Spatial Preferences for Graffiti/ Street Artists in Berlin and San Francisco

Causes, and Implications for: Scale, Content, and Creating Legal Works.

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Introduction

While most people only think of hooded figures prowling late at night scrawling their names, or *tags*, illegally on public and private property when considering *graffiti*, graffiti in fact belongs within a developed social and creative subculture that begins with tagging (Iveson, 2007). The beautiful cousin of tagging is spray can art. Masterpieces, or pieces, created with spray cans are colorful, site-specific works that require great artistic skill and take days to complete. Another form of contemporary urban art, murals, trace their roots back to Latin America, and more recently, the 1920’s Mexican Muralism Revolution and the subsequent 1960’s Chicano Muralism Movement (Chaffee, 1993; Cockcroft, Weber, & Keppel, 1977). Murals are often associated with political or social messages, and done by artists who use public art as a tool to disseminate their message to the masses (Cockcroft, Weber, & Keppel, 1977). Due to brush murals’ time intensive nature, most are completely legal, with full permission and documentation (Jakob, 2008). Indeed, many cities have begun to promote murals to reduce tagging, as street codes prevent others from covering another writer’s work out of respect (Austin, 2001; Castleman, 1982).

Both Berlin and San Francisco have had a thriving graffiti culture for over thirty years, and each city takes on a different approach to dealing with graffiti/street art. Berlin boasts that it is the “most bombed city”—a slang term for copious tags related graffiti (Tzortzis, 2008). Berlin’s municipality is physically unable to cover all of the graffiti that is created by tourists, locals, and artists on a nightly basis and thus the city’s “Berliner Strassenkultur” thrives (Tzortzis, 2008). With more success than Berlin, San Francisco’s Public Works Department spends upwards of $22 million yearly to maintain the city’s unblemished face. Tagging still persists, and according to the San Francisco penal code, it is the responsibility of the property owner to cover it up within 30 days or face fines and citations. Like some other cities around the world, today the San Francisco Arts Commission also commissions murals by established artists to reduce tagging.

Even though Hip-Hop graffiti first surfaced more than 40 years ago, many city governments are still struggling to come up with effective policies. The most discussed policies have been the New York City MTA’s. A constant battle with writers since the 1970’s, in 1973 the MTA spent 10 million dollars repainting 7,000 subway cars. According to Joe Austin, this led to a massive burst of creativity— the fresh exteriors helped develop full-car pieces (Austin, 2001). In another effort to stop subway graffiti the MTA increased its security around train yards (by adding extra fencing and guard dogs), getting rid of the colorful, large-scale pieces from the outside of the train and taking graffiti into the insides of cars (Castleman, 1982). Instead of working with writers, taggers, and street artists, many cities around the world for too long have worked against them. While some researchers have discussed the negative, unintended consequences of city policies regarding graffiti/street art, none have explored the implications of these laws on changing the content and processes of artists. The inclusion of practitioners’ processes into city policy would also reduce the number of unintended consequences such as increased tagging, new styles to combat policies, or graffiti invading other urban spaces, and allow cities to more effectively target the behavior they seek to curb (Ferrell, 1993).
To lay the groundwork for a more collaborative relationship between cities and street artists, this project studies how artists interact with walls. By interviewing urban art practitioners from a variety of media (graffiti, murals, wheatpastes, stickers, taggers, etc), I sought to understand their opinions and processes towards their commissioned, non-commissioned, and illegal works. I explored how each work is defined, planned, created, and maintained. This project compares Berlin and San Francisco’s graffiti/street art policies, content, and general attitudes regarding these forms of urban art. While historic and cultural factors largely shape San Franciscan artists’ spatial preferences, in Berlin city policies and programs also come into play and influence where artists prefer to make their works. In San Francisco, the majority of artists interviewed made their works in alleyways, and in Berlin most artists mentioned painting in abandoned buildings. These differing spatial preferences in turn inform the scale and content of artists' pieces in each city, as well as potential barriers to creating legal works for younger artists.

In the next sections, I will discuss the relevant literature on graffiti/street art and the methodology for the study. Then, I provide historical and cultural information and discuss the city policies/programs in both San Francisco and Berlin. This context will set the stage for a discussion on spatial preferences in each city and their respective implications. Finally, I conclude with policy recommendations for cities to implement based on suggestions from artists.

Literature Review

Much literature regarding street art/graffiti is visually based, showcasing images instead of approaching them through an analytical framework- (Besser; 2013; Carlo et al, 2010; Jacoby, 2009; Jakob, 2009; Koebel and Schlesinger, 2005; RomanyWG, 2011; Schacter, 2013; Zimmerman, 2008). These coffee-table books contain excerpts from interviews with artists, but few have conducted qualitative analysis on these statements. I have included some of these books within my review of the literature, but they do not constitute a vast majority. Instead, most of the works discussed in this section are academic papers with analyses on the history and culture of urban art, and the policies that relate to them.

Since American graffiti’s emergence in the 1970’s, many researchers have explored its culture and social characteristics linked to hip-hop, mainly through in depth interviews with graffiti writers (Brewer and Miller 1990; Castleman 1982; Chalfant and Prigoff 1987; Cooper and Chalfant 1984; Feiner and Klein 1982; Kurlansky, Mailer, and Naar 1974; Lachmann, 1988). Hip-hop graffiti as seen throughout the world first proliferated in the subway system of New York City in 1970-1971, by urban youth living throughout the five boroughs who used graffiti as a tool to claim space, express themselves, have a tangible effect on their city, boost ego, and beautify their environment (Austin, 2001; Castleman, 1982; Ferrell, 1995). The development of graffiti led to two classifications based on the different motivations behind the works but both having a heavy emphasis on style: bombing (tagging with intent of vandalism), and piecing (graffiti focused more on the aesthetics and manipulation of letters) (Gomez, 1993; Iveson, 2007; Zimmerman, 2008).

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1 While there are many other motivations of graffiti as well, this is a short list of some of the more prominent ones that are thematic in many of the early movies and books about graffiti. (Style Wars, Beat Street, Wildstyle, Subway Art, Spraycan Art, Getting Up, etc).

2 The Broken Windows Theory states that criminals perceive neglect/disorder (in the form of...
Superstar and SFAustina, 2011; Waclawek, 2011). Both of these classifications have a social aspect to them through crews. Although many times crews are mistakenly tied to gangs, they are largely non-violent social groups of writers who go on “missions” together to either bomb or piece (Ferrell, 1993; Graham, 2004; SFAustina and Superstar, 2011).

The main body of research discusses current measures municipalities have taken towards graffiti prevention. The most popular, and costly, method is police enforcement and aggressive removal laws (Brewer, 1992; Heinsohn, 2013; SF Dep’t of Public Works, 2013). Today, most cities cover up graffiti with paint as soon as possible (Austin; 2001; Ferrell, 1993; Gomez, 1993; Graham, 2004; Iveson; 2007; Burke; 2012). Although regarded as effective, even by many graffiti writers, this is one of their least preferred anti-tagging measure (Brewer, 1992). Cities largely base this policy on the “Broken Windows Theory”, although there is much debate on its validity (Wilson & Coles, 1982; Graham, 2004). Some scholars argue that racial and economic context affects perceptions of disorder more than observed disorder (Sampson and Raudenbush, 2004), while others show that survey respondents were not able to distinguish between disorder and crime, questioning the basis of the theory (Gau and Pratt, 2008). These studies raise serious questions the effectiveness of order maintenance policing as a preventative measure for crime-- the reasoning for the removal of graffiti today (Gau and Pratt, 2008).

Other graffiti prevention methods include graffiti education programs for youth or legal spaces for graffiti. These have been met with some success (Gomez, 1993; Graham, 2004; Iveson, 2007; O’Connell, 2012). The education programs and legal spaces are not effective to change the habits and ways of bombers though, who seek to vandalize property and are partially motivated by the illegality of their actions (Gomez, 1993).

In addition to graffiti, a parallel movement of community-based murals took root in the 1960’s that has also been discussed in great length by researchers. Beginning in Chicago, this movement expanded from isolated events and individual gestures to a conscious multinational movement of artists who began to call themselves muralists (Cockcroft et al, 1977). Stemming from Latin American mural traditions, this form of public art communicates messages about events or issues related to the local community (Chaffee, 1993; Cockcroft et al, 1997; Jacobson, 2002). The mural making technique emphasizes the neighborhood more than the artist, and integrates community input in the design process (Cockcroft et al, 1997; Drescher, 1994; Gilmore, 2013; Merrill, 2013; Waclawek, 2011).

Many cities around the world have taken advantage of the positive effects of community murals and implemented complementing programs. These policies encourage and allocate resources for large or small-scale mural projects throughout the city (Gilmore, 2013; Gomez, 1993; Graham, 2004; O’Connell, 2012). Programs focusing on youth as community builders through mural painting are particularly successful, although they must incorporate the community-based mural design and painting process, and be relevant to the community or they will not achieve their goals (Cockcroft et al, 1977; Finn and Checkoway, 1998; Gilmore, 2013). Programs educating

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2 The Broken Windows Theory states that criminals perceive neglect/disorder (in the form of broken windows, tagging, excessive litter, etc) as indifference on the part of residents/community, and commit crimes on the disordered neighborhood.
caught taggers or inner city youth on mural making techniques, and then employing them to create such murals in some cases, have also been lauded by researchers as a more restorative approach to justice (Gomez, 1993; Graham 2004; Iveson, 2007). In certain situations, murals reduce the amount of tagging on a wall and are now painted to help business owners protect their property (Craw et al, 2006; Merrill, 2013; SF StreetSmARTs, 2009). Murals to reduce tagging serve more aesthetic goals rather than community goals, though (Cockcroft et al, 1997). These mural projects increase an area’s economic activity and have been used by cities to activate certain spaces, but unfortunately, also expedite the gentrification process (Gilmore, 2013; SF StreetSmARTs, 2009; Zukin and Braslow, 2011).

Within the last ten years, there has been a worldwide evolution of graffiti that has also been explored as researchers attempt to clearly define these new emerging forms of urban art (Carlo et al, 2010). For one, many artists are taking their art out of the public realm, and into abandoned buildings where they have more privacy and time to devote to their pieces (Besser, 2010; Romanywg, 2011). In addition, traditional community murals are evolving into large-scale multi-story murals designed and painted by single artists or collaborative crews—usually commissioned by galleries or art organizations (Besser, 2010). Within the last ten years, street art has also become mainstream, causing much critique from the graffiti community (EZ, 2007; Lush, 2013), but also forcing artists to innovate to stay unique (Deitch, 2010). With these emerging new forms of legal and illegal independent public art, cities must re-examine their policies to make sure they reflect and address the realities of the streets.

This paper interviews artists to explore how they interact with walls when producing their artwork, ranging from traditional muralists, taggers, wheatpasters, chalk artists, and everything in between. This method has been used for assessing graffiti prevention methods through interviews with hip-hop graffiti writers, but never for assessing the implications of policies within the perspective of this new emerging form of illegal/legal public art.

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

The sites used in this study were San Francisco, California, and Berlin, Germany. An international study was chosen due to graffiti’s ubiquitous nature; even though this movement started in New York City, its norms and styles have spread throughout the world. By looking at two different countries, unique cultural and historic factors can be highlighted that affect this global movement with consistent core characteristics. These results will be more interesting and telling than a domestic study where the history, culture, and approaches to regulating graffiti/street art may be consistent and similar.

San Francisco was selected due to the San Francisco Art Commission’s proactive and well-funded graffiti/street art policies. It commissions murals to support local artists, sponsors art education programs, and links business owners and artists to prevent tagging. The study explores how effective these policies are, and how they impact San Francisco writers. Berlin, on the other hand, has no such programs, and is relatively poor (Dempsey, 2005). Despite little government financial support, the city has a huge art scene and draws many artists to come and live there.
Berlin also has a huge youth population, creating the conditions ideal for the graffiti/street art youth movement.

For this study, interviews with artists were the best research method. Interviews allow for holistic data collection on subject’s personal histories and experiences, especially regarding sensitive subjects such as previous encounters with police. In-depth interviews allowed for probing and further exploration of certain ideas and concepts, whereas through a survey for example, respondents would be more reluctant to provide the same narratives. Artists were chosen as the subject group, since they seldom have an opportunity to be in dialogue with city policies. By and large, these artists have to maintain anonymity due to the illegal nature of their work. They are unable to attend city government hearings and openly share their artistic processes with Council members, or risk police harassment. Artists gave descriptive answers to open ended questions that allowed common themes to be drawn across, or within, each city.

While in San Francisco, artists were successfully recruited through snowball sampling, in Berlin artists were interviewed through a different process. I recorded signed works throughout the city, and then found the corresponding email addresses or social media accounts, and sent study invitation emails to them. In Berlin, I had fewer initial contacts than San Francisco, which made it more difficult to get into the street scene. Moreover being a Bay Area native gave me more street credibility, making San Francisco writers and artists more willing to speak with me than Berlin writers. In both Berlin and San Francisco, I only spoke with artists who lived at the time in the city. Currently, there is a trend of international muralists traveling to cities and painting permanent large-scale murals as part of a gallery show. I excluded these artists since they represent a different, newer form of muralism I chose not to study (Guémy, 2013).

Interview questions were pre-tested on artists and non-artists prior to asking them officially in the study. Currently, there is some animosity between street artists and graffiti writers, and interview questions were appropriately fitted to reflect the background of whoever was being interviewed. Within the interviews, questions touched on a variety of subjects: their past with graffiti, the content of their works, the motivations behind their works, their experiences with the government/police, and their interactions with community organizations. The main focus of these interviews was the kinds of works the artist produces: commissioned, within the gallery, on the street, etc. Since most of these artists began their careers as graffiti writers, I also wanted to see where they are now and how they got there. These interviews gave a holistic view of graffiti, and allow comparisons of artists’ experiences in these two cities.

The study focused on graffiti writers or street artists who are not gang-affiliated taggers or just people bombing the city. Their graffiti is more justifiable as art rather than vandalism in the eyes of the law. Moreover, they are also the writers/artists who may also be impacted by policies and programs than bombers.

The kinds of artists interviewed are more open to strangers/academics prodding into their underground art form, a slightly skewed representation of this subculture. Nonetheless, these are also the kinds of artists who perhaps could work alongside the city, rather than against it.

Data Collection
In order to better understand the way artists interact with walls, and the street politics in these two distinct cities, I interviewed eleven artists from Berlin and nine from San Francisco, who all work in a variety of media (wheatpasting, murals, graffiti, stickers, etc). All of these interviews were audio recorded, and then transcribed. One interview was conducted with the aid of a translator (from German to English), and the rest were conducted in English. To gain perspective from the city’s side, I interviewed one representative of the San Francisco Arts Commission, but was denied an interview with a member of the Berlin Anti-Graffiti task force. Instead, I was referred to a series of documents outlining Berlin’s stance towards vandalism and street art--which answered many, but not all, of the questions I had.

Data Analysis
For the analysis, open and focused coding to draw out themes from the interviews was used. Using the Dedoose coding software, I highlighted common themes throughout the interviews from either both cities, or common themes within each unique city. The themes predominantly mentioned across both cities were: encounters with police, commissioned works, working with city governments, tagging on murals, graffiti street codes, and spatial preferences.

Results
San Francisco
Who were the subjects interviewed?
In San Francisco, I interviewed nine artists-- two women, and seven men-- along with one public official, Tyra Fennell, who works within the Community Arts and Education department in the San Francisco Arts Commission. Artists were largely between the ages of 30-69, with the average age being 40 years old. Reflecting the great diversity of San Francisco and large influence of Chicano muralism, four subjects are Mexican, two African-American, one White, one Asian, and one mixed race (African-American and White).

Out of nine subjects, eight lived from their art (or are in a field tangentially related to their art), and one currently did not, but planned to pursue a doctorate with a dissertation on street art and graffiti. Reflecting the long-standing presence of both graffiti and murals in San Francisco, many artists considered themselves working in cross-over genres or some form of these traditions. While two subjects who have been active for over 21+ years came from a traditional mural background, two of the younger artists mixed the same traditional mural technique with graffiti or street art influences. Five subjects began in traditional graffiti backgrounds, but only three continue today to create works using those techniques-- with one of the artists explicitly labeling himself as “more of just an urban contemporary artist with stuff that’s just out in the public” (SF004, 2013). One of the subjects comes from a “commercial art background”, and sees murals not only as a way to give back to the community, but also to gain exposure (SF001, 2013). Eight of the subjects currently live in the San Francisco Bay Area, while one of them has since moved to New York City but states his work was most influenced by the Mission Mural Artists when he was living in San Francisco.

Historical and Cultural Factors
San Francisco has had a long history with murals, stemming back to commissioned WPA projects painted by Diego Rivera and other Mexican Muralists in notable locations like Coit Tower and the Rincon Center. In the 1970’s, there began a wave of community mural projects which still stand today-- created by groups of artists, neighborhoods, or community organizations (Drescher, 1998). The projects are in the heart of the Mission District, a historically Latino community embodying the Mexican Muralism tradition to this day.

Parallel to the resurgence of community muralism, graffiti also took hold in San Francisco even before Subway Art came out in 1984. San Francisco has a history of political art, happenings, and street theater that gave rise to artists adopting graffiti fairly early in its history (Shachter, 2012). Since the main transit system within San Francisco is Muni bus lines, taggers started scrawling their names there (SFAustin & Jocelyn Superstar, 1998). Called “bus-hopping”, youth in the 80’s and 90’s bombed the city with their tags, and later developed more into piecing. San Francisco is also home to many internationally known artists, like Twist (Barry McGee)-- one of the most prominent graffiti artists to successfully enter the fine art scene directly from a graffiti background. Many artists refer to his deviations from traditional lettering and into more character-based works (Twist’s iconic screws) as an inspiration for their own work. Today though, San Francisco’s median income is $72,947 and is becoming more gentrified, causing many artists to relocate to other, cheaper, parts of the Bay Area (Interview SF002, 2013).

What are the programs the city is funding that relate to street art/graffiti?
San Francisco has active policies and programs for artists-- encouraging mural making art as part of multi-pronged solutions to various urban problems. The main program, StreetSmARTs, used to be three-fold, but in the last year was reduced to two parts.

The first, and now defunct, portion of StreetSmARTS involved a movable free wall (a blank wall or large canvas that gets painted on by event-goers) during Sunday Streets, a space activation event in San Francisco. Wherever StreetSmARTs set up the free wall, they would provide spray cans and allowed anyone to paint.

The second, and still running, component of StreetSmARTs contains an urban educational class, “Where Art Lives”, that serves to educate middle school kids about the social and economic consequences of tagging based on the Broken Windows Theory (Tyra Fennell, 2013). According to Tyra Fennell, Arts Education Program Manager of the Community Arts and Education Department, “Where Art Lives” brings into classrooms teachers who:

…Are mostly StreetSmARTs artists that have teaching experience, so they are graffiti artists or brush artists... They have 4 workshops talking about the technical stuff, and they learn the art making. Then the last two workshops, making it six in total, they get to paint a mural with the artist. (Tyra Fennell, 2013)

The third portion of StreetSmARTs that is still running today links business owners with heavily tagged storefronts to artists (see Figure 1). Property owners who are fined by DPW for heavy

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3 Subway Art, by Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, was the first illustrated book that documented the New York City subway graffiti phenomenon in the 1970's-80's. This book spread throughout the United States and the world, and is considered as one of the most influential works by many writers and artists.
tagging can waive their citation by signing up for the StreetSmARTs program and hiring an artist from the SFAC website. The SFAC funds part of the mural, while the property owner is asked to match the city according to a sliding scale. For artists to qualify for the program, they must

...submit their work, and we have a vetting panel of spray and brush artists, and a representative from DPW and the Arts Commission. We don’t go through the art to judge it on its artistic merit, we go through to make sure whatever the medium is, it’s a certain quality. The artists have to submit 10 jpgs of their work, an artist statement or bio, and it’s as simple as that. Once they are selected through a ranking system, then they go onto the website. (Tyra Fennell, 2013)

While the StreetSmARTs program partially aims to “attract former vandals that were artistic and now give them an outlet to express themselves legally” (Tyra Fennell, 2013), in reality most of the people accepted into the program are not reformed graffiti artists but rather established “brush artists who went to Parson’s School of Design, or CCA [California College of the Arts], or AI [San Francisco Art Institute]” (Tyra Fennell, 2013). Despite an artist’s quality works or connection to a neighborhood, the city cannot have an artist with a history of illegal tagging on payroll-- as has arisen twice since the program’s inception in 2010 (Tyra Fennell, 2013). While the main goal for StreetSmARTs is to save “the property owners and the city a huge amount of money because the murals largely go untouched” (Tyra Fennell, 2013), the San Francisco Arts Commission denies opportunities for taggers to gain experience and exposure through this program. Unlike artists with formal art training, who may have alternative resources to advance their creative visions, artists without formal training lack the gallery or art school connections to gain exposure. Without a foot in these realms, artists may have ideas and creativity but no financial means for funding these projects.

![Figure 1: SFAC Commissioned mural: Megan Spendlove, 1035 Post Street, 2013](image)

While six of the interviewed subjects had worked with city governments on legal mural projects, only three had explicitly worked with the city of San Francisco. As a participant of the StreetSmARTs program, one artist criticized the low budget of the program but reconciled it by negotiating total artistic freedom for himself in the project. Since the time he completed his piece, the program has expanded both in budget and in artist’s regulation-- requiring community
outreach meetings and a lengthier approval process for concept and mural sketches (Tyra Fennell, 2013).

When asked their thoughts about working with any city governments on commissioned projects, San Franciscan artists expressed some dissatisfaction. Artists mentioned not enough funding, extreme and unnecessary safety precautions, and self-serving Arts Commissions as some reasons preventing them from working with city governments. One subject applied many times for a variety of projects and recalled he could make “a mural from the rejection letters from the San Francisco Arts Commission”, and at this point felt that he “did so much in the city without them, that I don’t need them” (SF001, 2013). Supporting a global trend away from state sponsored mural projects, seven of the San Francisco artists did not rely on the SFAC (or other city’s Arts Commissions) for work or projects (Besser, 2012). Instead, they sought out private businesses, corporations, and galleries to fund their art.

What are the legal policies regarding street art/ graffiti?
The San Francisco Police Department’s main concern with street art/ graffiti is permission. If a property owner does not give formal permission for an artist to make a piece, then their work is considered illegal. When asked about their encounters with police one artist mentioned that the financial aspects of writing “hit us in a way where you became a little smarter about it, and you can still keep doing in” (SF006). After getting caught, writers changed their methods and then seldom encountered the police. However, older writers now get more opportunities to do legal works, and they opt to take commissions and rather than sneak around piecing illegally (SF005, 2013). While The San Francisco policies and penalties are harsh towards artists, they do not entirely stop artists from creating their work and have no explicit influence on their spatial preferences.

Spatial Preferences
Every single subject brought up alleyways (mostly in San Francisco’s Mission District, but some in Oakland as well) in some sort of context-- either as the location of their favorite piece or spaces they enjoy painting in. As a place for public art, alleyways are small and intimate, surrounded by neighbors and community members. They allow people to stroll through them and admire each work, both by itself but also in the larger context. Moreover, pieces in alleyways become a permanent fixture to the block’s residents’ private property; the same people are seeing them daily, and interacting with the pieces for a lifetime.

Each of the alleyways artists brought up has a unique style of art that it attracts (see Figure 2). Started in 1984, Balmy Alley was thoroughly discussed by the two traditional muralists as one of their favorite places to have painted or worked in. Titled Peace in Central America, the collaborative community-driven project focuses on specific Latin American immigrants’ narratives that now live in San Francisco responding to US intervention in their home countries (SF002, 2013). The alleyway still stands today with many of the original pieces in tact, alongside new murals too. Two artists painted pieces in Clarion Alley, a newer, individualistic mural project drawing more on science fiction themes that was started to beautify the neglected alleyway (Drescher, 1996). Both artists are younger than the traditional muralists, and have backgrounds within graffiti although they now largely identified themselves as practitioners of other forms of urban art. Lilac Alley, another Mission alleyway, was mentioned by one graffiti
writer as not only a space to paint, but also a meeting spot for current and younger writers in the city to hang out, exchange ideas, and practice mentorship (SF005, 2013). In his eyes, Lilac Alley replaced the now defunct Psycho City, a huge abandoned lot on Market Street turned Hall of Fame for writers in San Francisco that was torn down in 1993. Another artist heavily rooted in graffiti discussed Cypress Alley, an alleyway where neighbors offered him food and drinks as he was painting a fence one Saturday afternoon. This artist paints largely in San Jose, and also referred to the San Jose tunnels as Halls of Fame, where he was able to develop his skills as a youth but does not frequent it anymore (although it is still active today).

Although most of the writers live and work in San Francisco, three from Oakland mentioned Solano Alley, a project started in 2012 in the Fruitvale area of Oakland, consisting of mural-filled alleyways featuring both local and international artists. These murals are thematic character driven pieces done by various artists collaborating together (SF006, 2013). Similar to the intentions of the Clarion Alley Mural Project, the Solano Alley murals came about “to do something about the gang stuff, garbage, littering, landlords throwing garbage. We wanted to revamp the area with a lot of art”, in the words of SF006.

The historic beginnings of mural projects in alleyways in the Mission District, coupled with the lack of designated free painting spaces and legal Halls of Fames [legal walls set aside with the intention of graffiti writing] in San Francisco, Bay Area artists continue to create public works in
alleyways. While city programs commission murals largely on storefronts, artists nonetheless prefer to make works in alleyways and continue this historic and cultural tradition, without city funding.

Implications

Content
By and large, San Francisco’s subjects paint in the public eye, breeding community interaction, involvement, and mindfulness. Since most of the artists interviewed paint many of their outdoor works in alleyways, halls of fame, or city streets, the public and the surrounding community are constantly evaluating their works. My findings supported previous studies showing that community muralism is still well and alive in the Bay Area, six out of nine artists had participated in the past in community based murals which include the community as a core practitioner of the mural: six of nine also had incorporated community issues or symbolism into their painting in the past (see Figure 3). Beyond the content of the mural, all of the artists mentioned some sort of interactive element with the surrounding community when executing their works. These interactions ranged from individuals commenting on their work, to receiving high fives, to actually resisting the community’s influence and trying to “influence the community with my style and artwork” (SF008, 2013). Many of the graffiti backgrounded artists also use their works to illustrate to younger generations and taggers the artwork that can be done with a spray paint can (SF004, SF005, SF006, SF008, 2013). In their intentions, many of the artists talked about their public works as serving a greater purpose beyond just self-expression—relating to the community, beautifying the neighborhood, or teaching some lesson related to art, culture, or history.

Scale
By working largely in alleyways, San Francisco artists work on a small scale (see Figure 4). These alleyways house murals that are one to two stories tall, usually requiring no scaffolding or other equipment. Ladders are sometimes used for extra height, as one subject recalled for his Clarion Alley mural (SF006, 2013). Today, there is a global trend of large five+ story murals that are done on entire facades (Schacter, 2012). As previously mentioned, although San Francisco
has some large-scale murals, San Francisco artists are largely not executing these works. They are mostly done by touring international artists that set up a show in one of San Francisco’s many contemporary galleries. Working in alleyways limits the scale that San Francisco artists are exposed to, and thus prevents them from painting entire facades within their own city.

Younger Artists and Legal Works
While Halls of Fame (like Psycho City), used to play a larger role in the graffiti scene in San Francisco, today there hardly exist any free walls of the same scale. Instead, alleyways are largely taking on this role as spaces for writers to meet, exchange, and collaborate (SF005, 2013). However, these alleyways require permission from homeowners to paint on, as they are private property. Luckily, Lilac Alley has become a curated alleyway due its residents’ appreciation for graffiti art, but young artists just starting in San Francisco do not have any viable free walls to develop their styles-- forcing them to create illegal works simply because of the lack of space to experiment on.

San Francisco’s scene also has a strong social theme of mentorship facilitated by painting within the public sphere. Seven of the nine artists engage or have engaged in teaching some form of art to youth, either through workshops, going into schools or community centers-- with one artist lamenting they have not done so yet. These workshops range from mural technique, to manipulating graffiti lettering, to can control classes. Three of them have worked side by side on murals with youth in the past, providing them hands on experience and mentorship. Both mural and graffiti worlds emphasize passing down the technique and culture through mentorship, and San Francisco exemplifies these traditions.

While StreetSmARTs commission artists to paint storefronts for businesses, this program is not affecting any of the artists I interviewed. The lack of Halls of Fame are pushing artists to paint in alleyways, although it is clear that San Francisco’s history and culture play a more direct role in shaping where artists prefer painting. By painting in the public sphere, artists are more aware of community members and this impacts the content of their works. In addition, artists are largely painting on the scale of 1-2 stories, although there are larger anomalies throughout the city. Finally, by painting predominately in alleyways, there are fewer opportunities for younger, non-established artists to create legal works.
Berlin

Who are the subjects?
In Berlin, I interviewed eleven subjects who were all artists. Two of the interviews were with collectives of artists (two or more people) that worked as a team. Of the individuals, eight were male and one was female. The collectives were both mixed genders. The range of ages was between 28-52, with the average age of the subjects being 31 years old-- an overall younger demographic than San Francisco’s subjects. Of the eleven, five had backgrounds in traditional graffiti, although only three continue to write today. Two had backgrounds in large-scale murals and still continue to paint them today. One had a background limited to the wheatpasting form of street art [artful posters/cut-outs pasted to walls with a homemade glue], which they also continue to create today. Nine of the subjects identified as having a background in a hybrid graffiti and street art style, but all three now explicitly disassociate themselves from this art form. One subject stated they were “actually proud to belong to the first generation of street art, but the problem is that people always put us in a box” (BR005, 2013). Nine of the subjects live in Berlin, one lives in Leipzig (a nearby town), and one splits his time between Berlin and his hometown.

Historical/ Cultural Factors
Throughout the years Germany was split, West Berlin was an isolated West German city within a great sea of communism. Moreover, in those years it became a hub for anarchists, leftists, and radicals since if an individual did not want to serve in the army, they would be relocated to Kreuzberg-- a West Berlin neighborhood surrounded by the former Berlin Wall on three different sides. As some academics have analyzed, the Berlin Wall somewhat influenced street artists. The Western side of The Berlin Wall in the Kreuzberg area mostly featured personal outbursts, political slogans, posters, painting, attachments, and attempts at destruction (Ladd, 1997). Moreover, Berlin had a robust squatters movement that occupied roughly 300 buildings in the 1980’s, with West Berlin peaking around 1982 with 5,000 squatters in 180 buildings, and East Berlin peaking in 1989 with 4,000 squatters occupying 120 buildings (Corr, 1999). These “empty” spaces allowed people to explore different kinds of living, art, and art forms (Romanyyg, 2011). These squatters challenged current notions of society, economy, and art, and this spirit is still alive in Berlin today.

During this same time Berlin had a growing train bombing scene influenced by New York’s-- writers focusing on lettering, striving to be all-city Kings and Queens but warring against the Deutsche Bahn and BVG police (the companies that operate the subway lines) (Potter, 1992). Writers were of all ages, genders, and races, looking for a way to get up and stay up (Lange, 1992). Today, this train scene is largely diminished due to strict punitive measures and heightened security by the Deutsche Bahn and BVG, although it has not faded altogether (BBC, 2013).

In the early 2000’s, Berlin saw newfound experimentation and exploration of graffiti styles and early forms of street art-- many artists refer to Berlin’s peak as being during this period (Multiple interviews, 2013). Today, in certain parts of the city there are hardly any untouched walls. As Koebel and Schlesinger (2005) suggest, graffiti today persists in Berlin partially due to 16% of visual artists remaining without studio space. Since the reconstruction of the city in 1989, Berlin
has not built enough studio space for the estimated 5,000 artists within the city—many whom now may take their artwork into the streets (Koebel & Schlesinger, 2005). In the last ten years, there has been an increase in the number of mural festivals in Berlin and in other German/Eastern European cities, sponsored by art organizations that organize 7-10 different building facades to be painted by some local, but mostly international artists (Besser, 2010). In 2013, the street scene has also opened its arms to tourists, with companies offering free or for-a-charge “Street Art Tours”, taking hundreds of daily visitors to the Berlin hot spots around the city.

Moreover, in Berlin there is a different cultural attitude regarding property ownership than in San Francisco. Compared to San Francisco where 62.9% rent their properties, the rental property share of the total residential market is around 90% in Berlin (Palmer, 2011). From this low rate of home ownership, subjects reported a different cultural perspective on property ownership, “members of the general public, not that bothered [by graffiti]…they’ll just keep their head down and keep moving” (BR001, 2013). Since most Berlin residents are not investing financial capital in the maintenance of their apartment building’s exterior, there is less personal attachment to a clean façade.

What are the programs funded by the city relating to graffiti/street art?
In comparison to San Francisco, Berliners are relatively poor— with a median annual salary of $48,373 (36,000 euros). While Berlin has a huge urban art scene, there are currently no city programs to support the arts. Berlin, however, does invest heavily in anti-graffiti measures. In 1997, Berlin created a “Graffiti Action Plan” to achieve four main graffiti goals. To educate children and parents about the serious problem of graffiti, brochures were created and disseminated discussing its criminal/civil consequences (LKA 713, 1997). In order to have an appropriate punishment while also reforming public opinion that youth paint in the city unchecked, any caught youth offenders had to clean up the graffiti, and were also later offered summer employment opportunities with graffiti removal companies (LKA 713, 1997). This section of the “Graffiti Action Plan” had over 140 individuals participate with positive results (LKA 713, 1997). The finale of the “Graffiti Action Plan” was to shift graffiti’s focus from conflict between crews over wall space to the art form (LKA 713, 2013). Legal spaces were provided and established for “artistic shaping”, leading to the establishment of multiple Halls of Fame throughout the city that are still in use and frequented by writers today.

Today, the main anti-graffiti prosecuting authoritative body in Berlin today is the Anti-Graffiti task force (also known as the LKA-713 squad), run by Marko Moritz and consisting of 36 officers from Berlin and neighboring areas, who are devoted to collecting intelligence and information about writers, and maintaining a police database full of tags and pieces (Wroe, 2008). Even though this task force is “more concerned with painting crews that bomb and hit trains” (BR009), they collect this information and pose a threat to writers. One interviewee who had been caught refused to tell me the location of one of his other pieces, afraid that somehow it would get linked to him specifically through this database (BR004, 2013).

What are the policies relating to street art/ graffiti?
While few San Francisco artists shared their experiences with law enforcement, or never encountered the police while working on a piece, Berlin artists had much to say. Unlike in San Francisco, the Berlin police distinguish between street art and graffiti-- any form of wheatpasting
or stickering is likened to illegal postering, and considered a misdemeanor due to its temporality (BR005, 2013). As one artist put it, “posting in Berlin, it’s a 15 euro misdemeanor for littering, so I don’t really sweat it” (BR009, 2013). Due to this low fine, most street artists reported going “mainly pasting by day, so it’s less suspicious and nobody cares” (BR008, 2013). Another artist echoed this sentiment, that because you can go during the day, you can make street art everywhere and at any time (BR005, 2013).

As opposed to most street artists, who at most carry a large gallon of homemade glue and their rolled posters, writers carrying bags of cans face a huge stigma by the police. Even though “the members of the general public are not that bothered by [graffiti]” (BR001, 2013) and “people appreciate the paste ups and graffiti” (BR004, 2013), one artist mentioned, “there is a big stereotype that if there is someone with a spray can, its illegal” (BR008, 2013). Indeed, another artist said “With graffiti, only when I made these letters things I’ve gotten in trouble, with wheatpasting, not really. Only once. But then I go, they just took some stickers and that was it” (BR004, 2013). Because of these differences in punishments, unlike San Francisco, in Berlin there is a ubiquitous street art scene-- with wheatpastes and stickers glued to every surface imaginable in certain parts of the city. Indeed, in an informal conversation with one up-and-coming street artist, she specifically acknowledged this discrepancy in the law as why she focuses on creating street art rather than graffiti.

Artists who had been caught writing graffiti faced jail time and high fines. One female artist who was caught writing on trains “had to pay for the cleaning, and the government fine. It was about 7,000 euros [~$9,500] in total” (BR007). While she was writing on the train line, which one writer described as “the ones who are really going after you” (BR001), other artists have also faced similar “non-funny stuff like this” (BR003). Another writer was detained, questioned, and heavily fined for writing on a government building (BR003, 2013). However, most artists called themselves very lucky and reported never getting charges pressed, but just lightly hassled by police. Like San Francisco writers, many artists with a strong background in graffiti who have now stopped writing illegally point to these heavy fines and high associated risks as lowering their interest.

Spatial Preferences
Unlike San Franciscans who paint largely in alleyways, Berlin artists predominantly paint in the formerly Soviet abandoned or squatted buildings. These empty spaces were cited by eight of the eleven subjects as places they enjoy painting in for a variety of reasons.

I prefer the empty places because there you have new walls, and often in the Hall of Fame you see everything around it and the other graffitis. (BR004, 2013)

Most frequently, artists liked the semi-legal, semi-illegal aspect of painting in abandoned buildings. While it is private property, these buildings have been neglected and unkempt for the last few decades.

Abandoned buildings, its not fully legal but nobody touched this building for the past 30 years. I’m not breaking anything, I’m not stealing, I’m just painting. Usually, if there are cops, they are pretty indulgent--especially if they like what you’re doing. (BR003, 2013)
The police may hassle you, but none of the artists were ever arrested due to painting in an abandoned building, and only one knew someone who had been. Artists felt they could take their time while painting in abandoned buildings, and experiment a bit more to develop their styles.

*A lot of times we would go down [to the Hall of Fame] and paint during the day and practice and mess around. But if we found an abandoned factory, we would go down there and paint, and actually take the time to paint.* (BR009, 2013)

Wheatpasters, however, do not prefer to paste their work in abandoned buildings. Due to the relaxed penalties for these street artists, they prefer to paste during the day, on the streets where people can interact with the work (BR008, 2013). With regards to wheatpasters, city policies are influencing artists’ spatial preferences more than historic or cultural reasons.

In general though, historic and cultural factors are also influencing Berlin artists’ spatial preferences. The high fines and risks associated with getting caught spraying are making artists search for semi-legal, semi-illegal spaces to paint, and thus the prevalence of abandoned buildings from the fall of the Berlin Wall are becoming preferred spaces for artists to create works, due to the lowered risk and greater amount of wallspace.

![Map with some abandoned buildings visited shown](image)
Implications

Content
Since artists prefer to paint in abandoned buildings rather than in the public eye, this spatial preference affects the content of works in the Berlin scene. For one, there is significantly less community involvement in pieces. Only two artists were involved in community based mural projects in Berlin, as opposed to six in San Francisco. Moreover, relating the piece into the larger neighborhood context becomes irrelevant within an abandoned building because nobody actually lives there. Indeed, no Berlin artists discussed how they explicitly incorporate symbols or elements from the surrounding community into their personal pieces. The spatial isolation of abandoned buildings makes artists detached from the surrounding neighborhood and allows them to shift from content that communities would demand to see on their walls (see Figure 6).

Scale
By painting in abandoned buildings, Berlin artists have more opportunities to create large-scale non-commissioned works. In these buildings, one can devote the time necessary to paint a larger piece without getting caught by the police. As one artist who specializes in large-scale murals said, “in abandoned buildings, there is less risk and you have more time to work on a piece” (BR002, 2013). While he has executed some large-scale murals illegally, his personal works in abandoned buildings are significantly more detailed and colorful. In most countries, to paint a piece on a comparable scale an artist needs either expensive equipment such as scaffolding or a cherry picker (implying the need for a commission or arts grant), or creates the piece illegally. The availability of abandoned buildings allowed seven Berlin artists-- mixed between established artists and newer artists-- to have experienced painting large-scale murals, while only three established San Francisco artists had been able to paint works on a similar scale.

Figure 6: Murals’ abstract content: TM, Bärenquell Brewery, 2013

Figure 7: Large-scale mural in abandoned building: Alaniz, Bärenquell Brewery, 2013
In abandoned buildings though, not everyone paints multi-story murals on the outside facades. There are still many Berlin artists who create works on the same scale as San Francisco artists. However, Berlin artists are able to play with staircases, curves of walls, and even decaying machinery in abandoned buildings that San Franciscan artists are not able to. Even though many Berlin and San Francisco artists create works on the same scale, Berlin artists have more opportunities to take advantage of varied architecture and site specificity in their pieces based on their preference to work in abandoned buildings.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 8:** The flexibility of using decaying machinery abandoned buildings: Unknown artists, Bärenquell Brewery, 2013

*Younger Artists and Legal Works*

Painting in abandoned buildings also creates fewer obstacles to making legal works for artists developing their street art/graffiti techniques. Out of the public eye and with vast amounts of empty wall space, aspiring individuals can experiment and explore their own style. At a site visit to an abandoned building, I met an aspiring graffiti writer who focused on developing a unique style. That day alone, he had already painted five whole pieces, each with a different typography. Unlike a Hall of Fame with its limited wall space, (and seasoned veterans showing off their skills (BR010, 2013)), abandoned buildings allow for younger artists to develop and legally hone their style.

Halls of Fame nonetheless still serve an important role within the Berlin scene. Three of the seven graffiti-backgrounded artists were exposed to new styles and techniques while developing their own style at Halls of Fame. Although one of the underlying assumptions at a Hall of Fame is its temporality, “you paint on the Hall of Fame, and you come back the next day and its already been painted over” (BR003, 2013), there used to be stronger street codes to preserve the burners:

> Back in the day, you came to a hall of fame to paint, and if there was a burner on it you went home. It was too cool to paint over. Nowadays, people don’t care because it’s a hall of fame and you just pass it over. (BR010, 2013)

Many of these artists now avoid painting at Halls of Fame, as their pieces have an even more temporal nature since many of the street codes have undergone change. While Halls of Fame are great spots for “having a barbeque, discussing over a beer, and just painting” (BR011, 2013), artists who want their works to have a permanent nature prefer to paint in abandoned buildings--
where they are also more mindful to not go over other works due to the greater quantities of empty wall space (BR002; BR004, 2013).

Overall, the majority of Berlin artists mentioned preferring to paint in abandoned buildings. The quiet setting devoid of potential police harassment (and thus exorbitantly high fines), empty walls, and large facades foster an environment ideal for experimentation and development for both established and younger artists. These abandoned buildings remove the writer/painter from the surrounding neighborhood, and thus limit the amount of community consideration inputted into artists’ works. In addition, the abandoned buildings give artists more experience with painting large-scale murals and painting with varied architecture.

Conclusion
In both San Francisco and Berlin, cultural and historical factors largely explain where graffiti/street artists’ prefer to create their works. While Berlin’s policies and programs also contribute to these artists’ spatial preferences, San Francisco’s robust programs have little influence on artists. In San Francisco, the majority of artists interviewed created works in alleyways, while most Berlin artists mentioned painting in abandoned buildings. These differing spatial preferences in turn inform each city’s scale and content of artists’ pieces, as well as potential barriers to creating legal works for younger artists. San Francisco’s artists focused more on creating works that were relevant, or at least acknowledged, the community. Local artists worked on a smaller scale, preventing them from painting many of the city’s large-scale works. Moreover in San Francisco there are greater barriers to making legal pieces for younger artists due to the lack of free space available for experimentation. In Berlin, artists did not have the same connection to the community in San Francisco because their preferred spaces—abandoned buildings—are outside of the public eye. Berlin artists, though, have more access to larger surfaces and thus are experienced at painting large murals. In addition, by painting in abandoned buildings, Berlin artists can paint on the same scale as San Francisco artists, but have more opportunities to play with the architecture and niches of a specific space. Finally, in Berlin, making legal works is easier since there is an abundance of empty and secluded wall space, as well as many legal Halls of Fame.

There were some limitations in this study though. For one, interviews were done mostly with established artists. While I tried to get in touch with taggers and younger artists in both cities, these people were less inclined to speak with me about their experiences and share their narratives. While I actively explored various spaces for painting, gallery shows, and befriended some of my interviewees, I conducted this research throughout the summer of 2013, and thus spent roughly 1.5 months focusing on San Francisco, and two months in Berlin.

Upon its completion, this study raises even more questions than when I began. On a philosophical note, what should the role of government be in the regulation of graffiti/street art? How should governments decide what is legal and illegal, and therefore decide what to encourage and discourage? What are the implications for cities that designate free walls and space for graffiti/street art? How effective are different types of murals (community, aesthetic) at preventing tagging? Although I am unable to currently answer these questions, they could be interesting avenues for future research. In addition, further research could expand to the implications of policies for artists in other cities. Namely, I would be interested in exploring
Philadelphia, which has a robust city-sponsored volunteer driven mural program, and Taipei, which has certain spots designated in the city as legal but overall has few laws regulating graffiti/street art (Huang, 2009).

Since currently San Francisco and Berlin’s policies and programs do not complement artists’ spatial preferences, these interviews highlighted many small changes cities can enact in their policies that practitioners would appreciate. For one, grant programs should be better publicized and include grant workshops (SF009, 2013). Many lower-income artists do not have experiences writing grants, but have great ideas that city governments would be willing to support (SF006, 2013; SF009, 2013). Moreover, cities should allocate more legal walls for writers and street artists (SF005, 2013; BR010, 2013; BR011, 2013). Many individuals who would otherwise want to create legal works are forced to execute them illegally simply due to a lack of legal space (BR010, 2013). By providing more free spaces, cities could reduce the amount of illegal tagging. Finally, some artists appreciated programs that incorporated youth into the art making process. Since there is a strong aspect of mentorship within both the traditional mural and graffiti cultures, this encouragement (instead of forced assignment) to work with youth by city governments would be received positively (SF004, 2013; SF005, 2013).

In 2013, graffiti is now 44 years old-- having already started a family and now raising children, it’s viewing the world through a different lens. In a similar life stage, traditional muralism is witnessing younger generations using its techniques and modifying the content and purpose of their works. Graffiti/street art forms are being re-defined right now, and cities must critically evaluate the laws they put in place regarding these urban art forms to fully understand both the consequences and the implications of these policies.
Glossary

ALL CITY
What a writer is considered to be when he/she is "up", but implies more status than being just "up". Many people can be "up", but only a select few could be considered "all city".

BEEF
Disagreement or conflict.

BOMB
Prolific painting or marking with ink. To cover an area with your tag, throwups, etc.

BOMBING
To go out writing.

BUFF
Any means employed to remove graffiti from trains or surfaces.

BURNER
A burner is a very good piece. A burner is any piece that has good bright colors, good style (often in wildstyle), and seems to "burn" off of the wall.

CHARACTER
A cartoon figure (usually, but not necessarily) taken from comic books, TV or popular culture to add humor or emphasis to a piece.

CREW
A loosely organized group of writers who also tag the crew initials along with their name.

GETTING UP
To hit up anything, anywhere, with any form of graffiti, from a tag all the way up to a wildstyle burner -- although the term implies the process of tagging repeatedly to spread your name.

GOING OVER
One writer covering another writer's name with his/her own

HIP HOP
The culture in the late 70s and early 80s that spawned the graffiti culture as we know it now, breakdancing and hip-hop music, which has since turned into modern rap music.

KING
The best with the most. Some people refer to different writers as kings of different areas. King of throwups, king of style, king of a certain line, etc.

MURAL
A large-scale type of piecing, done top to bottom on a wall; usually a large production involving one or two pieces and usually some form of characters.

PIECE
A graffiti painting, short for masterpiece. It's generally agreed that a painting must have at least three colors to be considered a piece.

STENCIL
Cut out of a printed/ hand drawn picture in specific areas to produce an image after applying spray or rolled-on paint.

STICKERS
A form of tagging, most commonly saying "Hello, my name is". Can be anything from computer-generated, clear, generic blank stickers that have the writer's name on them to elaborate stickers with little pieces and characters.
TAG
The most basic form of graffiti, a writer's signature with marker or spray paint. It is the writer's logo, his/her stylized personal signature.

TAGGER
As opposed to "writer"; this term is usually used to refer to those who only do tags and throwups and who never piece. Some taggers seem to like more destructive methods such as scribers and sandpaper in addition to markers and paint. Some taggers do get interested in piecing, some don't.

THROWUP
Over time, this term has been applied to many different types of graffiti. Subway art says it is "a name painted quickly with one layer of spray paint and an outline", although some consider a throwup to be bubble letters of any sort, not necessarily filled. Throwups are generally only one or two colors, no more. Throwups are either quickly done bubble letters or very simple pieces using only two colors.

WHEATPASTE
A wheat-based adhesive used when hanging up poster and fliers. The form of street art refers to the pasting of drawings or images with this adhesive.

WILDESTYLE
A complicated construction of interlocking letters. A hard style that consists of lots of arrows and connections. Wildstyle is considered one of the hardest styles to master and pieces done in wildstyle are often completely undecipherable to non-writers.

WRITER
Practitioner of the art of graffiti.
Bibliography and Works Cited


