

From non-places to commonplaces...and back? Graffiti writing and street art's paradigm shift between artification and deartification.

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Abstract.

If, like it has been shown with Blu's self-iconoclasm cases, a complete and successful return to the non-places paradigm is no longer possible, it seems that its original ethos could only survive in a perpetual, Sisyphean struggle against the threat of deartification: the aesthetic specificity of the non-places paradigm can only be preserved or restored through symbolic actions, or through a transfiguration into something new, a constant aesthetic research that plays within the frames and the paradigms. It is the case of MOSA's works, BULKY and Neo-Archeologia: they both embody, in almost an ironic manner, such an ambiguous and everlasting suspension between non-places and commonplaces.

Keywords: Non-places, Aesthetic specificity, Symbolic actions, Neo-Archeologia, Ambiguity, Transfiguration

1. Introduction:

Graffiti writing, street art, and the problem of *place*

I shall begin this article with a reflection on the concept of *place*, and more precisely on its two variants of *non-place* and *commonplace*. Whether we use it in a literal or in a figurative fashion, the word *place* implies the presence of boundaries – which can be physical, material, real, or conceptual, ideal, virtual – delimiting or surrounding something: an object or a portion of space, a thought or a practice. Let us momentarily focus on these complementary concepts and their relation to graffiti writing and street art¹.

As observed by Rafael Schacter (2014), such relationship reminds of the one already existing between the ornament (or *parergon*) and the work of art (*ergon*) and notoriously theorized by Jacques Derrida: “[parerga] are inseparable from a lack within the *ergon*. And this lack makes for the very unity of the *ergon*. Without it, the *ergon* would have no need of a *parergon*. The lack of the *ergon* is the lack of a *parergon*” (Derrida 1987: 24).

There is something disturbing about the *parergon* and its relationship to the *ergon*. The former is accessory and adjunctive to the latter, but at the same time the *parergon* has a certain agency on the *ergon*. Their relationship results in a particular aesthetic functioning: it has the power to destabilize our perception of what is primary and secondary. For instance, one can sense this fundamental ambiguity in the case of a temple and its ornaments: what makes the Parthenon the Parthenon? Its architecture or its frieze? Its unity, of course, but if we follow Derrida's reasoning, that very unity happens to be the result of a tense relationship rather than a harmonious one.

Let us consider now a street artwork and its place, meaning by this term a wall, a building, an average urban surface or site. In Schacter's Derridean reading of street art, the role of the *ergon* is played by the place, while the street artwork plays the role of the *parergon*. As the British anthropologist points out, and compared to the urban

1 - In what follows, the term “street art” shall be used to identify both unsanctioned or sanctioned forms of muralism from artists (“street artists”) that have a past in (or at least a cultural proximity to) graffiti writing, i.e. the usually illegal urban art practice based on the spray-painted inscription of the artist's own pseudonym (called tag) through their own personal graphic style.

surface on which it is produced, each street artwork has an “adjunctive, and thus parergonic status” (Schacter 2014: 39). In other words: a tag, a throw, a piece, a stencil as any other kind of mural painting act as ornaments. He then makes a pivotal distinction between street art and graffiti writing, the former acting as “consensual ornamentation”, i.e. characterized “by a desire for inclusion within the public sphere as a whole, by a certain conceptual openness that seeks a harmonious relation with its recipient, and a visual decipherability [...] which often [...] works through a figural rather than textual modality” (Schacter 2014:47); the latter acting as “agonistic ornamentation”, moved by “a desire for a very partial rather than wholesale inclusion in the public sphere, a conceptual and formal obfuscation which if not simply dissensual, illustrates a combative modality of communication, and a style which often [...] works through textual rather than figural form” (Schacter 2014: 48).

Schacter makes an ingenious point by suggesting that what actually provokes unease in both graffiti writing and street art's aesthetic experience is not their (potential) illegal status, but the tension that they establish with the place in/on which they occur. I wish instead to suggest a different phenomenological standpoint by arguing that, even though adjunctive by nature, in their most original and spontaneous form, i.e. as unsanctioned practices, graffiti writing and street art might actually *subvert* the common hierarchy and perception of ornamentation. In order to do so, I shall first make clear what I mean by “original and spontaneous status”. I refer to graffiti writing and street art's origin in the physical, social and cultural margins of the urban society – what Henri Lefebvre had defined as “a society that results from a process of complete urbanization [...] during which the old urban forms, the end result of a series of discontinuous transformations, burst apart” (Lefebvre, 2003: 1-2) – outside the institutional artworld and the cultural industry, in places where art does not usually occur. I shall henceforth call such margins *non-places*.

At the same time this premise implies the existence (actually the coexistence) of some less or un- original and spontaneous graffiti writing and street art, or their transition to the very (physical, social and cultural) *center* of that same society, including the institutional artworld and the cultural

industry, that I shall henceforth call *commonplaces*, a term that should be understood in its literal sense (as places in which art is not an uncommon thing, like museums and galleries), but at the same time figuratively, as places where a certain process of trivialization occurs. How to interpret such a transition then? Is it something irreversible? It seems to me that the whole graffiti writing and street art world, from its birth to its late developments, could be resumed in a three-stages trajectory:

- I. The origin of graffiti writing and street art in *non-places* as pre-artified (i.e. not yet recognized as art by the institutional artworld) and anti-ornamental visual expressions.
- II. A paradigm shift from *non-places* to *commonplaces* (and from anti-ornamentality to servile ornamentality), consisting essentially in both the *artification* of graffiti writing and street art and their subsequent *deartification*. I will further clarify the use and meaning of these two concepts in the following paragraphs.
- III. A hypothetical comeback to *non-places*, recently exemplified by two case-studies: the first, a case of self-iconoclasm by the Italian street artist Blu; the second, a case of aesthetic transfiguration by graffiti writer and visual artist Alexandre Bavard.

I shall further develop such a trajectory in the following paragraphs.

2. Places vs. non-places

Not just graffiti writing and street art, all art presupposes a link with some place. All art originates, first, in the immaterial place of the artist's thoughts and sensations. All art turns itself into work in/on a physically determined place: a workshop or a theater, a canvas or a piece of paper, a camera or a screen, and so on. All art is preserved or displayed in some place, for a definite or indefinite period: be it in a museum, in a private house, in the stand of an art fair, or in a digital, virtual place such as a website or an online photo-gallery.

What do we mean then by place when talking about graffiti writing and street art? Is there any original, proper and specific place where graffiti writing and street art occur? In

order to answer we may question the relationship between graffiti writing, street art and their putative place: the street. First, one can very easily observe that all art in the street is not necessarily graffiti writing or street art: is there really anything in common – apart from sharing the same place – between a street stencil illegally and stealthily made on a wall, and a public art installation funded by a public institution? At the same time, to affirm that graffiti writing and street art must necessarily be in the street would be no less problematic. If we follow Ernst Gombrich's famous quote "There really is no such thing as art. There are only artists" (Gombrich, 1950: 5), we could provocatively say that street art and graffiti writing as such do not exist, and that there are only graffiti writers and street artists. What is a graffiti writer, then? What is a "street artist"? I would not argue that graffiti writers and street artists are simply individuals doing art in the street. They are individuals *artistically born* in the urban space and society, originally outside the institutional and conventional structures of the artworld, and whose artistic practices maintain a necessary and indissoluble link with such urban space and society.

Graffiti writing and street art cannot simply be considered as art in the street, or art of the city: such definitions are too vague, since any epoch has known, at least in the Western tradition, the tendency to aestheticize the city and its architecture, to fill it with signs and symbols. This is what Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour argue in their iconic book *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), but above all this is what the frieze of a Greek temple tells us, together with an equestrian statue or the facade of a Gothic church; the design of a Renaissance square or of Haussmann's avenues; the ornaments of a baroque fountain or those of an *art nouveau* building; the public art that acts as an extension of the museum in the street and the complex system of road signs and screens. However, each one of the examples that I have just enumerated, in its own fashion and according to its own specific function, happens to be the expressions and the self-representations of a certain power structure, being active in a certain place at a certain moment of history.

All these kinds of urban visual expressions are the product of places where the political, economic, commercial, ritual

and communicational activities of a city are centered. They are therefore the urban manifestation of a cultural hegemony, and they contribute to shape and to transmit the visual and cultural identity of a city during time. Thus, the procession where Augustus parades with the pontiffs along the southern frieze of the *Ara Pacis* is part of Rome's identity, and the *gotico fiorito* that, through its drawings gives rhythm to the facade of the Dome of Siena is part of the identity of the Tuscan city. The same can be said for the surfaces and patterns drawn by Antoni Gaudí in Barcelona, for the Cloud Gate in Chicago and all the advertising screens in Times Square and Piccadilly Circus.

The fundamental difference between these types of art and ornaments and what we call graffiti writing and street art lies exactly in the fact that, unlike the former, the latter are originally the product of a rather specific type of urban places: *non-places*, or marginal, interstitial places in a geographical, political, economic and cultural sense; places of transition or connection between the city center, the industrial zone and the countryside; places devoid of any specific architectural identity, and the space of which is punctuated by large housing projects and vacant lots, by bridges, viaducts, tunnels, motorways, railways, yards, abandoned warehouses and post-industrial rubble. Such a landscape exists worldwide, as it is the result of a global crisis of the urban society first observed and theorized by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre. Such a crisis consists in the "implosion-explosion" (Lefebvre, 2003: 14) of the traditional cityscape, the proliferation of the suburbs, the dilation of the peripheries and the centrifugal scattering of the populations based on their ethnicities or social classes. Lefebvre's considerations prove to be a valuable interpretive tool when it comes to describing the urban environment immortalized in the photos and videos documenting American artist John Fekner's interventions and New York graffiti writing in the 1970s and 1980s – for instance, Jon Naar's 1974 photos published in *The Faith of Graffiti* (Mailer, Naar, 2009) and Manfred Kirchheimer's 1981 documentary *Stations of the Elevated*.

3. An art of non-places

The occurrence of graffiti writing in that very environment has permanently changed our experience of it, and we will always associate the 1970 Washington Heights and South Bronx's urban landscape and trains with throws and pieces by Dondi and Seen, by Lady Pink and Blade among many others. In other words, and by employing the vocabulary of Martin Heidegger's phenomenology, graffiti writing has succeeded in *disclosing a world* (Heidegger, 2002: 15) that otherwise would have remained unnoticed. Such world is the *non-place*, a world that is inherently concealed because of its aesthetic, social, political and cultural marginality. The expression *non-places* has already been employed by Marc Augé to designate something close to the idea of marginality: "a space that cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (Augé, 1995: 77-78), a world "surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral" (Ibidem). Nonetheless, Augé circumscribes the discourse to a quite specific type of place: he means especially the airports, the service stations, the shopping malls, the hotel chains and the holiday villages, all those places produced by what he calls "supermodernity", or a world characterized by "overabundance of events, spatial overabundance, the individualization of references" (Ibid.: 40).

As already seen, the use of the expression *non-places* in this article has been inspired more by Lefebvre's idea of urban society rather than Augé's supermodernity. A similar concept has been proposed by Edwige Comoy Fusaro: "cata-places" (cata-luoghi), or "rarely-visited areas in the urban centers and transit places (construction sites, parking lots, tunnels, overpasses) [...] interstitial areas" (Fusaro, 2015: 6).² *Cata-places* has the merit of efficiently synthesizing the idea of opposition and approximation thanks to the suffix *cata-* (from the Greek κατά), meaning against, downwards or circa. Although the decision, in this article, to emulate Augé by using the negative particle *non-* obliges me to specify my own, different purpose, at the same time it allows me to enunciate two further ideas that are crucial in my interpretation:

I. An art of *non-places* is a *non-art*: from the angle of the artification theory developed by Nathalie Heinich and Roberta Shapiro – meaning by this concept the "dynamic process of social change [...] through which objects, forms, and practices are constructed and defined as artworks" (Heinich, Shapiro, 2012) – what we call graffiti writing and street art had not gained the status of art until their recognition by the artworld, i.e. by the market, by museums, by art criticism, the specialized media, etc.

II. A *non-place* always implies the presence of *non-surfaces*, namely all those generic, practical and serial surfaces that compose the architectural elements of the city. Ordinary surfaces that we barely notice as such during our daily routine, when we move from one place to another: the doors of a train, store curtains, the steps of an escalator, dumpsters, and drainpipes ...an exhaustive list of non-surfaces would be unobtainable.

Here again, graffiti writing and street art succeed in disclosing something: the *non-surface* turns into a surface, it emerges and becomes visible thanks to the street artwork and its occurrence. Let us get back to the interpretation of graffiti writing and street art as ornamentation: because of their adjunctiveness and their world-disclosing action, we can argue that street art has a crucial agency on *non-surfaces* and *non-places*. Nevertheless, precisely because they act on *non-surfaces* and *non-places*, unlike all the cases of hegemonic ornamentation previously enumerated – which, as we have already seen, act on places already shaped by power relations – graffiti writing and street art's agency looks like one of a different kind. Hegemonic ornamentation is servile to architecture, which, if we follow Georges Bataille, "is the expression of the very soul of societies [...] that which has the authority to command and prohibit, that is expressed in architectural compositions properly speaking" (in Hollier, 1992: 46-47). Graffiti writing and street art act as a subversive form of ornamentation or, better, they act as anti-ornaments, as parasitic creations that exploit the architectural element instead of serving it. While hegemonic ornamentation fulfils the power's need for self-representation through aesthetic order and the embellishment of architecture, graffiti writing and

2 - Translated from the Italian by the author.



Figure 1: SKUB and RIZOTE, *Untitled*, 2015. Spray paint on wall and car. Abandoned garage in Pantin, France. © Vittorio Parisi.

street art tend to subordinate architecture to their need for aesthetic and performative chaos. In their original form, graffiti writing and street art do not care for embellishment, nor are they meant or supposed to add aesthetic value to a place or a surface: on the contrary, by subordinating the place and the surface as their own background, they only add value to themselves. In other words, the aesthetic specificity of graffiti writing and street art, in their original and unsanctioned forms, is also that of constantly being *out-of-place*, and acting in an opposite way compared to the principle of *site specificity*.

Let us observe two photographs. The first one portrays a huge piece (on the wall) and a little throw-up (on a dismissed car), respectively made by the French graffiti writers SKUB and RIZOTE, in an abandoned parking lot in Pantin, a banlieue located in north-east Paris (figure 1). The second picture shows an abstract mural painting made by the Italian street

artist 108, located in an abandoned dairy farm in Vedriano, Italy (figure 2). In both cases, the place is at the complete mercy of the art: SKUB and RIZOTE have subordinated its many surfaces (a wall and a car, which consist themselves in many other surfaces equally exploited: the windows, the door...) to their creations; the same has been done by 108, who spread his black irregular, abstract form above walls, ceilings and tubs without caring about the aesthetic order prescribed by the preexisting architecture – and that is precisely how hegemonic ornamentation acts, by following and respecting the surfaces provided by the preexisting architectural order. Perhaps most of the unease and the uncanny feeling provoked by original, spontaneous graffiti writing and street art results from this very subversion of the common ornamental hierarchy: they play the role of the *ergon*, while the place and the surface play that of the *parergon*.



Figure 2: 108, *Untitled*, 2014. Acrylic paint. Abandoned dairy farm in Vedriano, Italy. © 108.

4. From non-places to commonplaces

What happens, then, when graffiti writing and street art enter the realm of the commonplaces? Does this subversion and this conflictual, anti-ornamental ethos persist in the transition from non-places to commonplaces? Such a transition appears as a true “paradigm shift”, a concept first forged in 1962 by the American physicist and epistemologist Thomas Kuhn to describe, in sciences, a radical change from one universally accepted state of knowledge to a new one, and then borrowed by Nathalie Heinich in order to interpret the rupture from one universally accepted conception of art to a new one, or “an effective change in collective representations” (Heinich, 2014: 45)³. In the case of graffiti writing and street art, the shift consists in two crucial steps:

I. The first is street art’s quick artification, which occurred quite early, when in 1972 the sociology student Hugo Martinez founded the *United Graffiti Artists* and organized the first “*graffiti art show*” at the New York City College. It was the first time that the words *art* and *artist* were associated to the word *graffiti*, and it was the first time that graffiti writing moved from outdoor walls and trains to canvases in order to be exposed in a gallery-like space.

The recognition by the art market and by museums came right after and grew in Europe during the 1980s. Yet this first wave of artification only concerned the “golden age” of New York graffiti writing and its protagonists. A new one came up at the beginning of the 2000s, when new European generations of graffiti writers and street artists started using the internet in order to diffuse the images of their actions in the *non-places*. This takes us to the second step of the paradigm shift.

II. As Katja Glaser has shown (2015), the internet has radically transformed the way street art is being produced, promoted and experienced. Street artists joined the huge category of the “digital prosumers” (Ritzer, Jurgenson, 2010), i.e., both producers and consumers for the user-generated web, and suddenly their visibility no longer ran only in the *non-places* but also and especially on screens, from online forums to social networks, from artists’ websites to Instagram accounts. One only has to check, for instance, the amount of Instagram hashtags dedicated to graffiti writing and street art in order to measure the extension of the phenomenon. If street art had already entered the artworld during the 1970s-1980s thanks to the interest of dealers, scholars and art critics, the years

3 - Translated from the French by the author.

2000s-2010s and Internet mark the entry of graffiti writing and street art in the cultural industry and the leisure market, the most evident sign of this being the proliferation of street art festivals in Europe.

The first street art festival ever organized in Italy occurred in 2002 (*Icône*, Modena). Six years later, festivals were only four but in 2012 the number had risen to 13 then to 28 in 2015. The storytelling that usually follows the organization of a festival, especially when supported by a city council – as in the case of several Italian festivals that I have been observing – show the recurrence of a particular motive, that of the urban requalification of the suburbs and housing projects. Nicholas Alden Riggle has already spoken of “transfiguration of the commonplaces” (2010) by borrowing and using in the plural a famous formula by American philosopher Arthur C. Danto (1981). While the latter uses the word *commonplace* in his metaphorical sense of triviality, in order to describe the elevation of ordinary objects – like Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Box* – to the status of artwork, Riggle uses this same expression in a more literal fashion: *commonplaces* as the places of life in common, i.e. the city. Street art certainly transfigures the city, but when the possibility of transfiguration becomes a decorative and demagogic tool for councils and other institutions, the transition of street art from the *non-places* paradigm to the *commonplaces* paradigm reaches its very fulfillment and its most critical outcome: the *deartification* of street art.

Deartification may look like the contrary of artification, but the two have no real connection. They actually have two distinctive epistemological applications. The latter, as we have already seen, as a sociological concept. The former is a translation from the German word *Entkunstung*, which has been forged by Theodor W. Adorno in 1953 and by which the philosopher meant the dissolution of art into the cultural industry, or the process through which art loses its critical force and becomes a commodity. Such process appears quite evident in two cases: when – as in most of the festivals organized in Italy – street art is ideologically and demagogically used to decorate huge walls; then, when the aesthetics of the margin and of the revolt is turned into commodity – as, for instance, in the case of Shepard Fairey and the multinational brand of clothes he derived from

his artist’s name, OBEY. In the first case, the art of *non-places* turns from *ergon* to *parergon*, from anti-ornamental to pure hegemonic ornament and it loses its original and spontaneous force. In the second case, graffiti writing and street art’s antagonistic and conflictual aura is turned into commodity. In both cases, what remains is no longer *non-places*’ original vocation, but its degradation to kitsch.

5. Back to non-places? The case of Blu

Speaking about deartification is, to a certain extent, tantamount to speaking about the end or the death of art. But what if, in the case of graffiti writing and street art, there was a way out from such an ominous destiny? Is deartification irreversible, or would a return to the non-places’ paradigm be a concrete possibility? The most representative case of a hypothetical return to non-places would be the Italian street artist Blu painting over some of his own murals, in Berlin on December 12 2014 (figure 3), and in Bologna on March 12 2016 (figure 4):

In the first case, the artist used black paint in order to self-buff two murals he had realized in 2007 and 2008 in an empty lot, located in the former underground neighborhood of Kreuzberg. According to art curator Lutz Henke, who coordinated the action on Blu’s behalf, the murals had taken “their involuntary place in this reality as a pilgrimage site of guided street art tours, as a photo opportunity for countless greeting cards, book covers and record sleeves” (Henke, 2014), and the city council had started to “use the aesthetics of resistance for its marketing campaigns. But by this time the neighbourhood had already found itself in the thick of gentrification, with fierce protests against rising rents. And of course art – especially highly visible public art [...] – contributes to this process.” (Ibidem).

In the second case, Blu covered in grey paint all the murals he had painted in Bologna over a period of twenty years, as a form of protest against the exhibition *Street Art, Banksy & Co. L’arte allo stato urbano*. The show, financed by the *Genus Bononiae Foundation*, ran from March 18 to June 26 2016 at Palazzo Pepoli (the museum of the history of the city) and was focused on American and European graffiti writing and street art’s history and breakthroughs. Most part of



Figure 3: Blu, *Untitled*, 2014. Acrylic paint. Vacant lot in Kreuzberg, Berlin, Germany. © Blu.

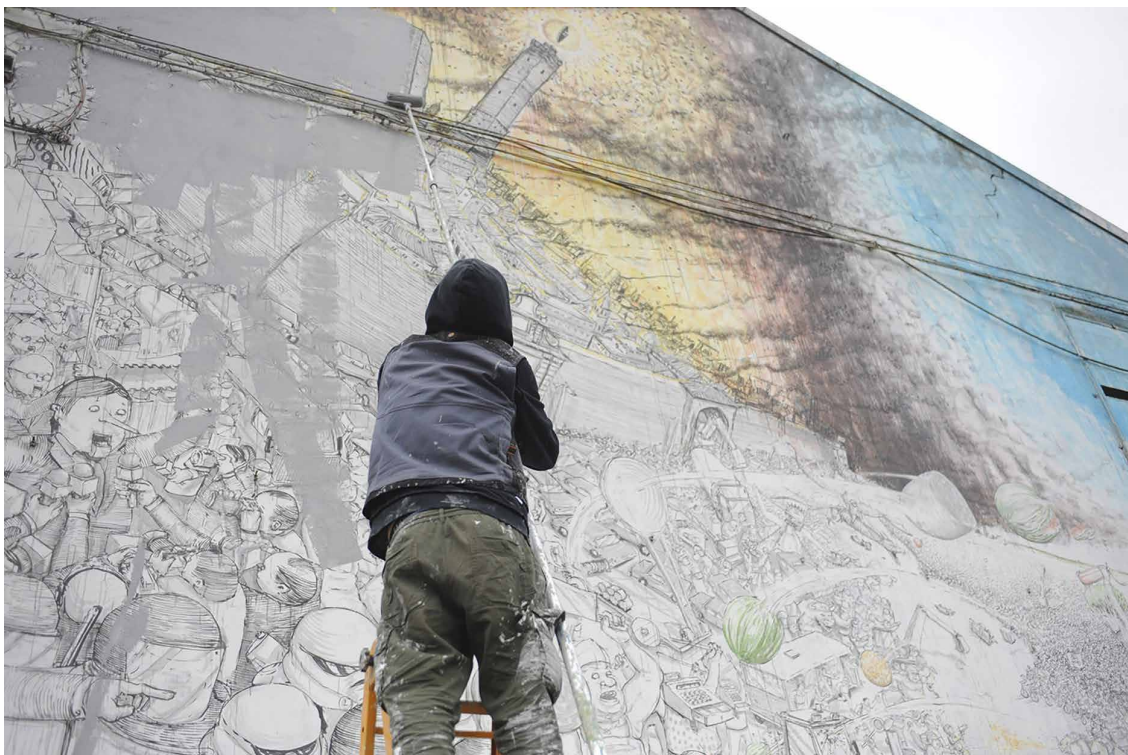


Figure 4: Blu covering in grey paint his 2013 mural *Occupy Mordor*, 2016. Acrylic paint. Bologna, Italy. © Blu.

the artworks came from private and public collections, except seven pieces of wall illegally painted by Blu in 2006 in an abandoned garage: these were extracted by the team of the Italian restorer Camillo Tarozzi and transposed on canvas, thus exposed in the exhibition. Following the buffing action – this time carried on by Blu himself with the help of several other artists and friends – the radical leftist group of Italian authors named Wu Ming released a declaration on behalf of the artist, claiming that “Blu’s self-cancellation is an act of guerrilla-art, inflicted against the symbolic reduction of street art within museums [...] Sometimes it takes to sacrifice beauty to the effectiveness of action. [...] The work of art doesn’t matter. What matters is the life and the relationships that lie behind and struggle to escape assimilation to the dominant logic (Wu Ming, 2016).”⁴

Both the actions taken by Blu appeared as acts of protective self-iconoclasm. Particularly in the second one, a game of mutual appropriations between two opposite ethos – *commonplaces*’ and *non-places*’ ethos – seems to emerge: on the one side, the artworld seizes a practice that was formerly considered uninteresting or harmful, in order to produce an institutional exhibition; on the other side, the street artist destroys his own creations in order to restore their meaning and force, by seizing an iconoclastic measure – namely whitewashing – that is usually employed by institutions in order to restore public and private property affected by illegal graffiti writing or street art.

Perhaps Blu’s actions can be interpreted as a symbolic return to the *non-place* paradigm: once the street artwork becomes a commodity or loses its original vocation – i.e. when it becomes deartified – it can gain back its force only at the cost of a radical, self-iconoclastic action, a sort of artistic euthanasia. In this struggle against deartification, the artwork does not actually disappear but takes on a new form, a new meaning and a new power: this is particularly true if we give a greater value to its performative, rather than to its visual-objective status. Nevertheless, such symbolic transformation has itself a side effect: it easily undergoes media spectacularization, as the huge media

hype that followed Blu’s action in Bologna seems to confirm. In other words, it is likely to be deartified again, since no radical action is invulnerable to being endogenized or commodified by what Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have called “the new spirit of capitalism” (2007).

In theory, a true return to non-places could be possible only at the cost of a *de-artification*, meaning in this case a reversion of the artification process theorized by Heinich and Shapiro, namely an actual departure of the artist from the circuits of artistic recognition, something which is quite unlikely, as the two French sociologists suggest (Heinich, Shapiro, 2012: 292). Furthermore, much of the illegal and unsanctioned graffiti writing and street art that is still being made in non-places, no matter their illegal nature and their aesthetic value, is already produced within the premises of platform capitalism – as its main outcome is to be published on user generated web platforms such as Instagram or Youtube – i.e. within the paradigm of the commonplaces.

6. The art of non-places, transfigured: the case of MOSA/ Alexandre Bavard

Nevertheless, is there any possible way to reconcile graffiti’s original ethos – the non-places paradigm – and the need for social recognition? The awareness of the impossibility of a true non-places comeback has already led a few numbers of graffiti writers and street artists to transform their practice, and to play in between the non-places and the commonplaces in order to question the awkward ambiguity that shapes this particular artworld and its whole discourse. A member of the Parisian crew PAL (Peace and Love), the French artist and graffiti writer Alexandre Bavard, also known as MOSA, has for instance figured out a choreographic notation system on the basis of the body movements generated by the act of tagging (figure 5). Such system, which he has named *BULKY*, is then interpreted by a dancer during a performance conceived for the institutional art world:

“Bulky is a system of notation of the movement generated by the tag. This system responds to a primary desire of

4 - Translated from the Italian by the author.

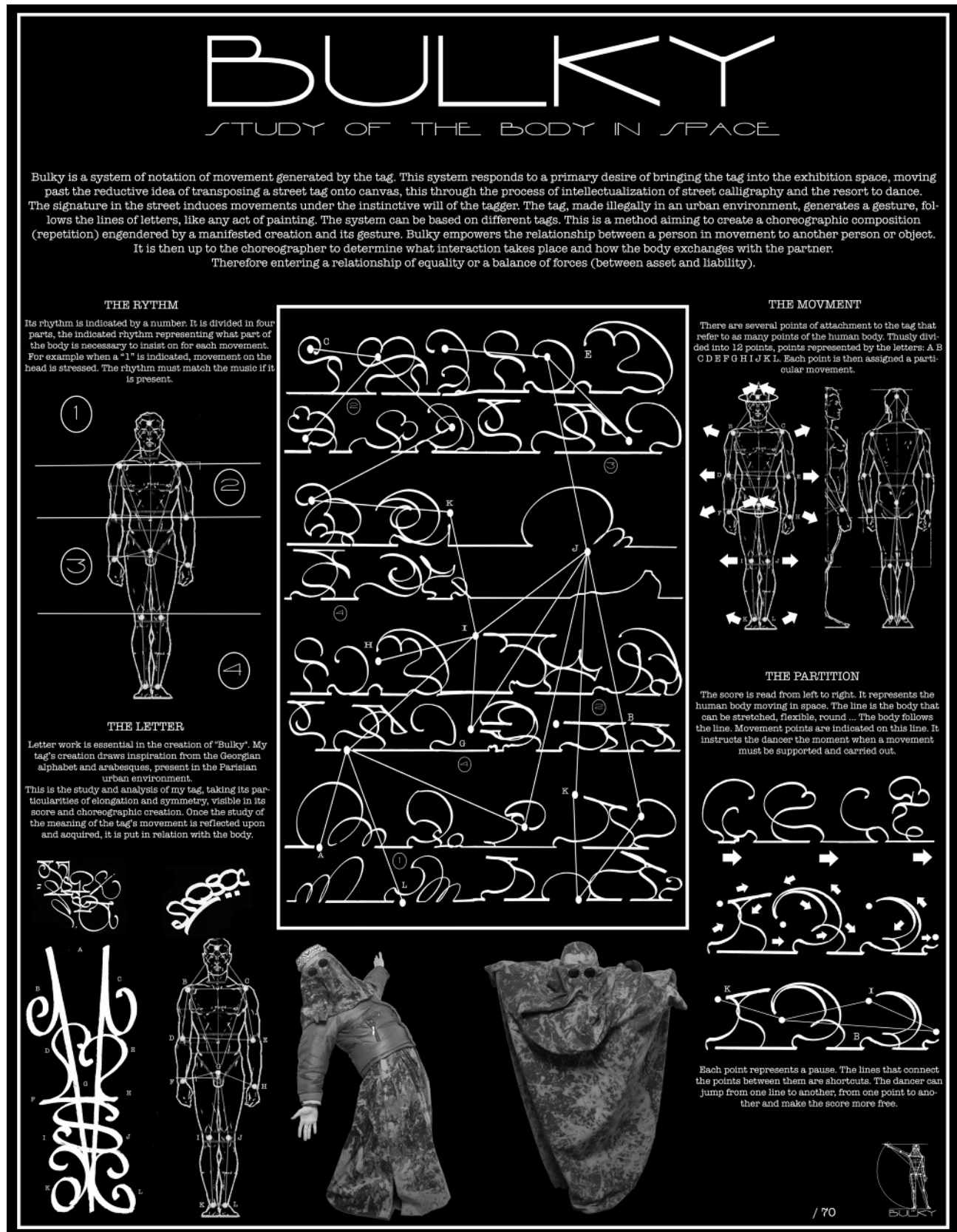


Figure 5: Alexandre Bavard, *BULKY - Study of the Body in Space*, 2018. Silk-screen print. © Alexandre Bavard.

bringing the tag into the exhibition space, moving past the reductive idea of transposing a street tag onto canvas, this through a process of intellectualization of street calligraphy and the resort to the dance. The signature in the street induces movements under the instinctive will of the tagger” (Parisi, 2019: 70)

In another work from 2018 named *Neo-Archeologia*, the artist has transfigured into sculptural works some pieces of garbage found in the vacant lots that fill the North-Eastern Parisian suburbs like Pantin and Bagnolet, where he usually practices graffiti writing. Car tires, vacuum cleaner attachments, boxes of household products, etc., are moved to MOSA’s studio, in order to be transformed into imaginary relics through the technique of plaster cast and the addition of airbrushed neon color. Both the examples seem to match the new category that has been recently suggested by Rafael Schacter, and that he has called *Intermural Art*: “not merely a movement transplanting Graffiti or Street Art into the permissible realm of the gallery or museum” but rather an “art in between the walls” by which “the inside can affect the out and the outside the in [...] the internal can critique the external and, in the same manner, the external the in” (Schacter 2016).

7. Conclusion

If, like it has been shown with Blu’s self-iconoclasm cases, a complete and successful return to the non-places paradigm is no longer possible, it seems that its original ethos could only survive in a perpetual, Sisyphean struggle against the threat of deartification: the aesthetic specificity of the non-places paradigm can only be preserved or restored through symbolic actions, or through a transfiguration into something new, a constant aesthetic research that plays within the frames and the paradigms. It is the case of MOSA’s works, *BULKY* and *Neo-Archeologia*: they both embody, in almost an ironic manner, such an ambiguous and everlasting suspension between non-places and commonplaces.

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