aforementioned models of motivations (Halsey & Young, 2006) and communication (Appleyard, 1979) because graffiti visibility in one or another locale is a result of individual graffiti creator's reasoning and their broadcasted messages are not independent from the surroundings;

- Graffiti Debate – determines the personal opinions of respondents about the position that reverse graffiti occupies in the social debates and thus contributes to its definition. This brief part is based on the existing discussions and criticism of graffiti, such as that of legitimacy and its use in marketing (Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012, pp.29-30; Delmas & Burbano, 2011, pp.3-6), and contributes to the context of its creation (Appleyard, 1979, p.144; Stern, 2000, pp.416-18);

- Future – probes into the expectations of the interviewees and helps to end the interview.

Finally, the transcribed interviews were analyzed by means of categorizing answers according to the hybrid of deductive and inductive thematic patterns. Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows to organize empirical data and to make sense of it with regards to themes, and because it is flexible enough to use predetermined as well as newly emergent categories (Marks, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2008). Since the aim of this exploratory qualitative paper is to place reverse graffiti in the existing literature about the graffiti culture and to test it against the respective theories and models, first and foremost, deductive method was used in the interview analysis – the main answer categories were known at the outset and used throughout the analysis (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p.303; Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Based on the themes in the interview question guide, and thus subsequently on extensive literature review and theories, the main three patterns serve to answer the research question and the sub-questions in a direct and concise manner; they are: the "Definition of Reverse Graffiti" which includes answers about the techniques, physical locations and individual interpretations of what grime art stands for as well as its relationship with the more conventional graffiti and the legal authorities, the "Motivations of Reverse Graffiti Creators" that groups the answers about the background and personal motivations of grime graffitists, and the "Reverse Graffiti Messages" which gathers

information about the content of reverse graffiti pieces, the objectives of their creators and their views on the existing debates around the employment of this unconventional type of street art.

The use of an inductive method in thematic analysis, on the other hand, indicates that new thematic patterns were recognized while processing the raw data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258) – unforeseen answer categories were developed and incorporated under the headings of the three main categories with a sub-heading because all thematic categories help to understand reverse graffiti, its creators' motives and messages albeit from a different angle. Categorizing the data in interview transcripts was an iterative and long process which entailed careful reading and re-reading to ensure the accuracy of results (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p.83). At first, three colors were used to mark the respondents' answers that broadly related to the main three themes, these answers were then grouped together in separate documents where they were re-read and scrupulously color coded again to sift the most substantial findings. It was during the second color coding stage that the new themes started appearing, they were marked by different colors than the initial markings. The findings pertaining to both the prior and the new themes per respondent were then compared to those of other interviewees to make sense of data in the results part. Although to a certain degree subject to the unique interpretation of data by the researcher (Patton, 1990), collectively the findings in each patter should allow establishing an inclusive definition of reverse graffiti and inspect the motives as well as the messages of its creators.

4. Results

The results of this qualitative study are comprised of ten interviews with people who all create graffiti in the broad sense but who employ different methods and are driven by a wide range of motives. The contacts of seven graffiti creators were found during Internet searches, however, the names of Scott Wade and Klaus Dauven were indicated by the fellow grime graffitists while DL who does spray-can pieces was contacted by means of online networking – a result of a snowball sampling method. In general, the variety of backgrounds of the interviewees allowed for rich contextual answers: the most famous reverse graffiti names like Moose (real name Paul Curtis), GreenGraffiti company and Klaus Dauven gave a possibility to look at grime art from the perspective of its ambassadors and modern initiators. For example, Moose (together with Alexandre Orion who sadly did not participate in this study) was identified by several respondents as the influential figure in their personal cases. At the same time, Edina Tokodi and Jesse Graves are well known in their respective crafts of moss graffiti and mud stencils. It goes without saying that the views of interviewees with less frequently proliferated names on the Web are just as valuable and treated the same.

Even though the interview answers are grouped into three main patterns that directly address the questions of reverse the graffiti definition, its creators' motivations and messages, the division between them is not always straightforward – some arguments of graffitists can be categorized under more than one heading. For example, the choice of location can pertain to both the technical side of doing grime art and thus represent a distinguishable quality of such street art, and it can be a part of the creator's motivation tied to the visibility of their work. Furthermore, the major emergent themes within every pattern were grouped together and presented under a separate sub-heading – one of those can be found in every pattern. Finally, because this study is exploratory and the interviews are semi-structured, some of the respondents went more in depth on certain issues than the others and they also had their freedom to talk about what they thought was important in order to understand their works and (reverse) graffiti better. Therefore, the quotes that are used as empirical data under the three main patterns as well as the transcripts vary in length. That also means that the transcripts contain valuable information that was not used in the analysis part but should be consulted nevertheless for a fuller picture of the results.

4.1. Definition of Reverse Graffiti

The first question attempts to establish the very foundations for understanding what reverse graffiti actually is from the graffitists' point of view and thus undertakes the main research question of this paper: How do reverse graffiti creators define reverse graffiti? Obviously, this pattern includes responses of all interviewees for a twofold reason: current sources are not quite clear on what reverse graffiti entails and the creators of grime art are scarce, therefore, an inclusive approach has a better chance at describing this phenomenon more accurately. To begin with, the respondents were asked for their own interpretations and the descriptions of their techniques before moving on to the more conceptual issues. All respondents had opinions about what grime art is and what it is not irrespective of the form of street art that they do themselves, except for Vinchen who was not familiar with the concept:

"I have not heard of the term 'reverse graffiti'" (Vinchen)

Unfamiliarity with terminology does not automatically mean that the respondent has never encountered reverse graffiti – it is also possible that it might be designated differently in the surroundings of this particular artist. Notwithstanding, it could also be arguably blamed on the relative invisibility of grime art in the street culture as confirmed by another graffitist DL who could only relate it to the YouTube video of Alexandre Orion drawing skulls in the soot of a tunnel and the classic "Wash me" example on dirty vehicles:

"But that's actually the only thing I've seen and yeah, you know, the writing on cars, on dirty cars, you know, they say 'It's dirty. Your car is dirty' that kind of stuff." (DL)

His limited encounters with clean tagging, however, introduce the notion of removing dirt that is usually associated with reverse graffiti and underlined in its definition by Truman (2010, p.8). That proved to be a popular understanding among the vast majority of graffiti creators, although somewhat more bound to the urban filth in the explanations by those who do not remove dirt in their methods:

"[R]everse graffiti […] that is what folks are calling the process of removing dirt to create an image". (Jesse Graves)

"It's also called clean graffiti. They do this art form actually by cleaning up the dirty, dusty surfaces in the city." (Edina Tokodi)

Not surprisingly, graffitists who engage in this particular form of street art, whether for commercial or artistic purposes, gave more elaborate and specific definitions:

35

> "So reverse graffiti is selectively cleaning a communication message out of the dirt. […] Everything that we do is about organizing chaos, dirt is basically chaos and we're just organizing it in a way that our eyes see it as a letter or an, an image." (Jim Bowes)
>
> "It is creating images on the dirty windows of automobiles, amm, using subtractive technique." (Scott Wade)
>
> "[T]he reverse graffiti is kind of a form of expressing the interesting ideas as in graffiti but in a, a little bit more appreciated one I guess. […] Dirty usually. I haven't found any area that I would do with moss." (TJ)

The next three definitions of reverse graffiti by Martin Pace, Moose and Klaus Dauven go beyond the idea of mere pollution clearance: while they do agree that messages can be carried out in dirt, they show that it is only a part of reverse graffiti. According to them, it is a subtractive technique that can be carried out on different surfaces by removing layers:

> "[I]t's a great outdoor canvas for the entire public to enjoy while driving past […] I mean, I don't know what they're like in Europe, I'm sure it's quite, it's quite a heavy moss with a lot of like actual tangible dirt on it. […] it's like dry organic moss that's growing on the walls here – it's because of the maritime climate and it gets fed by the salt air, and exposed to a lot of sunlight. Yeah, so it brushes off real easy." (Martin Pace)
>
> "Well for me it's any, any process that involves creating a contrast on a surface without doing any damage to it, so it's mostly about cleaning. Although the stuff that I've done on poster sides, I'm quite often sanding through laze glue to go back to the original surface or physically cutting through posters that have become out of date, so are litter. So mostly it's, it's any process that will create a contrast good enough for you to see it from, you know, twenty yards. Anything, anything in the, any process that does that I call reverse graffiti." (Moose)

While Martin Pace and Moose named specific surfaces where they carry out their reverse graffiti pieces, Klaus Dauven spoke in more general terms:

> "[T]he method to take something away, to make drawings by taking something away is a princip[le] of my work nowadays, but it's, I'm not only working outside, I'm working inside and with many things." (Klaus Dauven)

Even though old posters could be considered a type of pollution on the streets, moss is an organic material that is not necessarily associated with filth. What is more, it seems like it is possible to

create images by uncovering the original surface from the extra layers on top of it, therefore, Truman's (2010) exclusive reference to reverse graffiti as dirt cleaning is challenged. The case of Martin Pace also shows that weather conditions – a contextual factor in the communication model of environmental actions (Appleyard, 1979, p.146) – have influence on the surfaces where reverse graffiti can be done: dry moss covers the walls in maritime climate. In this sense, the physical space aspect of the location – as described in spot theory – is crucial to the very definition of reverse graffiti.

Being familiar with good territories and appropriate surfaces also comes into play when choosing where to carry out reverse graffiti pieces as not every dirty or layered object yields the same quality or visibility. Spot theory dictates that the knowledge of locations is an everyday reality in graffiti culture as different landscapes account for the different exposure as well as the longevity of their works (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, pp.50-54):

> "[T]he surfaces […] it has to be a open wall concrete that has a surface at breeze, you could say". (Martin Pace)

> "[I]n our part of the country we have this limestone, crushed limestone gravel basically mixed with a little bit of clay and that creates a really fine powdery white dust that just settles on the back of the car, so that's perfect. Really high contrast with a shadow inside and so just makes a great canvas". (Scott Wade)

Scott Wade reinforced the observation made by Martin Pace that climate conditions have a huge influence on the surfaces; this argument is supported further by Jim Bowes who specified detailed differences between the countries:

> "It has to be a good combination of a, the original color, it needs to be very light and the dirt on top of it needs to have a good contrast. Now that varies by country, so, for instance, in the Netherlands our dirt is very dark, is very black, amm, which is perfect so a light color tile, black stuff – you get a great great great contrast. Italy and Bulgaria have a very light brown pollution, which means they have huge success doing things out of the asphalt because what happens is when you clean it, you get this beautiful, rich black color underneath. […] The other thing is really important, is what is the, the material itself. So, for instance, natural stone doesn't work very well coz it's not very porous so the, the dirt doesn't really settle in in there. […] it's not that every single surface works for reverse graffiti, it's not true at all." (Jim Bowes)

In addition to climate and color peculiarities, Jim Bowes mentioned the face of the surface as an important factor – it has to be permeable for additional layers, such as dirt. TJ also stressed the importance of the same factor:

> "I made certain attempts that didn't work out, and that depends on the type of wall that you're using – it has to be smooth obviously". (TJ)

For TJ, however, the smoothness of the surface is a deciding factor – the two points made by the reverse graffitists suggest that porous flat locations are the best for reverse graffiti. Meanwhile, Moose noted that uncluttered spots result in better visibility:

> "The better ones are out of town because in town, if you got a good wall, it either has a poster on it, it's a shop front or somebody's painted something on it, and so it's limited. So I use the pavements a lot because there there's very little goes on, on the pavements. […] I mean, when we clean something, we want there to be a contrast that's so bright that you can see it from a long way – there's no point in cleaning something and not seeing that contrast. So for that reason, road signs are actually really good because they, they reflect light when the cars hit them." (Moose)

Clearly experience guides reverse graffiti creators in their quest for the best results; graffiti writers' motivation model of Halsey and Young (2006) calls it the emotional pleasure of improving skills and techniques in producing an aesthetically pleasing piece (pp.279-83). The trial and error gives graffitists a chance to find out which surfaces work best for their pieces to stick better, look prettier and last longer. By and large, the main criterion for a suitable surface is to give a good enough contrast with the cleaned area to ensure its visibility.

One thing that is clear and is confirmed by all the interviewees is that reverse graffiti does not add anything to the surface, as opposed to stickers, paste-ups and the paint from cans or markers that are used in traditional graffiti. The same observation can be made from the whole gamut of tools and methods that are used when applying reverse graffiti to the surfaces:

> "(U)sing brushes, sticks, fingers, amm, rubber paint shaper tools, things like that, in order to create an image. […] So amm, and then trying to figure out how to get some shading or more detail using a finger nail, using the pads of my fingers to brush with, and eventually trying out other art tools." (Scott Wade)

"I just use a wider brush and water. That was one of the surprising things that I've found in the comments on it is that people think I use come kind of chemicals to clean off the dirt but you just need water and a wide brush, and that's what I use. And stencils." (TJ)

There is more than one way to clean a surface, as proved by Scott Wade and TJ, and the tool preferences depend on the graffitist. Dutch Ink, on the other hand, uses a variety of methods:

"[T]here's three styles to it really that I can uncode, the first being just amm free hand brush strokes: you know, with a steel brush and you get your different variations of bristles, going from plastics to the coppers and whets and that's how you get different impressions there. Then you work with a lot of stencils, stencils are great, cutting out of like a birch ply with ward and then it's kind of working it from there. And then besides using just manual labor, with some of the commissioned works we've done, we've used, we've taken a 4x4 truck and we've got a, a barrel on the back that we filled with rain water, you know, to be eco about it, and then a generator which pumps a high pressure hose, and then we just blasted through." (Martin Pace)

Perhaps due to its reusability, GreenGraffiti also employs stencils:

"So really what we did is we created this, this sort of kit, collage kit – […] it could be used in anything you adapt it to, any shape. […] That's it, using that, a template." (Jim Bowes)

As shown in Picture 8, the use of stencils in reverse graffiti differs from the traditional spray-can stenciling because the texts and images are cleaned out rather than sprayed onto the surface.

Picture 8. Stencil templates and power washer used to remove dirt from a sidewalk. Author & source: GreenGraffiti.

Reusable portable templates also facilitate the economic function of mediated communication (Schulz, 2004), which makes it easier to disseminate reverse graffiti messages. Powered machinery is another popular method alongside manual tools in reverse graffiti:

"The bigger scale stuff is more a case of being aware of what the different kind of semi-industrial power tools that we carry can do and in what location […] There's a lot of

different ways of doing it, you know: a twig on a street sign, socks on tiles, water on grimy concrete, sand on grimy stone, sticks on sand, lawnmowers on grass." (Moose)

"I'm still doing vacuum cleaner drawings with sheets […] Normally I do these works with head-brusher cleaners with water […] Power-washer, stencils or, you know amm, you know a little bit about my work? – I did big drawings on dams. […] I did it with special projections of laser and with points." (Klaus Dauven)

Ranging from sticks to lasers, the objects used by reverse graffitists come in different sizes and shapes, and depend on the resourcefulness of the creators. At the very end of his interview, DL realized that he had also done reverse graffiti in the past using his fingers:

"I always did it in the shower, you know, where you have this the plastic door, you know, which is transparent […] the vapor comes on the door and you can paint on it". (DL)

Although rather unconscious, reverse graffiti in the shower supports its definition as a subtractive technique which is not tied to dirt alone, as opposed to Truman's (2010) short description.

At least four different categories can be drawn from the interviewees' answers:

1) non-powered tools like templates, stencils, brushes with different bristles and rubber paint shapers;

2) powered machinery, such as high pressure washers and other semi-industrial power tools, lawnmowers, vacuum cleaners and lasers;

3) objects like twigs, sticks, socks as well as body parts like fingers and nails;

4) natural materials including water and sand that are used in a reductive process.

None of these tools/materials attach anything additional to the surfaces, and other than powered machinery, they are environmentally-friendly since they are organic and/or depend on human labor only. The availability of technology and work instruments is another contextual factor in environmental actions, according to Stern (2000, p. 416-18); in this case, the creation of reverse graffiti is accessible to everyone as even body parts can be drawing tools as long as there is a suitable surface. Notably, all four abovementioned categories stand in stark contrast to the works of Jesse Graves, Edina Tokodi and Vinchen who add materials onto surfaces and thus make for an accretive practice:

"[F]or the mud stencils that I'm posting outside, I wanna try to stick with something that I can dig up from the earth". (Jesse Graves)

"I'm working not just only with moss but other plants and organic materials (soil, salt, fibers ..etc) depending on the project and the location itself. […] providing viewers with art that they can reach out, touch and appreciate in a tactile way." (Edina Tokodi)

"I have incorporated such elements as ponds, earth and plants into my work." (Vinchen)

While Jesse Graves and the collective of Mosstika add organic materials to the surface, Vinchen combines spray-paint pieces with elements of nature, as it can be juxtaposed in Pictures[2] 9 and 10. Both Moose and Jim Bowes confirm this break in methodology between reverse graffiti and other types of environmentally-friendly street art by emphasizing the differences in their application:

Pictures 9 & 10. Above – moss graffiti "Hungarian Cattle", below – "People in the Walls". Authors & sources: above – Mosstika, below - Vinchen.

"Moss, mud when people draw with using moss, no, because they're adding something. If you are adding anything to a surface, you are potentially defacing it and the law of criminal damage is based on the fact that if it costs money to return something to its original state, it's regarded as criminal damage." (Moose)

"So we do more than just reverse graffiti, we are also doing things with sand printing, with moss, with milk paint, with sand, with snow." (Jim Bowes)

Due to this stark difference in the methodology of application, henceforth only interviewees who use subtractive techniques are going to be called reverse graffiti creators. Accordingly, those who add something to the surfaces are going to be referred to as graffiti creators who use accretive techniques with a distinction between graffitists who employ eco-friendly methods and spray-cans or markers. It is worth noting that TJ and Edina Tokodi actually

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[2] White circle in Picture 10 was added by the author of this paper to show the graffiti piece.

categorized reverse and moss graffiti together but on a conceptual level rather than a technical one which reinstates the environmentally-friendly street art status of both methods:

"I guess, if you're gonna call reverse graffiti, moss graffiti is also in the environmental area – you're not necessarily adding something that wouldn't otherwise grow there or something that otherwise wouldn't be there. I would still call it, apply it to reverse graffiti." (TJ)

"Well, yes. In a very conceptual way." (Edina Tokodi)

To take matters even further, this subtractive method is also not always tied to time-aggregated surface stratums outdoors as explained by Scott Wade and Klaus Dauven who sometimes manually prepare their working spots before doing reverse graffiti on them:

"I had to develop a method for dirtying up cars for events because you can't rely on a dry dirt road to go dry down a week before the event, you know. […] We got these local, it's amm, building supply place supplied us with plexiglass and we, we dirtied up this plexiglass and all the kids got to, got to play on it". (Scott Wade)

Picture 11. Reverse graffiti on a cloth at a gallery. Author & source: Klaus Dauven.

"I make big big drawings on the cleaning cloths. It's the same, same method: I made these cloths dirty outside and I clean it with stencil afterwards." (Klaus Dauven)

Since the cleaning cloths are portable – Picture 11 shows the reverse graffiti drawing on a cloth at a gallery – and the cars are mobile, these two examples defy the space-biased nature of graffiti mediums that are viewed in one location only, like walls and bridges. On the other hand, the time-biased element, or visibility that is limited to a certain amount of time according to Tomlinson (1999, p.153), is referred to persistently in the answers of both the reverse graffiti creators and the people who add natural materials onto the surfaces. The time and place of visibility as well as the durability of graffiti is epitomized by the liquidity concept in spot theory – it mandates that street artists take these aspects into account when searching for a satisfactory location (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, pp.53-57). Contrary to the expectation that reverse graffiti

pieces have a short life span due to their non-chemical application, the results show that the different places see the works endure a different amount of time:

> "People have sent me photos of it and unfortunately it has degraded but amm, it kind of adds to the image […] and people can see the process of the reverse graffiti and how the wall itself will probably re-grow." (TJ)

> "[O]ne of the most important princip[le]s of this work is that it will go away, it fades away". (Klaus Dauven)

TJ and Klaus Dauven experienced the short-lividness of their works while Jim Bowes, Martin Pace and Scott Wade pointed to the longer periods of time that reverse graffiti can survive:

> "[I]t just fades away so we have this self-healing canvas […] Sometimes reverse graffiti lasts too long, that's why we're using things like sand printing, it's a little bit shorter". (Jim Bowes)

> "I think, the life, well actually it got a lot, it got a lot of time: the first impression we did of the fish, we had about 5 years on that piece before it was starting to really disappear. […] The wall with the birds – that is […] South facing and so it doesn't see as much sun. And so being in the shade, those, that moss, that ogee – it's actually, there disappear far quicker." (Martin Pace)

> "[I]f it were done in a desert town like Las Vegas or Dubai or someplace like that, it would last a long time. You know, they'd probably have to get up there and wash it off cuz it wouldn't rain off." (Scott Wade)

Moose confirmed the argument that reverse graffiti can last for a while and noted that gradual disappearance may actually add to the aesthetic image of the drawing:

> "[T]here was tone involved because it, the moss, it started to grow back and then I'd go over again, so there's this beautiful tones in it, really gorgeous. […] we were going through five millimeters of carbon, of just dirt built up on some of the stone, and it was almost like we were engraving into the grime onto the front of the building – that's tattooing on something. So there are places that I've, that I'm working that, you know, will outlive me". (Moose)

Graffitists who use non-subtractive eco techniques also had different experiences with the temporality of their works:

"You know, the thing about mud stencils, the whole idea is that they're temporary, they wash away in the rain but I found that they, they end up staying up for a while and they would stay up indefinitely if they're in a location that isn't exposed to rain." (Jesse Graves)

"No one is sure how to treat it. Is it graffiti or just plants on a wall? As a result you never know how long your work will survive. Sometimes the works are there for several months and sometimes they're gone by the next day." (Edina Tokodi)

In comparison to the practical explanations of longevity above, Vinchen gave an alternative conceptual view on it:

"The temporality of graffiti is beautiful. It is an apt depiction of the human condition, attempting to put your personalized mark on the planet before you are wiped forever from it." (Vinchen)

Clearly, natural elements like sun, rain and even moss itself determine the longevity of eco-graffiti pieces. Whereas they are not permanent, under the right conditions, they can last quite long as illustrated in Pictures 12 and 13. Another factor that has immediate effect on the lifetime of these pieces is human activities, as suggested by TJ and Edina Tokodi, but that is not a unique quality in reverse graffiti only as all street art is subject to alterations by the public – even spray-can graffiti can disappear under a new layer of paint:

"[I]f you put it on the street, anything can happen, you know". (DL)

"So, you know, you look at, you look at street art that goes up anywhere: someone puts up a sticker, someone paints over the sticker, someone, you know, does a tag, someone
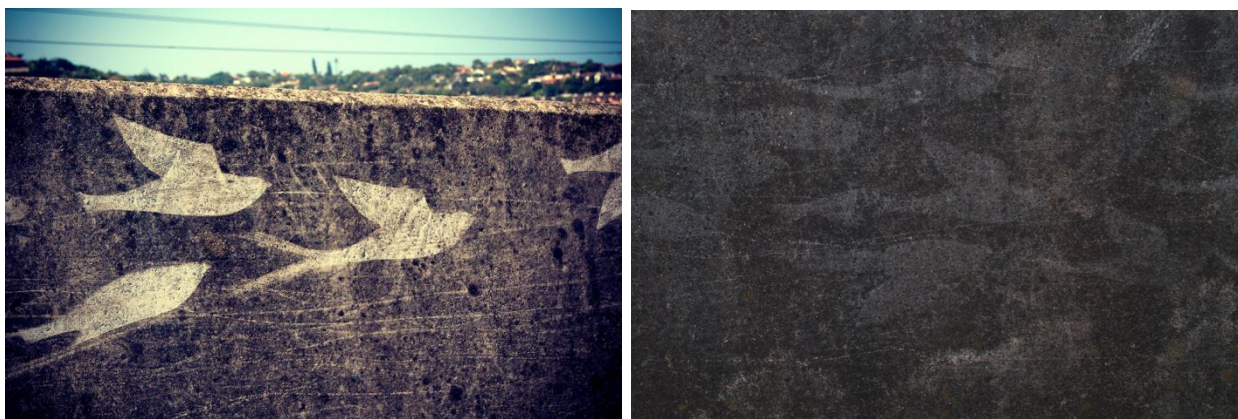
Pictures 12 & 13. Birds' stencil in 2011 (left) and in 2014 (right). Author & source: Dutch Ink.

44

paints over the tag, someone paints over that, and it's, it's always evolving". (Jesse Graves)

In order to circumvent the evanescence of their works, a few graffiti creators found it important to store the pictures of their pieces in a digital format – a common practice among the representatives of street art culture that serves to give examples, showcase achievements and inform the public, all of which, of course, depend on their personal motivations and intentions (Snyder, 2006, pp.94-96). Photographs of graffiti is another aspect of location liquidity, or in other words the time and place of visibility as well as durability, as described in spot theory, since online images have the potential of lasting longer and reaching a wider public than physical static graffiti pieces (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, pp.53-57):

> "Creating videos around putting it on the ground – it is the ultimate content marketing tool, and I believe that it should be used that way. It's great that it's on the ground but the really successful campaigns, for every person that sees it on the ground, a hundred people see it somewhere else. So it's got this incredible potential to be, I think, even more effective form of communication than traditional outdoor." (Jim Bowes)

> "[T]he actual piece maybe, maybe, you know, twenty-fifty people see it and outside, I mean, maybe a lot more, depending on the location of it, but then thousands of people can see the photo when it's posted online." (Jesse Graves)

Jim Bowes and Jesse Graves emphasize the potential of their ephemeral graffiti pieces to live a second life online as a form of communication. In addition to that, Moose and Klaus Dauven point to the photo making as a means of documenting their works, which reinforces the claim made in spot theory by Ferrell and Weide (2010) that a digital realm is also a location for graffiti pieces to be seen (p.57), and that it facilitates the economic aspect of mediated communication as pictures can be multiplied and disseminated globally (Shulz, 2004):

> "It's about getting a good photograph of it really". (Moose)

> "Yes, pictures are very important and I always do books of my work." (Klaus Dauven)

Only Scott Wade explicitly stated that he feels no strong attachment to his collection of dirty car art pictures even though that does not negate the added value of having them online, as he also has his own website with a gallery section:

> "But if, if my hard-drive crashes and I'd lose all the images I've ever done, I think I could go on, go on living". (Scott Wade)

4.1.1. Troublesome Graffiti Term

There are two issues of contention when discussing the definition of reverse graffiti in terms of graffiti: first, most of the respondents either thought it is a misnomer or expressed concerns that it sheds a negative light on their works, which connects to the second point that the association of reverse graffiti with traditional graffiti puts it at odds with law. Even graffiti creators who do not use the subtractive method in their works had reservations about the existing terminology which emphasizes the importance of appropriate identification of such activities. The answers around the first issue stem from personal interpretations and from clashes with the conventional graffiti culture representatives:

> "I tried to reach out to the graffiti world to say 'Hey, guys', and I was told to fuck myself many many times because, as far as they were concerned, as soon as you commercialize anything, it is no longer pure." (Jim Bowes)

> "[T]he real graffiti guys, they don't really acknowledge me as a full-worthy graffiti writer because I don't do trains […] the people that really are hardcore doing graffiti, they have a really strong opinion about what graffiti is, and you shouldn't […] stretch it, you know, they don't like it. So you could say that once you're doing it in broad daylight and everybody can see who you are […] then it's not graffiti anymore, you're just making a mural. And actually you are. […] I would say you can call it what you want, you know.

> But if I would call it reverse graffiti – it wouldn't be my choice of words." (DL)

Both Jim Bowes and DL spoke from their experiences with graffiti writers who considered themselves the true representatives of the culture and who did not look kindly on any deviations from their norms and values, be it commercial or less controversial street art. Scott Wade and Edina Tokodi, on the other hand, personally did not feel like the term graffiti captured the essence of their work but added unwelcome bad reputation instead:

> "I think the word 'graffiti' itself […] has that connotation of amm, of something maybe a little extralegal, outside the bounds of strict legality […] So I think the reverse part of it, I totally agree with but the graffiti part of it amm, maybe mildly, maybe in some ways but I don't, you know, I don't think that's, that really describes the kind of work that I'm doing that well." (Scott Wade)

"I don't mind people referring to my work as graffiti although I prefer the term public art. […] The only objection I have with that label is that I feel it could limit my work by categorizing it." (Edina Tokodi)

Martin Pace and Jesse Graves agreed with Edina Tokodi on the concept of public art rather than graffiti:

"I think that this removing of dirt off a concrete wall is perhaps stemming more towards an outdoor public art". (Martin Pace)

"[G]raffiti is, I mean, that's the word that the city uses […] I definitely fall into the category of street art, I don't claim to be making graffiti. Sometimes people call it that but that's not actually what it is. […] If a stencil is used I think it should be called reverse stenciling, or some other name, because as I mentioned, graffiti refers to writing and possibly specifically writing with spray paint." (Jesse Graves)

Jesse Graves also suggested that reverse graffiti could perhaps benefit from a different terminology, such as "reverse stenciling" – an idea shared by TJ and Klaus Dauven who call their activities "clean stenciling" and "deep patinations" respectively:

"To me it's kind of a, I wouldn't say an aspect of graffiti itself, I made efforts in making stencils and spray painting but I found out […] there's a negative view on it. […] So I think the bonus of reverse graffiti is that it's not really a form of graffiti, it's not destructive, so people just tend to assume it's a form of art rather than vandalism, yeah. […] I guess I would rebel against that thing that I wouldn't necessarily want it to be considered graffiti. I myself call it just stenciling, clean stenciling." (TJ)

"This term 'reverse graffiti' is not really my word because it's, I call them 'deep patinations'. […] I don't think that the important point is the question of illegality, […] the important point is a good work, a good drawing." (Klaus Dauven)

Apparently, the disagreement about coining grime art as a type of graffiti comes from both sides: the creators of reverse graffiti and the delegates of traditional graffiti. The former are uncomfortable with the notion of vandalism that is inherent in the widely accepted view of graffiti (Snyder, 2006, p.93), while the latter do not see a subtractive technique as adhering to their norms and values, such as contestation which is present in hip-hop culture (Chmielewska, 2007, p.162). Even DL who does primarily spray paint pieces does not feel like his works could be categorized as graffiti in its traditional sense because he is not "hardcore" enough. Although,

Moose made an interesting point about reverse graffiti being in fact a rebellious act in a whole new way:

> "I think it's something more subversive about standing in front of a policeman doing this than doing it in the night when he can't see you. What's more rebellious than actually standing in front of the policeman and making a massive mural, a graffiti mural?" (Moose)

Whereas that is one way of interpreting it, the undesired status of an outlaw in the answers of the majority of interviewees suggests that both reverse and other forms of eco graffiti might be more precisely described as street art – a more relaxed term that encompasses a variety of practices and is not necessarily bound by strict ideologies (McAuliffe, 2012, p.190). This finding, however, has to be treated with caution because the majority of the reverse graffiti interviewees also do commissioned pieces, or have done them at some point in their lives, which may add to their reluctance to conflate their activities with traditional graffiti. At the same time, one has to bear in mind that not a single respondent who is uncomfortable with graffiti term has identified this particular reason for their uneasiness or doubts.

The second issue, namely the awkward relationship with the authorities, arises from encounters with the legislators and law enforcers, or initiators and monitors according to the producers' section in the communication model of environmental action and perception theory (Appleyard, 1979, p.145):

> "[Y]ou have to pay if the police get you. It's not allowed because you are changing something, you don't have the right to and so you get problems […] They compare it too much to normal graffiti." (Klaus Dauven)

According to Klaus Dauven, reverse graffiti is already illegal in Germany exactly because of its fusion with delinquent graffiti practices. Although somewhat milder, Jim Bowes has also witnessed the negative reaction of the authorities in the Netherlands:

> "The thing is, is that they have to be able to step back and look at something which right now they see as a problem. They see dirt as a problem. […] You're commercializing the public space, hmmm, we don't know how to deal with that. […] 'We can't control it, it will be like wild poster'. […] 'Uuu, people could see how dirty our streets are'. […] It could easily be controlled if cities were just willing to make the effort to sit down and figure out how to control them." (Jim Bowes)

Jim Bowes pointed to the reason which places reverse graffiti in the legal grey area and leaves the authorities the liberty to go awry either way in their judgment – the uncertainty. The same observation was made by Martin Pace, Jesse Graves and DL:

"[O]ur legislations haven't caught it up and so what we're doing is a lot of low grey area […] so we're just kind of riding that wave between the issues". (Martin Pace)

"[H]ere we do have pretty strict graffiti laws and amm, there's no specific law about spreading mud on a surface – so anyone who's anti-graffiti just doesn't know how to address it because technically it's not illegal, so they don't know how to handle it."(Jesse Graves)

"And even in the video of the Brazilian guy, you know, the police was asking the same question, you could see it, you know, like there is this guys – is he doing graffiti, what is this?" (DL)

From a personal point of view, this uncertainty has left both TJ and Edina Tokodi on the watch when doing their pieces:

"It's a very, I guess, futuristic city […] things like graffiti and littering are very discouraged. So very, I'm trying to be very careful with that". (TJ)

"I always try to make sure my work is not on private property. I'm not destructive." (Edina Tokodi)

A conflict of opinions from the legal forces and the eco-graffiti creator was visible in the example given by Moose:

"[W]hen the authorities try and do something about me and I actually just kind of sit back and just gonna go 'Do you know how embarrassing this is for you that you're coming to me and complaining that I'm restoring a surface without you even paying me?" (Moose)

The most outstanding trend visible in the answers is that the ambiguity surrounding reverse graffiti (as well as the examples of other non-permanent street art) has resulted in a 'handle with caution' approach to it because the authorities are not sure what to make of it and how to deal with it. Consequently, some graffiti creators, such as TJ and Edina Tokodi, are extra careful with their works since the possibility of crossing the legality line is always there simply because no one is quite sure where it is exactly. The label of graffiti is certainly not doing reverse graffiti any favors in this battle of legitimacy as exhibited in the cases of Moose and Klaus Dauven who have come to learn that they could be arrested for their works even though they are not actually

defacing buildings. Hence, the element of adrenaline which comes from the risk of being caught is to an extent also present in reverse graffiti, although, its characterization as a physical pleasure which is one of the motives in the Halsey and Young's (2006, p.283) model is questionable since the results show that reverse graffiti creators take issue with the notion of delinquency. The only respondent who expressed no concerns for the reaction from the authorities is Vinchen whose opinion perhaps resembles the attitude of traditional graffitists the most but who also does spray paint pieces as well as uncommissioned installations as opposed to interviewees who work with temporary materials only:

> "I guess that depends on who legitimizes? To be legitimate is to be endorsed by what....money, power, peers or established hierarchies like media, blog and social networks. Maybe there exists some ancient tablet that codifies the requirements for authenticity and legitimacy, but I certainly don't worship at that altar." (Vinchen)

4.2. Motivations of Reverse Graffiti Creators

The reasons behind doing reverse graffiti could help clarify the cloud of confusion hanging over this phenomenon just as much as the instrumental definitions of it, that is why the second pattern groups together the information of how and why the interviewed graffitists have come to this form of street art by addressing the first research sub-question: What motivates reverse graffiti creators to produce reverse graffiti? Figure 3 in the Methods section of this paper has briefly introduced the occupational background of the respondents – it showed that all of them are the executives of actions that alter the environment to say the least, according to the "Producers" part of Appleyard's (1979) model of communication. Nevertheless, not all of them are driven by the same causes as commissioned graffitists and companies are financially rewarded whereas unpaid artists have different incentives, although the two can overlap. However, the table was a demographic illustration rather than a comprehensive reflection on the graffiti creators' backgrounds and motivations. To a varying degree, the interviewees shared their personal stories which reveal the circumstances that led them to their current activities:

> "A trip to Japan has had a huge impact on me. The Zen gardens I visited there led me to create landscapes of hand-made paper and, later on, of plants. My idea was to create some kind of "pre-fab" meditation gardens or "Zen garden concentrates" that one can put on his or her wall, even in a small, urban flat." (Edina Tokodi)

"I started it off by just doing characters, funny faces that kind of just spring out of my imagination, things that I like to do – my dad was amateur cartoonist and so amm, you know, I started drawing funny faces at an early age, and just really enjoyed doing that. So that's what I started off doing, just playing around, having fun on the vehicles and, you know, our cars are always dirty coz we live on this long dirt road. It doesn't matter what – that's one reason why it was really natural for me to go into the commercial side of it". (Scott Wade)

A personal encounter with the Japanese culture was a big turning point for Edina Tokodi whereas the father of Scott Wade was an influential figure for his artistic predisposition which, coupled with the constant exposure to dusty car windows, led him to take up the practice of reverse graffiti. The following two examples show that reverse graffiti can also be an end result of a certain problem:

"I started doing this to promote a record, the little indie record label I was running and was releasing. We had no money, which is when you get creative, we had no way of promoting this thing and we needed to promote it, and I said 'Look, I've got this idea: we can make graffiti in, in, in a, by completely reversing it. […] And then I started to get invited to, to use it commercially." (Moose)

"I have an advertising background and 10 years ago when I was in the ad world, the traditional advertising world, I really tried to get the company that I was working in to give interest in sustainability. They weren't. So I sort of left the advertising world coz I wanted to figure out how could we participate in the sustainability […] So we're sort of filling this, this niche." (Jim Bowes)

For Moose reverse graffiti was a creative way to promote a record while for Jim Bowes – an environmental answer to the unsustainable advertising problem. Finally, education proved to be a cornerstone for the development of their street art techniques, albeit in different ways, for Martin Pace, TJ, Klaus Dauven and Jesse Graves:

"It was started as a collective and then it's slowly stemmed into a studio and agency now and to a degree, yes, I'd say we are artists. […] it was just a college assignment". (Martin Pace)

"I am currently a third year student and my final goal is to study in landscape architecture and environmental design. […] well I guess I first started coz my application to my program required a portfolio, so I was looking for ideas for that." (TJ)

"I'm a classical artist with studies at Kunst Academie, Dusseldorf and Munster, and. So it was for the first time and after this experience I did this for two years, vacuum cleaner drawings, what I'm still doing now and in 1999 I tried it for the first time with the wire-brush on concrete wall near to my hometown. That was the beginning of reverse graffiti for me." (Klaus Dauven)

"I studied metalsmithing in college and also art education but it was through my metalsmithing program that I learnt a lot about how artists need to really consider their medium, and the medium should be consistent with the message […] So, I just applied that same way of thinking to public art." (Jesse Graves)

As it could have been expected, the interviewed graffitists have diverse backgrounds and there is no one prevailing story/line of events that could be concluded as a prerequisite condition that leads to one or another form of street art. Notably, education played a role in at least four cases: two of the respondents have taken up reverse graffiti due to college requirements while another two have received art classes that spurred them into exploring the different means of expression. Experimenting with media was another pronounced factor present in the responses, whether for artistic or commercial needs – the latter also connects to a solution adopted in advertising by Moose and Jim Bowes. An individual experience with Zen gardens was influential for Edina Tokodi while the surroundings with dirty roads provided Scott Wades with a distinguishable canvas – constantly dirty cars. Hence, the backgrounds of reverse graffiti creators and those who do not use subtractive techniques cannot be categorized into any substantial groups other than reaffirming that all of them are the executives of physical environmental actions as none of them qualify as initiators, monitors or interpreters in the "Producers" section of the communication model (Appleyard, 1979, p.144).

More palpable themes emerge from the answers which concern the pleasures that the reverse graffiti creators derive from their actions and which can be both emotional and physical as determined by the motivational model of Halsey and Young (2006). For one, its quick execution and fast results seem to yield satisfaction for Scott Wade and Martin Pace:

"I love to do the work, it's, it's amm, it's very immediate: you don't really get a second chance with it, you have to execute well to begin with or, you know, the piece is messed up." (Scott Wade)

"When you drive dirt and when you brush it off, the result is so instant and so rewarding when you make that stencil, and it has… It's just as much of a gratifying doing as if you were spraying a mural on a wall or something, and it's just, um, you know, things like moss and eco, I mean graffiti's, they do take a lot of time and the reward regularly comes after quite a duration of time". (Martin Pace)

Scott Wade takes pleasure in the challenge that reverse graffiti presents – the drawing skills have to be good enough to succeed in the first attempt. This aspect of mastering a drawing or a writing technique is very close to the satisfaction of improving one's spray-can control which is one of the motivations in Halsey and Young's (2006) model. Martin Pace, on the other hand, acknowledged resemblance with spray-can gratification and pointed to the difference between the immediacy of reverse graffiti and the other forms of eco street art but that does not apply to mud stencils, as proved by Jesse Graves:

"I was working with stencils and I really enjoyed cutting stencils, so I wanted to use something that could be applied through a stencil. […] A stencil can be something that's reproduced multiple times, so I guess that's kind of why I chose mud." (Jesse Graves)

Since cut out silhouettes are also considered to be one of the major types of modern graffiti (Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012, pp.23-24; Verel, 2013, p.5), the reward of quick results is not distinguishable quality of reverse graffiti, rather, a trait that brings it a step closer to the graffiti culture. A possibility to work on big surfaces was another physical pleasure identified by Klaus Dauven who does massive pieces on dams:

"I always have been interested in big, yes, in big drawings, because it's very nice to do and to work with your, with your body and so it's really hard work to do them." (Klaus Dauven)

The instantaneous visual effect and physical engagement both account for the pleasures of doing reverse graffiti, however, there is a wide variety of individual drives behind the interviewees' decisions to take up reverse graffiti:

"The beauty of reverse graffiti is that it's different. Creative flexibility – there's no frame, so there's no limits to size, there's no limits to shape, you can alter messages, you can do

53

a lot of things with reverse graffiti that you just cannot do with other forms of outdoor advertising". (Jim Bowes)

"[I]t's so important, you know, get out there and step away from the competitors, and get your hands dirty and do something that's tangibly real I suppose. […] I have to be doing something different all the time, that's why being in advertising and design is perfect for us." (Martin Pace)

The two representatives of GreenGraffiti and Dutch Ink companies agreed on the uniqueness of reverse graffiti that gives them a competitive edge but Martin Pace also hinted to the desire of exploring new possibilities which was a clearly pronounced motive by Klaus Dauven and Edina Tokodi:

"I always have been interested in experiences with drawing and I, before I did this graphic, I always wanted to invent something but not only in the content, the content of the picture but the process of doing it, and with new materials, and that was always only part of my work. And when I saw that I found this reverse graffiti, it was a big something like a world, […] a kind of universe of reverse graffiti for me". (Klaus Dauven)

"I just do my work and make what I want to make. I'm constantly working on new pieces and working out new techniques. I'm very interested in finding new materials and new ways to expand my art." (Edina Tokodi)

Even DL who has never consciously chosen to do reverse graffiti for his own purposes reckoned that creativity could be the primary motivation for reverse graffiti creators:

"I think they're researching the borders of graffiti, of street art, you know, where is it, where is it just, yeah, they're researching the borders, you know." (DL)

A very distinctive pleasure of working with dirt, namely removing it, was named by both Moose and Jim Bowes – a type of satisfaction that could not be present in any other form of street art that does not involve a subtractive technique:

"I just came up with it the other day that I'm a 'dirtyist'. […] I get quite a lot out of cleaning, I get, like I really enjoy cleaning things so I get a lot of satisfaction from drawing in pollution which makes me, there's a cleaning side of me, so I do feel like I'm a cleaner." (Moose)

"And, and I think that when you talk to people like Moose and to me, you know, we have a love affair going on with dirt. […] It's out there, I'm not gonna lie, I like it, the dirtier, the better, more opportunity." (Jim Bowes)

Their passionate approach towards their individual sources of joy could be arguably matched by Scott Wade who is more fascinated by the medium than its cultural context:

"I'm just trying to push this medium as far as I can […] I'm interested in it from an aesthetic standpoint, and become aware of, you know, aspects of this artwork […] but, amm, they're not really the reason I do it. The primary reason I'm doing this is because it's fun." (Scott Wade)

These examples show split results between the motivational pleasures of traditional graffiti artists as specified by Halsey and Young (2006) and the reverse graffiti creators: they seem to agree on the value of improving skills and the creative appeal, and they share the physical pleasure of stenciling but the adrenaline of risk is not present in the discourse of reverse graffitists. Moreover, the joy of restoring a surface is limited to individuals using subtractive techniques only. Thus, the motivational model of graffiti artists is still useful when analyzing the pleasures of reverse graffitists but it is supplemented with method-specific gratifications.

The desires part of the motivational model reinforces the differences between the aforementioned two groups of graffiti creators. For instance, DL, who is closer to the traditional graffiti world, stated that he was looking for a way to display his creations that would surpass formal authorization:

"I was always painting and drawing, and I needed a way to show my work […] I thought it would be a cool idea to just pick a wall and show it to everybody really big without permission and so that's what I did. […] I know it's vandalism but I don't really like to see it this way." (DL)

DL's refractory outlook on his choice of public self-expression was matched by Vinchen who also does uncommissioned pieces and disregards legal constraints on the outdoor media – the positions that is the most similar to the contestation inherent in Chmielewska's (2007) definition of the graffiti culture (p.162):

"No, not other than the compulsion to express ideas in whatever medium is available. […] Freehand, stencil, paint brush and sculpture if you are lumping illegal installation into the same category as graff." (Vinchen)

55

Moose was the single reverse graffitist who expressed a similar desire:

> "I enjoy the pranksterist nature of this, what I love is when the cops come and try and stop me." (Moose)

However, the difference between Moose and DL together with Vinchen is that he gets gratification from the fact that grime art is actually a harmless street art form and the police have no or little ground for arresting him whereas the latter two enjoy doing their pieces even though their methods clearly defy the established rules. In their model, Halsey and Young (2006) have termed this type of motivation "righteousness" because the graffitists do not regard their actions as anti-social or immoral (p.283). The same motive of no-harm can be detected in the discourse of other reverse graffiti creators as well but it is uttered in a different manner. For example, TJ, who also has experience is spray can graffiti but has changed her technique to cleaning the surfaces, said that reverse graffiti receives more positive public reaction because it is not destructive:

> "I figured I try and do something that maybe would appeal to more people and the reverse graffiti is kind of a form of expressing the interesting ideas as in graffiti but in a, a little bit more appreciated one I guess." (TJ)

In a similar vein, Jesse Graves suggests that the anti-criminal nature might be a broader motivation for eco street art creators in general because, even though he adds layers to the surfaces, he does not damage them:

> "I think that that's definitely one of the added benefits of stenciling with mud, it can, you know, I don't feel like I'm doing anything wrong putting it up […] I don't feel like I'm doing anything that's against the law". (Jesse Graves)

At the same time, TJ identifies the temporality of grime art as a factor that encourages her to do the public works – impermanent results supplement the motive of harmlessness that is shared by a few other respondents, too:

> "I was also afraid that I'd make my, like a mistake for myself and the fact that you can clean it off definitely encouraged me to do it because otherwise I might have been more scared to do something on such a large scale." (TJ)

> "[I]t's also liberating because it's impermanent and so it's very freeing in a sense that it's gonna go away and I don't need to take it too seriously, you know, I can just have some fun with it." (Scott Wade)

"I actually, to degree, enjoy the rarity of the piece how it isn't around for a long time."
(Martin Pace)

To a degree, the peaceful nature plays a part in the reverse graffitists' justification of their actions as righteous; it contradicts the rebellious desires of the conventional graffiti representatives that are attributed to them by Chmielewska (2007) but the exception in Moose's case indicates that is not a rule, rather a choice governed by individual desires as the harmless and the disobedient can coexist.

4.2.1. Environmental Considerations

As noted in the environmental action and perception theory, the environment can be physical and social (Appleyard, 1979, pp.143-48). The same distinction can be observed in the answers of the interviewees when they explain their intricate relationship with nature and society. The social ambience aspect proved to be of special importance to the majority of respondents, Jim Bowes in particular made three different points with regards to it:

> (1) "I think is just, um, is really powerful. Because it's not, that it's not only about communication and branding, it's also about the public, it's also about helping with urban issues. You know, urban deprecations, our cities are falling apart, they're getting really dirty and ugly." (2) "You could help them promote their own businesses. That's where we need to stimulate our economy, not on the big boys." (3) "Amsterdam, you know how much cleaning equipment that you have yourselves? You know how many unemployed people there are in this town? This is low-skilled." (Jim Bowes)

The founder of GreenGraffiti recognized that reverse graffiti can help with the city depreciation problem, it is affordable for small businesses and it could be utilized for job creation at the same time. Martin Pace and Jesse Graves also took into account the fact that their works do not exist in a vacuum:

> "[W]e just had to have that social responsibility to put something on these walls that was neutral and that can be enjoyed by everybody, yeah. […] I mean, especially in our country, being the cultural melting pot that it is, we have to be very careful what we put out there because it could cause a huge, I mean a massive uproar and we could step on any, any religion's toes". (Martin Pace)

"I think that with this form of art it's really important that, just what you're saying, you're considering the location and, and the time, what's happening politically and the work should reflect that." (Scott Wade)

The social sensitivity in the actions of these unconventional graffiti creators support their justification as harmless and, thus, righteous, as well as confirms Chmielewska's (2007) claim that graffiti works are grounded in local context (p.163). In addition, this responsibility to help fellow citizens and ensure tolerance when cleaning the messages out in the public is absent from the graffiti writers' motivations (Halsey & Young, 2006), which suggests that it could be a trait of reverse graffiti creators' reasoning and, perhaps, a quality of eco street art in general. This notion is further explored in the unclean environments by Klaus Dauven, TJ and Moose:

"[N]ormally these places I work in are not places where people want to go because they're dirty, they're ugly. And now I'm working on these walls and make something nice, something, I don't know, interesting there." (Klaus Dauven)

"I guess sometimes the walls I've found in really degraded areas that are dirty and people don't really enjoy walking there, and they have stencils that I think would improve the area but that's about it." (TJ)

"[T]here's never been any love, there's never been any kind of attention in most of the spaces where I work, ever. And so, the result of me being in there for a couple of hours and obviously doing something manually and carefully creating something on a wall, has a very strong impact on people, it really, it really jazz people. […] These places where we walk every day they're soulless, they don't have anything, and then, this is, this is the same with a lot of street artists – there's something bugsome, there's something there, just to, you know, make it just a little bit more interesting." (Moose)

In all three cases the reverse graffiti creators took pleasure in beautifying dirty or derelict urban spaces, Moose even called these neglected places as "something bugsome" that motivated him to add a personal touch there. Scott Wade showed that the same rationale can be applied not only to grimy buildings but also cars:

"And plus every, you know, people love it and it's, you take something that is, that is normally considered an eye-sore, a dirty car, and you turn it, you turn it into something lovely […] I would always enjoy that turning, turning that around, that idea of something

that is, you know, just not a desirable thing and you turn it into something desirable."

(Scott Wade)

Even though this desire to change the negative impression of certain environments was not identified per se as a need to rupture cold man-made "striated" places in Deleuze and Guattari's (1996) term, it still counts for a significant sense of purpose which legitimizes graffiti in the eyes of their authors, according to the motivational model (Castleman, 1982, p.19; Halsey & Young, 2006, p.283). Arguably a closer link to the aspiration to liven up the orderly striated locales was manifested by Edina Tokodi, Martin Pace and TJ again:

"My installations, animated and playfully, call to mind a more familiar, environmentally friendly state breaking down cold urban norms." (Edina Tokodi)

"I think it's kind of like human nature, you know, we must throw a table cloth on it to cover it, we must put a duvet on to cover our bed, and our pillows must be covered, we must cover the walls with paint and that's how it will be clean. So yeah, I suppose, it's just kind of different. And different thinking and sure there are other ways to do things besides the norm". (Martin Pace)

"But at the same time, I guess, you can tie it to gentrification where everybody's focused on cleanliness and everybody needs everything looking sophisticated and clean-urban, and I guess reverse graffiti is a way of showing how that can never be perfect". (TJ)

As stated by these three graffiti creators, the cold, impersonal and sterile city spaces are considered irritable and can be alleviated of this undesirable sensation with the help of graffiti that alters the environment – it is a perfect fit for the desire to rupture striated places in the motivational model (Halsey & Young, 2006, p.296; Deleuze and Guattari, 1996, pp.361-70; 479). It also connects back to the spot theory which advocates that physical locations or surfaces invoke feelings and public conversations in a form of graffiti (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, p.50). Hence, the physical and the social aspects of reverse graffiti are inseparable; this kinship can also be traced in the accretive eco graffiti, as suggested by the founder of Mosstika.

Besides being embedded in the local contexts, the landscapes also attract different amount of public attention, as discussed by TJ, who has a very strong relationship with her surroundings:

> "But I also don't wanna find a place that's too public so I don't wanna encourage any negative interest in it, I just want to people maybe appreciate it for a quiet areas that I can find that they can see it." (TJ)

Clearly, for her the spot is tied to first and foremost the logic of visibility which determines her choice as opposed to the local meanings in the previous examples. The same applies to DL:

> "I prefer to make a good quick drawing on a spot where everybody can see it but sometimes it's better to do, to take a longer time on a spot where less people see it. […] I don't really like to use the surroundings too much because I think then it becomes a joke." (DL)

The difference between him and TJ, however, is that DL uses landscapes for the different economy of attention whereas TJ avoids big exposure – the credits for the ability of these graffitists to suit their recognition needs go to their knowledge of locations as proclaimed by the spot theory (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, pp.50-54). Perhaps coincidently, TJ is also a reverse graffiti creator which could mean that her counterparts are more inclined to appeal to the public than traditional graffiti writers, especially if one bears in mind the no-harm and social responsibility factors discussed earlier.

Obviously graffitists who use low-impact techniques fall into the category of environmentally-friendly graffiti creators by default and they also consider the social ambiences as shown above, but the green motivations of reverse graffitists is a whole different story. For Jim Bowes, Jesse Graves and Moose eco issues formed a core basis for their activities:

> "I sort of left the advertising world coz I wanted to figure out how could we participate in the sustainability, how could we lower the impact upon the environment. […] our only official position is we are out to prove that we can do advertising that has a lower impact on the environment." (Jim Bowes)

> "I started making mud stencils in 2007 and really my objective was to put environmental messages in public spaces in a way that's consistent with the messages that I was creating." (Jesse Graves)

> "[W]hatever I do it's an environmental message. Because I'm using pollution as my medium, I'm drawing in pollution, I'm highlighting how dirty the world is. So it's a bit of a wasted trick if I do something that doesn't have something relating to pollution". (Moose)

60

Moose underlined the characteristic of reverse graffiti that is celebrated in guerrilla art as a huge potential to communicate eco-conscious messages – the contrast of content with the surroundings (Mohrlang, 2012, p.14). Meanwhile, Edina Tokodi and Vinchen pin-pointed the specific environmental concerns that they attempt to address with their works:

> "We believe that our relationships to territories would be more balanced if we all had our own gardens. With growing exposure and societal consciousness to the global condition, the art world is expanding its standards and embracing eco-art as a new movement." (Edina Tokodi)

> "Human behavior is an environmental concern for me. The industrialized world seems to believe we deserve to live in luxury at best and comfort at least." (Vinchen)

The impaired human relationship with nature is the cause of climate change in the broad terms (Emmott, 2013), so it comes as no surprise that people who have a desire to draw public attention to this collection of global problems with alternative means target human behavior. Ergo, in these instances, the eco-friendly graffiti carried out in the physical environments actually addresses the tangible problems of planet Earth – one of the possible activity categorization provided by the environmental action and perception theory (Appleyard, 1979, pp.143-48).

Nevertheless, eco awareness does not necessarily have to be the point of departure for every reverse graffiti creator as even DL, who makes spray-can pieces, speculated that they might have different motivation and the green side of it is just a by-product:

> "I mean, no, maybe they just wanna do graffiti because it's, or, how you call it again, the reverse graffiti because it's an out of the box thing, you know. […] maybe it was not his mindset but then everybody's thinking 'Hey, and he's not using a spray can, so it's environmentally friendly and wow', you know it's, and it becomes this whole, yeah, like the piece gets his second life – it's not a part of the artist anymore". (DL)

His argument was confirmed by three reverse graffitists who were not solely driven by the possibility to be communicating about the threats to the natural environment:

> "And that's important but mostly the drawing, not the environment." (Klaus Dauven)

> "I think it's a great way to create art work that has no environmental impact. […] So I think that's a wonderful thing, I can't say that it's the reason I started doing it." (Scott Wade)

"[M]aybe people tended to think that reverse graffiti itself was a means of how I show

my environmentalism, whereas for me it was just a medium that I found to show, I guess,

my art form. But in that sense it's kind of a bonus." (TJ)

The creators of reverse graffiti do not object the idea of shining light on the environmental issues but their motivations are not tied to the eco side of it only, instead, they seem to concentrate on the social aspect of ambiences, such as beautifying neglected surfaces and improving the living atmosphere (and even conditions, as in case of Jim Bowes) there. On top of that, they are by and large driven by a mixture of personal motives. This finding contradicts Randazzo and Lajevic's (2013) claim that reverse graffiti creators are preoccupied with ecological communication relating to pollution (p.3) as that would be true only in the selected examples – it very much depends on individual circumstances and intentions.

4.3. Reverse Graffiti Messages

The communication model of environmental actions specifies that the original ideas of the intended messages come from the producers' side before they are up for public interpretations (Appleyard, 1979, p.144), therefore, since all of the interviewees are executives of such actions, they were asked about the topics that they touch upon with their works. Even though the messages are closely tied to the graffiti writers' motivations, this last pattern examines the designated meanings as well as the content of reverse graffitists' works particularly, and thus deals with the second research sub-question: What messages do reverse graffiti creators communicate? In order to present a comprehensive picture of their answers, the quotes about the content of the messages are combined with their intentions because the two are closely interrelated, hence, the quotations are rather extensive and largely based on the orientations of intentions table of environmental action communication model presented in Figure 2 (Appleyard, 1979, p.146).

The most outstanding theme reoccurring in the non-commissioned works of the interviewees was nature. Jesse Graves was the only respondent from among the eco-graffiti creators who do not use the subtractive technique to give exact examples of the natural motives in his works:

"I just did a series on Milwaukee, I live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and I just did a series

on the river animals. […] But, you know, in, in that case the message is celebrating, you

know, both Milwaukee's history of park preservation and amm, and the native animals that, that are in this area. […] I began using, you know, combinations of some graphic imagery and text to focus on very various environmental messages, like industrial farming, oil consumption and energy use, things like that." (Jesse Graves)

Picture 14 shows a mud stencil from the river animal series; it is a clear reference to the local wildlife in Milwaukee, unlike his combinations of text and imagery which address more universal problems. According to Tomlinson (1999), mediated communication is most effective when it can relate its audiences to happenings at home (p.179) – portraying indigenous species is one way

Picture 14. Beaver mud stencil. Author & source: Jesse Graves

to do it while casting light on global environmental issues is trickier since its gradual consequences are not tangible everywhere. At the same time, both types of messages inform the onlookers, or the consumers of visual environmental actions, about nature and the surroundings (Appleyard, 1979, p.146). The themes of informative messages about local flora and fauna can be also detected in the reverse graffiti pieces of Martin Pace, who works together with his Dutch Ink colleagues, and Klaus Dauven:

"And the motifs on the dams, for example, plants or animals which come from the area around – shows some kind of this environment themes too. […] And because it's a damn, it's not such a, it destroys nature at this point. […] And so I showed them, yeah, some kind of critic perhaps, not so heavy but a little bit." (Klaus Dauven)

"And there was typography, then we went on to still stencil which were the fish, then we went on to a three step stencil, which we did the birds because the area is right near a bird park and so there is a lot of wildlife as you drive over the Umgeni river. And we just kind of wanted to bring that to life to people there – it's not, it's not this grounded bridge you're driving over, you must be more observant to what's around you". (Martin Pace)

While the natural motives in the messages of Klaus Dauven remind his audiences about the damage caused by human intervention in nature, those of Martin Pace draw attention of the

public to nature that is in the urban vicinity but often overlooked – both fine examples of messages that are embedded in the local context and thus have a huge potential to cause empathy (Chmielewska, 2007, pp.159-63; Tomlinson, 1999, p.179). Moose shares the intention of Martin Pace to snap people out of their obtuse state with the help of organic themes in reverse graffiti messages:

> "You know, it's that kind of, I just want people to question things a little bit and that's how I regard myself, as a, as a fly in the ointment if you like, as a kind of provocateur […] I also want to make peoples' lives a little bit brighter and a little bit, put a bit of, a bit of fun into the world. […] I usually, usually use images of nature […] And it's just a very quick message, and that's it, you know, I do flowers, always do flowers, always do nature, everywhere."
> (Moose)

Picture 15. Reverse graffiti flower. Author & source: Moose

The content of Moose's communication differs from his counterpart's in South Africa in a sense that he uses more general images of nature, as shown in Picture 15, rather than drawing something species-specific. Moreover, his informative intention is interwoven with a wish to entertain the onlookers and beautify the places – a mixture of action and consumer orientated messages (Appleyard, 1979, p.146). A similar tendency can be delineated in the case of TJ:

> "[I]t's not really something that I'm trying to create a message for, it's more just how people – if they enjoy it, if they notice it more, maybe something that kind of brightens someone's day and something to look at and then adds the aesthetic to the area. […] The largest mural I've done is about nature and that's just because it was in a very popular area, and I didn't want anybody to I guess not enjoy it, whereas some of the smaller stencils I've been trying to incorporate some kind of joke – it's not always well received,

so that's better for smaller areas where it doesn't cause so much harm. So with the smaller ones I've done like Godzilla and I also did a smaller message for one of my courses on global issues, on gentrification". (TJ) Although somewhat modest about her objectives in communication, TJ named the enjoyment and the aesthetic appeal of the reverse graffiti messages as the most important characteristics. She also reinstated that knowledge of locations, as proposed by the spot theory (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, pp.50-54), is key in her decisions because the logic of visibility also determines the content and the size of TJ's messages as illustrated in Pictures 16 and 17 bigger pieces about nature are suitable for more public spaces but humorous content is limited to smaller and more concealed locales.

Pictures 16 & 17. Above – Godzilla, below – natural motifs. Author & source: TJ.

Notably, for TJ nature is more of a neutral theme rather than a commentary on local wildlife or eco issues. She does, however, address environmental issues but with her smaller pieces that do not necessarily incorporate natural motifs – gentrification concerns the atmosphere of neighborhoods and thus pertains to a social environment issue (Appleyard, 1979, pp.143-48).

The location and social aspects of TJ's messages relate to the second most popular disposition among the reverse graffiti creators – spot specific community content. In addition to the images of fish and birds, Martin Pace has also done typography stencils that correspond to the locales:

"But then you look at the pieces that we've done and, yeah, it revolves around motion and moving, talking as a collective […] And we'll try and communicate what's going on, I suppose. You know, in as simple and stylish manner as possible. […] I think we've done a piece with typography which was quite interesting, amm, basically we did a stop motion of words being created – each word represented different area and was talking about that location as well. A lot of pieces are location based and locations by." (Martin Pace)

Knowledge of locations and contextual awareness are once again indispensible from successful communication with the public via reverse graffiti messages because they establish an emotional connection with the audience (Chmielewska, 2007, pp.159-63; Tomlinson, 1999, p.179). The "simple and stylish" design of the messages, however, renders them pleasant on the eye and easy to perceive. The visual aesthetics imply a beautifying action intention, according to the communication model of environmental actions (Appleyard, 1979, pp.144-46), while the simplicity accounts for the message readability, which is not a common occurrence in the traditional graffiti writings (Schulz, 2004; Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012, p.25). Jim Bowes also shared his vision of reverse graffiti that would be combined with the surroundings but in an interactive manner rather than being fixed in the local context:

"And here's a great thing, you could, you could create, you know, an ad campaign or a story, or a series of images that over the course of a kilometer would allow somebody to really be experiencing a story or something clever, or something witty, or something funny which is being done and by an appropriate brand. […] With that street games you turn a piece of sidewalk into a playground. […] You turn a place where there's nothing to do with a few street games and some ABCs and One Two Threes, it could become a whole educational canvas." (Jim Bowes)

The founder of GreenGraffiti envisioned grime art messages as a continuous story throughout city blocks that could be both entertaining and informative or they could utilize the spaces with the help of games. These two intentions support the observation that reverse graffiti content is easily graspable (Schulz, 2004): while the language of images, such as those of nature, is universal, the educative and humorous messages are meant to be understood by others in order to fulfill their objectives, namely, to inform and to entertain. Unfortunately, these projections of Jim

66

Bowes are more future oriented because at the moment his clients are still experimenting with this unusual medium, as it is discussed in more detailed in the next section.

Graffiti creators who use accretive techniques proved to be no strangers to the theme of spot specific community content, or to intentions of informing and mildly titillating for that matter, as demonstrated by Jesse Graves and Vinchen:

"And it is really sort of hindering prisoners' access to information – the fact that you have to buy brand new material to send them instead of used books. So I worked with a group to put up mud stencils in Madison, around the state capital that related to that issue." (Jesse Graves)

Picture 18. Anti torture mud stencil. Author & source: Jesse Graves.

"It's not my intent to promulgate any particular message but themes of inequality, injustice, consumption and corruption are of interest to me. […] The manner in which the work interacts with what surrounds it can be crucial. I have a work called 99% Store which only fully makes sense painted on a dumpster or trash can." (Vinchen)

Mud stencils about the injustice done to the prisoners were placed in a State where the prison is located – Picture 18 exemplifies one of those stencils. Vinchen's messages, on the other hand, tackle human vices and engage in a witty interplay with the content-specific surfaces.

Finally, some messages of reverse graffitists Klaus Dauven and Scott Wade comprised a completely separate thematic category that was neither about nature nor location or community dependent. Whereas it would be wrong to call it an artistic theme because all reverse graffiti messages have an element of creative effort in them, these messages are marked by the liberty of self expression:

"[B]ut there's also more abstract or geometric things. […] It's like a, other more abstracts more abstract things I want to show, and for example, abstract self-portrait, things like that". (Klaus Dauven)

"A wide variety of things: I have done reproductions of famous paintings in dirt, amm, did or attempted to. I just did a Renoir the other day, that was a lot of fun […] I'm much person, as an artist I'm much more about creating amm, creating pieces that are accessible and amm, and fun". (Scott Wade)

Pictures 19 & 20. Above – abstract shapes, below – reproduction of Renoir. Authors & sources: above – Klaus Dauven, below – Scott Wade.

The intentions behind abstract shapes and remakes of classical paintings, both of which are visible in Pictures 19 and 20 respectively, could be interpreted as oriented towards bringing joy to people and beautifying places. However, since they do not address physical or social environmental subjects (although these messages still count as environmental actions because of their subtractive application which alters the surface), they seem to fit better in the self-development part of the intentions in Appleyard's (1979) communication model (p.146). Contrary to Klaus Dauven and Scott Wade, DL uses spray paint to create the images of his self-expression and aims to depict a concrete societal issue:

"I always painted drawings, you know, just yeah, puppets, like, like amm, laying drawings, like classic, like classic drawing actually. […] And that's, those are the puppets I draw, you know, they feel guilty, they, they're not happy but they don't do anything about it, you know, they just sit like the end, like the end of days are coming, you know –

they just lay down and they wait for the storm to come and that's it, you know. And that's how I see people and that's how I want to see themselves in my work, you know." (DL)

Human idleness in face of global and perhaps personal crises is of concern for DL which he shows in "puppets", like the one portrayed in Picture 21. It goes to show that it is down to personal motivations and goals which determine the intended messages in reverse graffiti as there is no one meaning tied to specific category of content – even in the more traditional graffiti culture there are writers who wish to communicate particular topics and there are those who just want to improve their skills (Halsey & Young, 2006).

Picture 21. Puppet. Author & source: DL.

4.3.1. Green Advertising

The reverse graffiti messages for commercial use stand in stark contrast to the personal pieces already because the first are less subject to the creative thinking of the reverse graffiti creators than the latter:

"You'll see a tremendous amount of logos and URLs on the ground in reverse graffiti – it doesn't work, it didn't work on web banners, it doesn't work on posters, it doesn't work on billboards. […] One of the biggest problems is that advertising agencies, and we work with a lot of them, they don't really understand it. They think 'Poster'." (Jim Bowes)

"And then when it comes to the commissioned pieces […] most of the time they will put out this massive dramatic message and scene and it's just, it's far too much, you know. And they spoil the canvases when we have to do this. […] Other than social media related, they'll ask us to hashtag a phrase and put it out there, or hashtag something, or it would be their logo, or it would be amm, something really strange". (Martin Pace)

Apparently, the clients are the authors of the commissioned reverse graffiti messages, not the graffitists, and they can find it difficult to think beyond the marketing that works on digital

(especially social) media – neither URLs nor hashtags are clickable on the ground. Such transplantation of knowledge from online marketing rather than adaptation to the visual street culture could be possibly blamed on the unfamiliarity with reverse graffiti and its potential. Moose reaffirmed this reasoning by pointing out that the companies sometimes do not consider the context of this medium:

> "People they ask me 'Do you do stuff for cars?' and it's like, you know, when I do
> something for car, I'm gonna be writing their logo of the car in the dirt that the cars
> produced – don't you think there's a weird irony there that people will get?" (Moose)

There are, of course, exceptions to this rather grim remark when the ad purchasers actually incorporate the messages into the surroundings – GreenGraffiti had a few records of such instances, Sonos was one of them:

> "So one of the best examples
> using the space, like you're
> talking about, was a campaign
> we did for Sonos (Sonos is a
> music system, right, wireless),
> this was the wide ad agency
> here as worldwide, brilliant
> idea. So what they did, they
> said, ha, Sonos, music, so they
> took song titles and they used
> those song titles in
> combination with the
> location." (Jim Bowes)

Picture 22. Sonos campaign. Author & source: GreenGraffiti.

The case of Sonos suggests that it is possible for companies to take advantage of reverse graffiti messages' placement, as illustrated in Picture 22. Scott Wade also had slightly different experience with his clients as he had a bit more creative flexibility:

> "Sometimes they leave it up to me and sometimes they have very specific ideas. […] I
> did a piece in Istanbul in Cevahir, big, great big mall in the middle of Istanbul. And so

that they, they helped, they kind of worked with me to find images that related to Istanbul they thought they're people going to the mall would enjoy seeing." (Scott Wade)

It would not be an exaggeration to say that commissioned reverse graffiti could also contribute to the positive ambience creation if the authors of their messages came up with funny, clever or even caring content and thus make it location appropriate (Chmielewska, 2007, pp.159-63). However, the prevalent theme among these examples is that the companies want brand recognition that would help them attract buyers. Hence, according to the communication model of environmental actions, the orientations of intentions behind commercial reverse graffiti messages are aimed at consumers as the washed out pieces inform them about the company's products and services or try to strengthen brand loyalty (Appleyard, 1979, pp.146-47). It is only logical that the commercial reverse graffiti messages are clear to read and thus fulfill the semiotic condition of mediated communication (Schulz, 2004) since the companies want their logos to be recognized and remembered, and their offers understood.

The topic of the reverse graffiti in the corporate world as a whole proved to be very sensitive and generated more feedback than anticipated. To begin with, DL was very clear about the fact that the graffiti world in general is very protective of its independent status and anything that is used in the sales does not meet this condition to be considered real graffiti:

"[I]f you take it off the street and if you ask money for it, then that's the whole idea of graffiti is gone. […] And I know a lot of, a lot of guys that are really into the, you know, that are really hardcore and they have a problem with the whole marketing thing […] But then you could say then it's not graffiti anymore, so it doesn't really matter, you know, that's what I think." (DL)

As established in the discussion about the definition of reverse graffiti in the first pattern, the vast majority of its creators do not claim rights to the traditional graffiti status and perhaps that is why they also do not exhibit such hostility towards the idea of commissioned grime art. Yet, all interviewees without exceptions had opinions about environmentally-friendly street art techniques being used for advertising, especially for non-green labels. DL, Edina Tokodi, Martin Pace and Vinchen were in particular critical of it:

"I'd rather see that the company then turning around their policy and making less pollution or paying some kind of tax to get rid of the mess they make instead of then just

making a small advertisement campaign which is environmentally friendly. Which is good too but yeah it's just a needle in the haystack I think." (DL)

"This art form is getting quite popular however it feels fake to make it for fake ideology." (Edina Tokodi)

While DL and Edina Tokodi expressed disappointment in corporate attempts to co-opt eco-graffiti, Martin Pace and Vinchen criticized the broader notion of corporate culture:

"I think a lot of the companies here still fix some of their own printing and a lot of waste, and they, they, when they see this work, their immediate thought is that it must be guerrilla, it must be underground work that is, that is cool because it's guerrilla. […] They couldn't be bothered if we were, yeah, however we did it, they wouldn't be fazed at all. They really just wanna see the end result." (Martin Pace)

"Advertising exists to make your life feel worthless while simultaneously encouraging a desire for a better life that is just within reach if only you're willing to part with the meager wages your labors afford you. If ad agencies use eco-graffiti to shill, it's only because they need to infuse a hip, populist texture to ensure their brand is appealing to coveted demographics." (Vinchen)

Martin Pace hinted at the possibility that the green ad buyers are motivated by the untraditional nature of eco street art, and Vinchen made a broader judgment of marketing as brainwashing. Independently of Vinchen, Jesse Graves adapted the idea of brainwashing to the specific situation of marketing with eco street art:

"Yeah, I mean, which is sad to see but what, what can you expect – that's what, that's what corporations do. […] I mean, it's called 'greenwashing', it's happening everywhere." (Jesse Graves)

He referred to a customer misleading practice which became very popular once the 'green' products were in demand and people got concerned about the damage that companies do to the environment. Interestingly enough, it is largely the absence of clear laws that permitted greenwashing to parasitize on customers' gullibility (Delmas & Burbano, 2011, pp.3-6) which suggests that if the term and the legal status of reverse graffiti remain ambiguous too, it could be easily used for advertising malpractices.

Despite these doubts about the good intentions of corporations employing sustainable means to advertise, Jesse Graves also recognized the benefit of eco street art in advertisement business:

> "On the other hand, you know, maybe an advertisement made out of natural materials is better than an advertisement that is made out of traditional materials, that might take more resources to create […] I don't think that you can criticize reverse graffiti because certain companies are doing this, so. I see nothing wrong with an artist getting hired and fairly paid to use environmental art to advertise an environmentally sound or sustainable product or event. I take issue with eco-art being used to advertise corporations and products that are toxic or destructive." (Jesse Graves)

The mud stencil author made two important points: one that sustainable advertisements have a lower impact on the environment than the regular ones, and two that an artist has the right to get paid if the company engages in environmentally-friendly activities. In fact, four of the interviewed reverse graffiti creators had similar dichotomous views:

> "Yeah that's why it's hard when we talk about doing it commercially because, because that's opposed to, you know, what I think is good about this. […] if they're spending money using this process and not doing damage to the environment, and that money would otherwise be used in print-full where they're wasting paper and ink, and creating litter, then it's a good thing, isn't it?" (Moose)

> "I think it's interesting because I guess reverse graffiti would be an interesting tool in advertising because it wouldn't be detrimental or anything but it might also ruin the idea of public art and kind of destroy that." (TJ)

Moose and TJ shared opinions that corresponded with the first point made by Jesse Graves that eco-street art is a better choice than the advertisements based on chemicals. Scott Wade had similar thoughts – he also underlined the importance of the *right* cause which falls into the same category as the second point made by Jesse Graves:

> "But at least their advertisement for the product is not, you know, creating harm, so yeah, you know, is it fair there's cynicism all over the place and heaven knows advertising agencies are as cynical as they come, so can you, can you do the right thing for the wrong reason? – Absolutely. You know, but if, if it's the right thing, then that's good. There's some good coming of it, right?" (Scott Wade)

Finally, Klaus Dauven was perhaps the only one from the respondents who identify themselves as artists that was absolutely intact with his corporate supporter but who still had an issue with the misuse of reverse graffiti:

> "I'm supported by the company "Kärcher" and since now nearly, almost ten years we work together and it's a very good cooperation because I can do what I want and they're supporting me with all their know-how, equipment, man-power, and it's great. […] Normally they're eco-friendly […] one of the first things I saw was for Ariel, you know, this cleaning powder, and in this time it works very very well because it was cleaning and cleaning clothes, and cleaning, I don't know. And amm, but I don't think so if it's very, really good if you do it for other things." (Klaus Dauven)

Quite likely the peace of his mind could be explained by the fact that his supporter's products do not contradict the eco-friendly nature of Klaus' works. His criticism towards the advertisement world, however, was slightly different from the previous arguments in a sense that he thought that reverse graffiti is appropriate only for certain products that are in harmony with the idea of removing layers. The answers of Jesse Graves and Scott Wade indicate that firm-level greenwashing is a concern for them, while the response of Klaus Dauven points more to the product-level mismatch. What Delmas and Burbano (2011) did not take into account when assessing greenwashing practices, however, is the ecological footprint of advertising regardless of company's products or practices. In contrast to all the aforementioned miscellaneous arguments, the founder of GreenGraffiti had no reservations about reverse and eco graffiti in marketing exactly for this reason:

> "A lot of people, especially in the sustainability world, have asked us 'Would you work for Shell? They're evil!' and I would say 'Yeah, I would'. If they're trying to legitimately do something in the right direction, who is it for me to point and say 'Oh, this company can do it because they're good and this company can't do it because they're bad'. If, if we as a sustainability community are gonna operate this way, what we're gonna do is just shut out an awful lot of companies that we really want to welcome." (Jim Bowes)

For Jim Bowes, the willingness of companies to step away from their unsustainable advertising habits outweighed their bad reputation because it brings them closer to reducing corporate impact on the environment. Ergo, no unanimous conclusion can be made about reverse graffiti specifically and eco-street art in general in advertising because the opinions of the respondents

vary from radical criticism to full support, but for most they lurk somewhere inbetween these two opposites.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This paper set out to explore a rare specimen in the culture of wildly colorful street art – reverse graffiti. Although not widely practiced, every once in a while pictures of drawings in dirt pop up in newspaper articles and webzines. The reason it raises investigative interest is because the lack of information about it leaves it at odds with the existing sources about graffiti culture and makes it difficult to place it in any theoretical framework. Not only is it unclear how to categorize reverse graffiti, but its potential to communicate ecological messages due to its application in dirt suggests that perhaps it should be encouraged to spread environmental awareness further rather than banned as an act of vandalism – no affordances can be made for environmental anti-discourse. For these reasons, the goal of this study was to contribute to the better understanding of this urban phenomenon by means of establishing a comprehensive definition of it, which is also the overarching research question of this paper.

The existing brief references to reverse graffiti in academic literature were used as the starting points of this research, namely Truman's (2010) description of reverse graffiti as temporary writings by removing dirt (p.8), and Randazzo and Lajevic's (2013) identification of it with ecological artworks that concern pollution (p.3). These arguments were put to a test by interviewing ten graffiti creators, including reverse, eco and traditional graffiti representatives for more comprehensive data from the inside of the street art culture as opposed to the observations made from the outside. The interview questions were mainly built on a mixed theoretical framework which consisted of Halsey and Young's (2006) graffiti motivations model, spot theory (Ferrell & Weide, 2010) and the communication model of environmental action and perception theory (Appleyard, 1979). The principals of these three approaches were transplanted to the particular case of reverse graffiti to explore this relatively new form of street art and define it. The establishment of reverse graffiti definition is closely tied to the two research sub-questions about the motivations and messages of reverse graffiti creators that help to place it in the broader fields of graffiti culture and communication, and that also form the main answer patterns in the results which, in turn, gather together the smaller answer categories.

The first pattern addressed the main research question from a more technical point of view – all interviewees described their methods and gave their explanations of reverse graffiti which allowed differentiating it from other types of graffiti. The results showed that identifying reverse graffiti as a dirt removal practice is not wrong, however, that is not wholly a

representative definition of the reverse graffitists' activities since they remove all sorts of materials from surfaces to leave their marks, including moss and paper. Thus, Truman's (2008) definition of reverse graffiti exclusively as dirt cleaning is not quite accurate. In fact, it is largely down to climate – a contextual factor according to the communication model of environmental action and perception theory (Appleyard, 1979, p.144) – which determines their work surfaces: weather conditions influence the color, thickness and even availability of dust, grime and moss. That is, of course, unless the surfaces are covered with additional layers, such as paper posters and charcoal, manually. In addition to that, the best areas for reverse graffiti were specified to be porous and flat so that the additional layers would actually stick to them and the image quality would not be distorted by an uneven surface. These findings are a result of trial and error, which is a common experience in graffiti culture in order to perfect one's skills (Halsey & Young, 2006, p.279-83) and closely tied to the knowledge of good locations, as advocated by the spot theory (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, p.50).

Most importantly, reverse graffiti proved to be a subtractive technique which creates a contrast between the original surface and the additional layer(s) which is a clear break from the mud and moss graffiti that apply extra layers onto the surfaces. This clarification helps to distinguish reverse graffiti from the other eco-graffiti practices as they were conflated in WebEcoist (Eliza, n.d.) and The New York Times (Brenhouse, 2010). The four kinds of tools used by reverse graffiti creators confirmed its subtractive nature as powered and non-powered instruments, everyday objects and natural materials were used to remove stratums in their examples. The qualities that unite reverse and accretive eco-graffiti, however, are that they are environmentally-friendly and they are both time-biased in Tomlinson's (1999, p.153) words: the absence of chemicals in their application makes them subject to gradual erosion by natural forces. Notably, the choosing of spot (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, p.50) comes into play once again as less open spaces can shelter eco-graffiti for a very long time. Although reverse graffiti is more dependent on weather conditions than traditional graffiti, they are both bound by the human agent as any street art can be altered by the onlookers and posted online in the form of a picture (Snyder, 2006, p.94-96).

The first pattern also revealed a three-sided contention with regards to the terminology of reverse graffiti. Firstly, the delegates of more conventional graffiti seem to reject anything that does not live up to their sub-cultural ideological standards as mentioned by Chmielewska (2007,

p.162), including commissioned works. Second, reverse and eco-graffiti creators themselves feel uncomfortable with the term *graffiti* because of its negative reputation which is upheld by the wider public (Snyder, 2006, p.93), while they do not consider it a rebellious activity in its entirety. Different terms to name their activities were suggested by the interviewees, such as "reverse or clean stenciling" and "deep patinations". And third, perhaps ironically, the encounters of reverse graffiti creators with the authorities have shown that the latter are unsure how to deal with it and tend to equate it with traditional graffiti which, if uncommissioned, is illegal. The sensitivity of this issue suggests that reverse graffiti needs a clarification not only in terms of its techniques but also a re-conceptualization as street art which is less prone to be interpreted as a delinquent activity (McAuliffe, 2012, p.190).

This finding is further supported by the respondents' answers about their motivations and desires in the second pattern: its harmlessness inherent in the temporality of reverse graffiti pieces and in the fact that it does not deface buildings was found to be a prominent reason to take up reverse graffiti. This might be a unique trait of reverse graffiti because harmlessness was not indicated as the self-justification of traditional graffitists in the motivational model of Halsey and Young (2006). Another exceptional reason behind the acts of reverse graffiti creators is the joy of cleaning and working with dirt – a motive that could only be present in the restorative practices as it is not quite in line with the idea of adding extra layers to the surfaces. The pleasure of quick execution and fast visible results is also common to reverse graffiti creators but it can be detected among those who do spray-can or mud stenciling, too (Halsey & Young, 2006, pp.279-83). Both traditional and eco graffitists in general also share the desires to improve their skills and to explore the options for creative expression (even the ones doing reverse graffiti for advertising); evidently, the application of graffiti writers' motivational model to the case of reverse graffiti has not only underlined the differences between the two but also showed that there are certain similarities.

The relationship between reverse graffiti and the environment is a tight one already because grime art alters the physical appearance of the urban landscapes (Appleyard, 1979, pp.143-48); this notion is supplemented by the current literature which portrays it as an environmental manifestation due to the contrast it creates between dirty and clean surfaces (Truman, 2010; Barrows, 2009; Brenhouse, 2010). Nevertheless, the results indicate that the creators of reverse graffiti are much more driven by the possibility to beautify neglected places

and improve the social atmosphere there than by a desire to bring to attention the issue of pollution – ecological concerns were a primary reason for a mixture of graffitists who use subtractive and accretive techniques but the majority of the interviewees pointed to the social ambience creation. Ergo, the discussions about the environmental value of reverse graffiti ought to take into consideration the fact that it has a potential to influence the social environment as much as the physical one. In this respect, reverse graffiti creators are actually in agreement with traditional graffitists who feel the need to turn striated places into the smooth ones (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996, pp.361-70; 479; Halsey & Young, 2006, p.296) as a few respondents named the unrealistic human desire for absolute cleanliness, the coldness of urban structures and the gentrification of neighborhoods as reasons for creating reverse graffiti there.

Interview results about the possibility to carry out reverse graffiti in places other than covered with dirt as well as the social aspect of it already negate the claim made by Randazzo and Lajevic (2013) that it communicates messages about pollution (p.3). By and large reverse graffiti messages are not one-issue specific as even nature, the most popular theme among reverse and eco graffitists, serves to reflect the damage done by human intervention and to draw attention to the natural surroundings as discussed in the last pattern. According to the interviewees, they use imagery of nature not only to inform people about it but also to brighten up their mood and to add aesthetic value to the surroundings which pertain once again to both physical and social ambience creation (Appleyard, 1979, pp.143-48). Similar conclusion can be made about the second most popular theme of spot-specific community messages, although they are more focused on societal issues. However, both themes also allow the categorization of reverse graffiti messages as easily readable because the images of natural motifs are easy to recognize and writings aimed at the community would be lost on their audiences if they were difficult to decipher like the ornate calligraphy used by traditional graffiti artists (Schulz, 2004; Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012, p.25). Moreover, the grounding of reverse graffiti content in the local context, such as indigenous wildlife or community problems, makes it a potent form of communication because relating messages to the local happenings has a stronger empathic effect on its readers than stories about distant events (Tomlinson, 1999, p.179).

Not all reverse graffiti messages are intended to beautify places and amuse people though, as proven by the theme of self-expression and the advertising industry. While the first one is meant for self-development and does not guarantee its readability by others just like in

traditional graffiti, the latter is consumer directed and relies heavily on the clearness of the message in order to establish brand recognition. It also limits the creative freedom of graffitists and thus is essentially different from the other prevalent themes. Hence, collectively the personal intentions behind reverse graffiti messages cover all three sections of the intention orientations' table in the environmental action and perception theory model: self, action and others (Appleyard, 1979, p.147). The answers of company representatives that employ reverse graffiti in advertising have shown that it has the potential to incorporate the surroundings too but so far it is mostly concerned with the more customary marketing content. The topic of eco-graffiti in advertising in general has sparked strong reactions but contrary to the traditional graffiti culture representatives who do not recognize commissioned graffiti, the interviewees did not judge a creators' right to win one's own bread by using this craft. Nonetheless, most of them did take an issue with eco-graffiti being used for company or product greenwashing to trick people into believing they are environmentally responsible (Delmas & Burbano, 2011, pp.3-6). The most perplexing and dividing argument for the respondents in this discussion was the lower impact of eco-graffiti in the outdoor advertising whatever the company policies may be.

In a nutshell, the results of this study challenge the two main explanations of reverse graffiti as a dirt removal drawing technique and a pollution awareness medium. Although the author of this study agrees with Jesse Graves and DL when they say that graffiti creators have the right to call their works whatever they like, a following description is suggested for more pragmatic reasons based on the findings of this research: reverse graffiti is a temporary subtractive street art technique that uses contrast between the stratal and the original surfaces for texts and images and has a low impact on the environment. A reductive process rather than an accretive one segregates it from the other eco-graffiti types although they can be categorized together from a conceptual point of view. Its harmlessness and peaceful intentions of the creators set it apart from the traditional graffiti perception but the two share a number of similar motivations and desires as identified by the Halsey and Young's motivational model – a yearn for a creative outlet and an aspiration to improve one's skills are a few of them. With regards to spot theory (Ferrell & Weide, 2010), the location proved to be as important for reverse graffiti creators as it is for traditional graffitists, especially when it comes to its social embedding, even though they opt for relatively different surfaces. Namely, reverse graffitists look for surfaces with strata on it. Personal reasons ultimately guide the content of reverse graffiti messages,

therefore, they are not tied to one environmental issue, rather, they tackle a variety of physical and social environmental topics current in the locale in an informative and aesthetically pleasing manner (at least that is the way they are intended). Ergo, reverse graffiti qualifies as both physical and social environmental medium, according to the communication model of environmental action and perception theory (Appleyard, 1979). As such, it has a real chance at emotionally involving the local public. Furthermore, as an advertising tool, it has a potential to decrease the environmental footprint in the outdoor advertising although it has to be regulated in order to avoid greenwashing instances.

Reverse graffiti is a low-impact medium that does not damage surfaces – from a societal point of view, it seems unreasonable to ban it all together. Instead, under a supervision of appropriate regulations, eco-graffiti in general could be employed to communicate a variety of locally embedded messages, environmental awareness one of them. Obviously, the results of this study are limited to a small and mixed sample of street art creators, most of whom are men and have done commissioned work at some point in their lives; a bigger and more uniform sample might show a different outcome – future research could focus on gathering such a group. Nevertheless, the current sample has revealed that the interpretations of reverse graffiti creators are identical neither to descriptions of their activities in the outside sources nor to graffiti qualities discussed by existing theories, which suggests that such discrepancies might exist in the literature about other types of underexplored eco-graffiti as well. As hard as it is to keep up with the new forms of urban street expressions, a systematic analysis is necessary to prevent mistreatment of them. Finally, the next logical step in reverse graffiti research would be an analysis of the public reaction that would complete the communication model of environmental actions from the side of the audience – after all the public has their own interpretations of the reverse graffiti creators' intended messages.

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General Interview Guide

Background:
- What is your occupation?
- Where are you based?
- What brought you to graffiti art?
- Was there a big influence (situation/person/piece) in your life that led you to graffiti art?
- Are you now or have you ever been a part of any graffiti crew? If so, what crew?

Techniques & Methods:
- Do you know what 'reverse graffiti' is? If so, how would you define it?
- What are the different types of reverse graffiti?
- What type of (reverse) graffiti are you currently doing?
- What methods are you employing? Do you experiment with different techniques? If so, what techniques?
- What do you think of the temporality element in your eco-friendly graffiti works?

Motivations:
- Why did you choose the eco-friendly technique(s)? Is there an ecological element to the tools used?
- What messages are you trying to communicate to the public with your work?
- What is the content of your graffiti works: any particular images or phrases?
- Why do you think it's important to communicate those messages to the public?
- What are your views on environmental issues? Any particular concerns?
- Do you think your works communicate your views on environmental issues? If so, what issues? And if so, do they communicate those views through their content or the technique? Both?
- Do you consider yourself to be an environmental activist?

Location:
- Is location important for your works? Why/how?
- Does the location influence the intended messages of your works? How?
- What locations do you choose for your works? Can you give any specific examples?
- Who sees your works in those locations?
- Is there a connection between the environmental graffiti and the spot where it's performed? If so, what connection?

- Would you say the location adds value to graffiti or the other way around – graffiti to the place? How?

(Reverse) Graffiti Debate:
- Do you think public acceptance of graffiti makes it legitimate? What makes it legitimate?
- Do you think eco-graffiti is more likely to be accepted by the public? Why (not)?
- What do you think about the criticism of reverse graffiti that it loses its rebellious nature because it does not have to be done secretly?
- What are your thoughts about reverse graffiti in marketing? Why?
- What do you think about reverse graffiti being co-opted for marketing reasons by companies that do not engage in environmentally friendly activities?

Future:
- What do you think is the future of reverse/eco-graffiti?

Message template for Facebook groups:

"Hello!

Does anyone know any people who are doing environmentally friendly graffiti and would be willing to give an interview? I am writing my master thesis (Erasmus University, Rotterdam) about eco-methods of street art, reverse graffiti in particular, and I'm looking for someone to answer a few questions.

If you know anyone and/or you're doing it yourself, hit me up!"

Message template for email contacts:

"Dear […],

I am a big fan of your street art and I would actually like to find out more about it first-hand. I am a student at Erasmus University, the Netherlands, and I am currently writing a Master Thesis on the types of messages communicated by graffiti artists who employ eco-friendly methods, reverse graffiti in particular.

On your website I noticed that you are using […], and that is why I think your input would be extremely valuable. Would you be willing to participate in an online interview with me? Your help would be most appreciated.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,
Veronika Norvaisaite