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(Photo: Jeffrey Ian Ross, June 3, 2013)

6

Ways of being seen

Gender and the writing on the wall

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Introduction

Be it a wheat-pasted character complimented by a confrontational political message, an indecipherable name spray-painted in 3D puzzle-piece letters, or a stenciled silhouette of a familiar pop culture icon – without an explicit identifier, the “writing on the wall” is assumed to be the work of an unfailingly gendered, raced, and classed subject. The process of a viewer’s visual and cognitive perception replaces anonymity with biases and stereotypes of the subject held responsible and/or given credit for the public act. This subject is likely assumed to be urban, economically disenfranchised, and a racial or ethnic minority. Moreover, the writer/artist is invariably assumed to be male. Under the conditions of this particular gaze, girls and women who write graffiti or make street art are not visible.

Contemporary street art descended from what is now classified as Hip Hop graffiti – a kind of writing that emerged in the post-Civil Rights era of the United States, pioneered by mostly African American and Latino youth living in Philadelphia and the Bronx in the mid-1960s. Hip Hop graffiti writing changed everything we knew about “graffito” (an inscription or drawing on a surface) from cave paintings, to hieroglyphics, to freight train monikers, to gang symbols, and declarations of love on bathroom stalls. Also known as spray can or aerosol art, graffiti is widely understood as an anarchic aesthetic of communication and rebellion against political disenfranchisement and social invisibility. Sometimes referred to as “post-graffiti” by art critics and art historians, street art is comprised of a wide range of mixed media imagery affixed to public surfaces such as posters, stickers, stencils, video projections, and yarn, which differs from graffiti in that it is not centered around the repetitive production of a tag name (Waclawek, 2011). Graffiti writers “bomb the system” with their tags, performing an identity they have created as opposed to the one that appears on their birth certificates. In contrast, street artists may or may not use aliases and therefore the artwork itself may or may not reflect that alias, and the central visual will instead be a character, a landscape, a statement, a symbol, etc. Despite differences in method and medium, as aesthetic descendants of Hip Hop graffiti, other forms of street art contain the seed of sociopolitical communication and rebellion, but are generally understood to be less “risky,” less physical, less dangerous, and therefore, less “masculine.”

Early studies and reports established the overwhelmingly sexist ideological conventions that would shape the subcultural and mainstream imaginary in regards to *how* we see the writing,

and *who* we see as the doer of the writing – especially when framed alongside other elements of Hip Hop such as dancing, rapping, and deejaying (Mailer & Naar, 1974 [2009]; Banes, 1981 [2004]). Graffiti history was not written from (or even inclusive of) the perspective of girls and women, nor did it consider the condition of gender difference within the subculture. There were exceptions who instead of being marginalized, were tokenized as unique representatives in canonical works. The earliest women on record to write graffiti include Lady Pink, Abby, Lady Heart, Barbara 62 and Eva 62, Poo-ni 167, Charmin, Gidget, Stoney, Cowboy, Grape, Kivu, Suki, Chic SS, Bambi, Anna, Dawn, and Kathy – each to individual acclaim (Castleman, 1982; Cooper and Chalfant, 1984; Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987; Siegel, 1993; Guevara, 1996; 149St Staff, 2002; Miller, 2002; Pabón, 2014a). Despite these exceptions, our ways of seeing the writing on the wall remain heavily influenced by hegemonic Western gender norms.

Scholars and documentarians of graffiti writing and street art have noted that more women tend to participate in street art (Ganz, 2006), rather than graffiti writing, because of the following: The juridical designation of street art as “art” versus graffiti as vandalism (the assumption being that women are less likely to participate in criminal behavior); the preparation of stickers, stencils, and posters in the private domain prior to being affixed to public surfaces (the assumption being that women are naturally inclined to be more comfortable in the safety of the private sphere); and the lack of an investment in “making masculinity” (the assumption being that women do not have the desire to exercise masculine behaviors) (Macdonald, 2001).

These ideas, developed over time and in relationship to graffiti writing/street art history, have exacerbated the numerical minority status of female participants and grossly underestimated and over generalized their realities, desires, and potential: Realities faced by writers like Utah who was went to jail for a year (six months in NYC, six months in Boston) and yet can still be found blogging about her graffiti exploits throughout Asia at www.utahether.com (UtahEther, 2008; Irving, 2009; ClawMoney, 2010; Turco, 2010; TEDx Talks, 2012; Sherman, 2009); desires for writers like ClawMoney, who began tagging in the late 1980s and over the years has turned her iconographic “claw” logo into an internationally known retail brand (www.clawmoney.com); she also became the first woman to design the paint scheme for a Nascar fleet in 2012 – activating the potential in her artistry (ClawMoney, 2007; Turco, 2012).

Graffiti writers/street artists construct, deconstruct, and subvert the social mechanics of representative identity through their ephemeral public artworks – sometimes consciously, sometimes not. But women, because they are not the presumed doers, have to decide whether or not to make their gender difference visible, and if so, how to accomplish that task. Signaling yourself as “woman” automatically makes your artwork susceptible to judgments based on your gender rather than on your skill: “That’s good for a girl,” and “her boyfriend must have done that for her,” are standard responses. The paradox is that for the gender signification to perform – to do the work of identification and representation – it must utilize the very same gender conventions that have traditionally worked to suppress them. The following contributes to the literature on graffiti and street art by offering an international sample of how girls and women from around the world navigate the politics of visibility.

Ways of being seen

Gender anonymity

Sensing that her male peers were likely to evaluate her graffiti writing as “girl graffiti,” Jerk chose a tag name that concealed her gender identity within a word implicitly identified with men (Swenson, 2013). Jerk is a Chicana graffiti writer from Los Angeles, California who began

tagging the concrete flood-control channels of the L.A. river as a teenager in the mid-1990s – about a decade after Hip Hop graffiti gained popularity on the West Coast, in contrast to territorial gang graffiti in style and purpose (Phillips, 1999). “Vandals” in California risk violating the “inscribed material” penal codes, being arrested, charged, and convicted of vandalism, and depending on the offense, subsequently sanctioned to community service, fines, county jail time of six months to one year (the latter is a felony), or counseling (Anon, n.d.). Despite these risks, Jerk has been bombing the system for over twenty years and represents the CBS crew out of Hollywood. Her style varies, but she favors plump, crisp, legible throwies and elongated, serpentine wildstyle letters – all of which can be seen on the freight trains, walls, and highway barriers of her city (www.facebook.com/Jerk.LA213). Through her dedication and “ups” she has now gained fame and her gender identity is no longer hidden.

Choosing a pseudonym that signaled her desire, Free was the first girl to start writing *pixação* in São Paulo. *Pixação* (to trace or stain) emerged in Brazil in the mid-twentieth century as a form of political protest against years of dictatorial rule (Coelho, 2011). Free and her peers, respectfully referred to as “G8” or Generation 80s, revived the form but replaced the direct political activism with self-empowerment and subcultural recognition. Characterized by cryptic monochrome letters resembling runes (ancient characters used in Northern Europe), during that time *pixação* appeared mostly on bridges and at street level. *Pixação* was the anarchic and exceptionally criminalized precursor to – the decriminalized – Brazilian Hip Hop graffiti, which intensified in popularity at the turn of the millennium (Pardue, 2011; Dixon, 2014). Free chose her tag name to signal the importance of independence and to celebrate the affective significance of taking the streets when she felt powerless and invisible as a young girl in a patriarchal society.



Figure 6.1 JERK LA, 2012, Northeast Los Angeles, California. Photo courtesy of Jerk

She was determined to “burn [her male peers] on the walls” – she wanted to do the best and the most *pixação* in her city (Pabón, 2012). She built her reputation before other *pixadores* knew she was a girl, but once her gender became common knowledge she became a model for up and coming female street artists.

Motel7 is a graffiti writer from Cape Town, a member of the notable graffiti crew 40HK, and one of the first white (of Norwegian-English ethnic heritage) women to paint graffiti in post-apartheid South Africa (www.motelseven.com). Black South Africans, by and large, were the first to embrace Hip Hop culture through political/conscious rap and dance for two decades before “non-political” graffiti popularized in the late 1990s (Marco, 2011). When she started painting in 2003, she chose the tag name Misty to highlight her “female identity,” but she soon adopted the name Motel7. Oftentimes feeling like a social “misfit,” graffiti subculture became the world in which she explored herself with indulgence and without explanation (Du Plessis, 2009). Motel7’s brightly colored geometric letters are deconstructed to the point of animation; they are sometimes accented with a goofy character bringing humor and accessibility to the image. Cape Town became the site of South Africa’s first anti-graffiti by law in 2010, which states that any “mural art applied to a wall facing the street requires permission by the City” (Council, 2010). Painting walls *with* permission has meant painting less frequently for Motel7, but her legacy as a prolific female writer who claimed unbridled self-expression through graffiti art remains.

The utilization of a gender-neutral tag name like Free, a “masculine” name like Jerk, or an androgynous one like Motel7, allows graffiti writers and street artists to communicate a message, and/or exercise their artistry without the stigma associated with their gender in everyday life. It is important to note that the decision regarding gender visibility or invisibility affects graffiti writing women more than street artists because the tag name is the central component of the work for the former. Further, because of the stakes of representation, and the number of girls and women who choose anonymity as a negotiation strategy, the “real” numbers of participation will never be known. Against those artists/writers choosing various forms of gender anonymity, we can juxtapose artists/writers who choose to publicize their gender specifically through signification.

Gender signification

Since 1998, NYC’s Miss17 has been writing graffiti on every single surface she can and in every single city she visits (www.facebook.com/miss17nyc). Regardless of the “miss” in her tag, which signaled her gender from the start, her peers uniformly recognize her as a “king” – the highest status one can attain in graffiti subculture. Making her mark in a matter of moments, her graffiti style is more often than not “gritty and raw.” She is probably best known for her throw-ups appearing alone or in a “family” and for popularizing the vertical tag. Miss17 registers her complaints about social conformity by scrawling her name on every surface she comes across – not just walls, but also objects that circulate through everyday life like dollar bills and postcards. In 2011, Miss17’s lawyer estimated that she was wanted for over \$600,000 worth of damages to NYC alone, a city notorious for its anti-graffiti laws and task force (Austin, 2001). The intensity with which she approaches her work makes hers a loud, present voice in graffiti (Lennon, 2009). Miss17’s tags and throwies draw an alternative map of each city she visits. For those in the know, or for those who pay attention, she makes streets familiar; she makes cities feel differently. The “miss” in her tag modifies, if temporarily, the gendered sense of belonging to, safety in, and ownership of public space influenced by architectural features and urban planning (Pabón, 2013f).

Hailing from Sydney, Australia, Ivey’s tag name comes from the DC comic book super villain “Poison Ivy” who exploits the ideological boundaries of conventional femininity to her



Figure 6.2 King Robbo Tribute, Steffi Bow, Leake Street, London, 2014 © Steffi Bow

advantage. Ivey's pieces are embellished with cartoon figures, elements from tattoo culture, and sometimes a provocative catch phrase. Her letters are old school (1970s NYC), funky yet legible, and always finished with some combination of bubbles, bows, or stars – elements that immediately signify her gender if perhaps her name doesn't. In 2012, Ivey painted a bubble letter piece with a band across the middle bottom half that read: "Real chicks paint, fake chicks talk." In this one piece, she identified herself, her expectations for other "chicks" who write, and claimed the sub-cultural value of her act. In 2008, Sydney's local government officials moved from an unsystematic effort to remove graffiti to a zero-tolerance policy akin to former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's 1990s support of zero-tolerance policing, making the consequences of being a "real chick" in Sydney that much more relevant (Giuliani, 2012; McAuliffe, 2012).

In Dubai, UAE, where there is a small but lively Hip Hôp scene pioneered by the Deep Crates Cartel (DCC), Bow (herself a DCC crew member, and a British expat) has emerged as the first female street artist in the UAE and one of the foremost in the region (DtNews, 2014). She began stenciling little bows around East London in 2008, and after moving to Dubai began honing her craft into freestyle graffiti flavored "fa-BOW-lous" images (Pabón, 2014b). Mostly painting in the Arts District of Dubai, which is located in the industrial area known as Alserkal Avenue, Bow and her crew paint live, in public, and with permission (<http://syabow.tumblr.com>; Olson, 2013). The arguably Western notion that street art/graffiti writing is only (sub-culturally) legitimate if it is legally or socially transgressive does not hold because the context of the scene's emergence is radically different. Street art in major cities actively developing their arts and culture sector – like Dubai – emerged *because of* the gradual legitimization and cultural currency of street art and graffiti as opposed to an emergence as a mode of sociopolitical resistance. Within this context, Bow is a highly visible female street artist motivated to develop a scene where there simply isn't one, a scene with women at the forefront.

The historical marginalization of women street artists/graffiti writers has consequently produced an aesthetic hierarchy whereby imagery, lettering, and approach characterized as "feminine" is degraded – tacitly informed by the notion that only men are capable of producing graffiti/street art with "masculine" characteristics. As an active deconstruction of a sexist value structure, a way to bring gender equity to these value systems, and/or as a nonchalant rejection of them, graffiti writing and street art making women mark their letters with embellishments (bows), popular culture references (Poison Ivy), and titles (Miss). Others revel in overt female sexuality and hyperfemininity through characters.

Hyperfeminine and overtly sexualized

DanaPink is a writer from Santiago Chile who began painting in 1999 and settled into her subject matter of choice – children, animals, and flowers – after joining Chile's first all-female graffiti crew, Crazis Crew (Pabón, 2013a). While Dana certainly paints her fair share of graffiti pieces, she is known for her wide-eyed *muñecas* (little doll-like girl figures), which don dresses, carry dolls, eat lollipops, and are accompanied by animals. Signifying her gender in name and aesthetic, she asserts her difference by valorizing and valuing an aesthetic often deemed "less than" in graffiti conventions – cuteness. Dana favors all shades of pink and purple; she exploits the highly gendered nature of these colors purposefully because she knows without marking her gender in some way, her graffiti could be attributed to someone else. She refuses invisibility with cute, pink, youthful, joyful characters and letters. She also refuses to subjugate her desires to paint in this way in order to match up to a North American or European aesthetic ideal and instead embraces the long history of muraling and public art in Latin American culture.

Shiro is a Japanese writer from Shizuoka, intermittently living in the United States, who has been writing graffiti since 1998 (www.bj46.com). Her tag name translates to “white” in English from Japanese, and for her that signals a kind of blank slate from which she can just be herself. The exploration and expression of one’s self, in Shiro’s graffiti, means the exploration and expression of one’s selves – multiple and ever changing in terms of visibility, yet somehow remaining the same: voluptuous and flirtatious (Pabón, 2013b). Her “Mimi” characters are hypersexual Barbie-like figures whose features are modified depending on place, theme, and purpose, but they always maintain the basic contours of the Mimi. She signifies her Asian ethnicity acronymically by tattooing her mimi’s with “BJ46,” big jade 46; the numbers and letters in her tag also locate her within Hip Hop graffiti specifically. Partaking in a visual tradition of sultry and playful female characters initiated by street artists including Miss Van and Fafi in the mid-1990s – both from Toulouse, France – sexualized characters like Mimi often come under scrutiny for the presumed reliance on beauty ideals and the male gaze (Fafi.net; missvan.com). Why would a female graffiti writer/street artist reproduce imagery that sexualizes and objectifies women? Shiro creates her Mimi characters as agents of communication between women of varying identities and experiences – not as passive objects to be gazed upon.

Painting on the categorical boundaries between street artist and graffiti writer, Brazilian artist Injah faces similar scrutiny with her figures. Using a tag name that reflects her spiritual commitments (in jah, in God), she’s been using street art and graffiti to communicate her sex-positive feminist politics in Rio de Janeiro since 2005 (Pabón, 2013a). Injah’s nude female figures are meant to inspire liberation of women’s sexuality from morally inflected social conventions. She sometimes punctuates her imagery with a short phrase relative to the content of the piece (i.e. liberate yourself). In terms of medium, Injah tends to use stickers and posters because she is hesitant to stay in dark alleys, under bridges, and in hidden places for too long. For women, painting at night – often alone – can be dangerous at the outset. When the imagery one is putting on the wall is *specifically* about sex and sexuality, the threat of rape and sexual harassment is magnified. Her characters spread their legs, touch themselves, and gaze directly at the viewer; they float through the air, hair down, unencumbered and delighting in their sexual indulgence.

Whether it is through cuteness or sexiness, graffiti writers/street artists like DanaPink, Shiro, and Injah reclaim and revalue the presence of girls’ and women’s bodies in public spaces. Taking strength from claiming their ethnic and gender difference, they manipulate the stereotypes and expectations that would otherwise subordinate them subculturally, socially, and historically. There are graffiti writers/street artists whose work is political because of what it is (mode of resistance) and what it does (change public perspectives, communicate messages, etc.), but there are also street artists whose work is primarily politically and/or culturally oriented.

Political and cultural

Starchild Stela, a queer Québécoise feminist street artist from Montréal, Canada redefined her sense of “being a girl” through criminal behavior (the fines and penalties for vandalism in Quebec vary by municipality; www.facebook.com/starchildstela). She began making stickers and painting on the street and on freight trains in 2006, and after some on and off activity settled into her “Stela” moniker (Pabón, 2013d). Mostly, she paints only the torsos of fairytale-like characters, some of which are part-animal (cat, specifically) and others with bouffant hairstyles in a pastel color palette; she makes them fierce with the addition of thought bubbles or captions in a curvilinear handstyle that generally include an explicative diminishing heterosexist patriarchy. Her textual and figural spray paint street art is a kind of visual consciousness raising initiative. Marking her gender (and her gender politics) through name, message, and imagery, she uses



Figure 6.3 Starchild Stela, 2014, Photo Courtesy Laurence Philomene

her painting to cope with everyday life and to inspire others to “think critically or die trying” – to resist the social order of things particularly in relationship to gender inequality and oppression.

Faith47 is a world-renowned street artist living in Cape Town, South Africa who was introduced to graffiti in 1997 (www.faith47.com), just three years after the end of apartheid. Sharing a common sentiment among women who write graffiti or paint street art, Faith does not want to be known specifically as a “female artist,” to be compared to male artists but rather as an artist in her own right (Pabón, 2013e). The themes of her artwork tend to focus on concerns such as equality, poverty, liberty, and justice – as her tag name suggests, she has faith that one day civil liberties and justice will overcome. Often, the central figure of Faith’s piece is a woman: An angel, lady liberty, or an African mother with child on her back. The messages communicated through these pieces are related to motherhood, the feminization of poverty, and women’s place in the world. Her imagery – spray painted, wheat pasted, or posted – is visually light, but conceptually heavy. With the simple but elegant placement of a word (“libre”), or a phrase with a corresponding figure, she breathes profound life into decaying objects like cars, rusty gates, and decrepit walls. Faith’s street art touches spectators affectively, without a visually aggressive message.

Japanese street artist Lady Aiko signals her gender and her status with her title: “Lady” (www.ladyaiko.com). She’s been developing her Pop-influenced street art style since she moved from Tokyo to New York in the 1990s (JapanSocietyNYC, 2013). She uses her artwork to delve into topics such as heritage, preservation, and place as a Japanese woman living in the United States and traveling all over the world (MOCATV, 2013). Aiko’s feminine female figures often gracefully occupy painstakingly collaged mixed-media landscapes complete with butterflies and flowers, bringing to mind those eighteenth-century Japanese woodblock prints she pulls inspiration from and gives a contemporary twist to by adding a bit of sexual energy in the figures’

pose. In 2012, she became the first woman to paint the legendary Keith Haring Wall in Manhattan at Houston and Bowery (Leon, 2012). For days, she plotted the space, taped the stencils, sprayed the paint, repositioned the stencils, and re-sprayed the paint – creating layers and balancing negative and positive space with an extreme attention to detail.

Stela, Faith, and Aiko all create works for a purpose that is different from the proliferation of an individual tag name, or the social recognition of their presence in a subculture. Their oeuvres extend beyond the individual and the subcultural – by broadcasting their commentary, they respond to their personal, political, social, and cultural environments. A growing trend, which responds particularly to the social/subcultural male-dominated environment in street art/graffiti writing, is the formation of all-female collectives and crews. More often than not, the aesthetic choices in relation to gender representation differ among individual members, but as a whole they “represent” one another and they do so in full view of the public – bringing a new level of visibility and recognition for girls and women.

Collectively

Rede Nami is a feminist urban arts collective, founded by graffiti writer Anarkia Boladona aka Panmela Castro in 2010 that made use of the 2009 decriminalization of street art in Brazil (www.panmelacastro.com). Anarkia cites TPM (*Transgressão Para Mulheres*/Transgression for Women), Rio’s first all-female crew, as Nami’s inspiration; TPM was active from 2003–2007 and founded by semiretired writer Prima Donna (Pabón, 2013a). Nami concentrates on girls and women living in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and teaches them how to paint street art and graffiti while educating them on reproductive rights, domestic violence, and sociopolitical empowerment (www.redenami.com). The themes of their murals reflect their politics and praxis, providing information to onlookers (such as how to call for help in a domestic violence situation). In addition, a structural part of the organization is to employ trained members to recruit and train other girls and women in their communities. Nami is also empowering these women economically. The groups’ magnetism and influence is such that in just three years the collective expanded from a grassroots organization with 20–30 members, to an NGO with over 200 members ranging in age from adolescents to elders (Lavoie, 2014).

Few & Far is an US-based collective of graffiti writers/street artists founded in 2011 by Californian graffiti writer Meme, which includes skater girls, deejays, photographers, and jewelry makers (www.facebook.com/FewandFargirls). They are the only all-female graffiti/street art collective in the US, and because of their productions at high art events like Art Basel: Miami Beach, they are making history with themes including “Queen Bees” and “Women Warriors” (McCorquodale, 2012). Painting as a collective of self-identified and proud women is a striking act in a sexist subcultural (and indeed, mainstream) environment where doing so is perceived as too political or too ghettoizing. When the members of Few & Far paint together they are generally in a public setting where spectators can witness and participate in the support network they have built (TheSlashskateboards, 2011; Ironlak Films, 2012; Bazookafilms77, 2014). As a collective, they make it a point to give each individual the safe and supportive space to paint whatever she wants to, trusting that her work will contribute to the overall piece.

Women on Walls (WOW; قطي حلا تس) is a loose network of over sixty street/visual artists, founded in Cairo, Egypt, after the January 2011 people’s revolution in Tahrir Square by photographer/author Mia Gröndahl and activist/journalist Angie Balata (<http://womenonwalls.org>; www.facebook.com/RevolutionGraffiti.StreetArtEgypt). The 2011 revolution sparked a surge of street art: Egyptians have taken their political fight to the walls and thus WOW employs

street art as a medium to organize and empower women in that fight, articulating social and political resistance during a period of precarious national transformation (Pabón, 2013c; see <http://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com>). The grassroots feminist art network launched their first national campaign in 2013, during which time they traveled to Alexandria, Cairo, Luxor, and Mansoura writing their feminist revolution on the walls – visually inhabiting each city (www.facebook.com/womenonwalls.WOW). In January 2014, WOW completed Phase 2 of their initiative by painting a 40-meter long wall addressing the problems women in public spaces face in the Arab world; also they transformed a parking garage in downtown Cairo into a kind of urban gallery (Bajec, 2014). WOW reclaims public spaces with street art that is particular to women’s empowerment in general, and with specific reference to pivotal moments in the revolution: From stenciled images of stoic female figures in gas masks to blue bras (citing the Muslim woman stripped of her veil and beaten by police in Tahrir Square; Amaria, 2011). In the autumn of 2014, WOW expanded their work by inviting twenty-five street artists from the Middle East to Amman, Jordan, where they painted the longest wall in support of women and women’s rights in the region.

All three collectives use an art form that does not “belong” to them – per the gender conventions described in the introduction – in order to invite more girls and women into street art and graffiti culture by staking their claim to belonging *as* girls and women. The gradual, but certain, subcultural shift in the active presence of girls and women in street art/graffiti writing is not only linked to all-female crews and collectives, but also to the power of digital culture. Similar to how painting as part of an all-female crew at a public event changes the condition and consequences of anonymity for women, going online changes the anonymity and the ephemerality of the art work in such a way that enables artist/writers to identify themselves and one another, to build networks, and to participate in the project of memory making and



Figure 6.4 “We are discussing the man who sits at the café and harasses women in the street. We tried to reflect the negative effect of this harassment on the female, even after she’s entered the private space of her home.” Indoor parking lot Sitt Naguib’s Garage, Nour Shoukry, Ahmed Nour, and Sad Panda, 2014, Cairo, Egypt. Photo by Mia Gröndahl © Mia Gröndahl

history writing. Digital culture offers countless means to subvert erasure, invisibility, and impossibility (Sweza, 2009).

Digitally

Predated by the now inoperative, but still significant, websites *GraffitiGrlz.com* and *CatFight Magazine.com* (F. Lady, 2007), since 2006 Kif, a graffiti writer from Guanajuato, Mexico, has been managing the website *LadysGraffiti* (<http://ladysgraffi.blogspot.com>). LadysGraffiti is a Spanish language site where Kif continues in the tradition of the aforementioned sites by bringing the work of female artists to light through interviews and sharing photos. She has been writing graffiti since 2001 and is part of the IKS crew (Insane Kings Crew). Her graffiti sensibilities tend toward gender-neutral, legible, crisp letters consistently including multidirectional arrows on legal walls. She is not what one would conventionally consider a bomber because when she started writing graffiti in 2001, the laws against graffiti were not enforced because a tradition of socially acceptable writing on walls such as murals and *bardas de baile* (dance party advertisements) existed (Heller, 2013). In 2004, that dynamic changed as Mexico City began to implement zero tolerance policies and practices (Grillo, 2004). Nevertheless, Kif builds graffiti community in her city and online – making it a point to create online communities specifically and exclusively for graffiti writing women not only through her blog, but also on social media platforms like Facebook.

Shamsia Hassani's arts practice merges street culture and digital culture in a novel way (Graham-Harrison, 2012; Radio Free Europe, 2012). An Afghanistan-based artist, she began experimenting with graffiti and street art in 2010 after attending a workshop sponsored by the Combat Comms. Though graffiti is not illegal in Afghanistan, Hassani finds that the socially conservative and politically tumultuous circumstances make painting in Kabul extremely dangerous. As a coping technique, she created a form of graffiti that would enable her to paint the city and feel safe simultaneously (Pabón, 2014c). At first deeming her practice of superimposing images on buildings through graphic design software as "digital graffiti," she now considers her work "dreaming graffiti" and has taken to painting on photograph prints with acrylics. Living in Kabul, and working as a lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts at Kabul University, Hassani's portraits of Muslim women in burqas are more like block letters than figural bodies; they are usually engulfed by, or producing, arabesque color streams. Her art is her contribution to rebuilding the city with a particular eye to the conditions of women before, throughout, and after the war (www.facebook.com/pages/Shamsia-Hassani/252100761577381).

Conclusion

The graffiti writers/street artists cited here negotiate, manipulate, exploit, and reject the ways in which the writing on the wall is seen, particularly in relation to gender representation. They do so by: Using the possibilities of anonymity to negate the sexism within graffiti writing and street art culture; developing a value system unaffected by the conventional aesthetic hierarchy dependent on the gender binary; celebrating women's sexuality and women's bodies through a mode of sexualization that does not subordinate or dominate; using art to share and provoke cultural critique; painting in groups, in public, and in front of an audience; inviting, training, and mentoring other girls and women into street art and graffiti culture; and accessing the power of digital culture to connect across borders and time zones, to make history where girls and women are a part of the story (FemaleCaps, n.d.). The hopeful intention behind their cultural work is that the sexist and bigoted generalizations about the graffiti/street art "doer" will fade

in favor of a realization that all writers/artists are individuals with the potential to expand the aesthetic diversity of the writing on the wall (Turco, 2012; McCorquodale, 2012; Harrington and Rojo, 2013; Wyatt, 2013).

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