

Introduction

The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet block was the essential proof needed to solidify capitalism and liberal state democracy as the epitome of the superiority of the western political order; coupled with the increase in democratic states throughout the 1990s.¹ In the 21st Century, however, which began with the United States' (and its allies) invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, we once again witness the forcible application of this state democracy that was so prominent during the Cold War. The arguments of the Bush Administration, that the United States is freeing the people of Iraq and needed to bring democracy to them, exposes the contradiction in state democracy. With the logic of come to democracy or democracy will come to you.² As in a political system that is based on the inherit power of the people is used to invade, kill, and ensnare the very people this system is based upon. How is it that democracy has come to mean the invasion and suppression of people? Within the enforcement of democracy at the international level, if the gaze is turned inward, it is possible to observe and analyze the nature of this state democratic order. Using the work of Jacque Rancière, the United States democratic order is not only undemocratic, it perpetuates an post-political order—typically, procedurally within the United States and violently internationally. Furthermore, this post-democratic order creates an *electoral habitus* within it citizenry, in which the each citizen is already accounted for and therefore can be included into the political procedure of elections. Therefore, these are little need for

¹ Crouch 2004, 1. Here state democracy defined as “full and free elections.”

² Dean 2009

politics in the streets or political antagonism outside of the political parties. From here, citizens who attempt to express their political will become illegitimate because they lack what I refer to as *expressive capital*, or the political and social resources necessary in order to be political, rather than criminals, vandals, anarchists, etc. Ultimately, the United States democratic order has transforms democratic equality into liberal emancipation of the property class; however, it does not end here, rather in our neoliberal times, liberty has becomes choice, and choice has become about consumption. In the end, expression of politics and injustices appear unreasonable because the expressing agent attempts to be political outside of the logic of elections or consumption. While this order appears all encompassing, both the frameworks of Rancière and Bourdieu offer potential for democratic agency and disruptive action against this neoliberal consumption non-politics. I examine the work of early graffiti writers as a case to explore two competing orders of the urban aesthetic; and how the lack of expressive capital can be used to delegitimize political alternatives by making them appear as criminals, until the neoliberal order is able to properly absorb them—a la street art.

A brief outline of my paper will help the reader follow my argument concerning post-politics and expressive capital, in order to understand the development of the United States post-political order. I start with a discussion of the development of the United States Constitution and its framework for a governing mechanism based on representation instead of direct democracy. My argument here follows the work and words of Hamilton and Madison in the *Federalist Papers*. I follow this section with a discussion of Bourdieu's work on habitus and capital in

order to explore the generation of the electoral habitus, which results in citizens lacking any expressive capital outside of the governing mechanisms and logic of elections and choice. After this, I will discuss the work of Rancière and his conceptualization of *politics*, *police*, and *democracy*. I will apply these concepts to the Hamilton and Madison's ideas within the *Federalist Papers* in order to explore the characteristics of the United States social order and the transformation of politics and democracy into policy and choice, and ultimately into consumption. Finally, I will explore the case study of graffiti writers as an example of the possibility of politics within the United State post-political order; however thin or thick those possibilities are I will leave up to the reader at this time.

A new beginning: Government, the Constitution, and the Federalist Papers

What type of state and what type of government were Madison and Hamilton attempting to establish based on their arguments in the *Federalists Papers*? In a liberal and humanist tradition, these founders were not attempting to create a new divine state and a monarchical government. Rather, as Slauter argues, they believed that government was a work of human art, not a work of God. Following from Montesquieu, they argued that governments were artificial but still needed basis between the fickleness of Man and the absoluteness of God (which were both coexisting elements under the British Crown—the English Monarchy=God, and the English's unwritten Constitution=Man). Instead, they wanted a government of Law,

which was accomplished through an established, written constitution.³ The Constitution was a prescriptive document⁴; to fix the wrongs of the Articles. The new United States under the Constitution set a more centralized government (one that, in theory, combined a federal government and a national government).⁵ This is present in *Federalist #1*, in which Hamilton argues the benefits to the union under the Constitution, as opposed to the disjointed confederacy under the Articles. The new Constitution would do a better job at protecting and preserving *government, liberty, and property*.⁶

Through the *Federalist Papers*, Hamilton and Madison lay out their arguments for how the Constitution was to do a better job at protecting a popular government, liberty, and property (or the right to it). A major concern for Madison and Hamilton was the role of democracy within the new state. In #10, Madison argues that measures, such as laws or regulations, within a democracy have a basis

³ Slauter 2009, 10-39

⁴ Wolin 1989, 3; Bilakovics 2012, 187

⁵ I do not approach the ratification of the Constitution in my analysis. While many other scholars have approached this event as undemocratic. My analysis is not meant to delegitimize the Constitution based on the rules of ratification based on the Articles; which state (Article X) that a change of the Articles would require unanimous vote by all the state. However, the convention used the new (Constitution) document's requirement of 9 states (Article VII) to ratify the Constitution. Even though Madison evokes the idea of 'the people' in his argument for the legitimacy of the new constitution, for this project, it is more important to analyze his thoughts on democracy in relation to the new republicanism he proposed throughout the *Federalist papers*. In this case, Madison bases his argument for the legitimacy of authorization of the new constitution on his own republicanism and representation democratic ideals. (For a good analysis of Madison's argument on this issue see: Moore 2013, 226-235.)

⁶ Hamilton, et al 2003, 30

in justice or with concern for minority parties within the society.⁷ He was concerned that factions would form within society, leading to one faction with a majority of members of society in it and that this faction would abuse the power of government to oppress and deny rights to a minority faction.⁸ He argued that democracy can only work when the society is small and homogeneous; that there are no true distinct factions within a society, but rather just a single small community.⁹ Instead of a direct democracy, in which the people (however defined) have direct control over the power of the government, he proposed a *republican* alternative. By republican, he states “a government in which the scheme of representation takes place.”¹⁰ He argues that a representative republic is better for a large-scale society because, under the new federal system, there would be too many locations of representation—at the state and federal level; and within the federal/national government—for one faction to gain control of all hands of government. Both Madison and Hamilton argued that people would pursue their self-interests over the rights of minorities or the public good. In other words, society is made up of competing groups, and that the everyday person tends to follow their passions and fickle desires. This republicanism had two key elements: 1) the public good, and 2) a representation.¹¹

⁷ Ibid., 72

⁸ Hamilton et al 2003, 73

⁹ Even this understanding of democracy is an attempt to depoliticize democracy; to make it based on too much consensus, instead of a vibrant and ever-shifting political ideal.

¹⁰ Hamilton et al. 2003, 76

¹¹ Moore 2013, 235

As the ancient understanding of republic is *res publica*, or public thing, Madison and Hamilton argued that the achievement of a republican self-government depends on a representative system that protected this “public thing.” In #55, during his discussion of the number of representatives in the House, that certain men will follow their passions, Madison states that there is a “degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust”; however he goes on to say that not all are to the same degree depraved, that there are “qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence.”¹² Here we see the influence of ancient thought about the split between passions and virtue within humans. While Madison, in theory, argues that Man is capable for self-government, but he also argues that not all humans are capable of discovering virtue on their own. In other words, they may not be able to discover and hold themselves to this public good. Based on his argument, his republican form of government is better suited for the American political system because, as he states in #10, representatives (ideally) would be like the ‘body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country.’¹³

The founders appear to desire neither a governing system that is direct democracy nor the monarchical system from which they freed themselves from as colonists. While we understand their distaste for the latter, their distrust of a full democracy links with their understanding of the ancient political theory. As both Plato and Aristotle theorized, not all men are able to be virtuous; a democracy not

¹² Hamilton et al 2003, 343

¹³ Ibid., 77

only leaves open space for an unvirtuous public good, it also risks a return of an illegitimate and unaccountable leader, the demagogue.¹⁴ Founder, Elbridge Gerry, was so distrusting of democracy that he is quoted as saying during the Constitutional Convention that open elections would be “radically vicious” and that democracy is “worst...of all political evils” because the people lack the proper education and would be misled by a few “designing men” who would pull at their interests.¹⁵

This doubt of the worthiness of the people to direct government and laws leads to the other element of Madison’s republicanism—the representative democracy. In #15, Hamilton proclaims that a government should create and enforce neutral laws; however, because men cannot control their passions and self-interests, direct governance would not result in neutral laws.¹⁶ In a representative system, to be considered democratic for Madison, the government must “derive all its powers *directly or indirectly* from the great body of the people...persons administering it [can be] appointed, either directly or indirectly, by the people...”.¹⁷ Madison desired a legitimate government (or, a government that the people viewed as legitimate); however, he did not desire for the people to have direct control over political and economic affairs within the government. Elected officials, or appointed officials, according to Madison, have two roles: 1) they provide an outlet for democratic energies, through voting, and 2) they ideally direct society toward a

¹⁴ Signer 2009

¹⁵ Ibid., 32

¹⁶ Hamilton et al. 2003, 105-106

¹⁷ #39, Hamilton et al, 2003 237. Emphasis added.

public good. Representatives are not to be a direct voice of the people, but as stated above, were to help the people find the *true* public good. These representatives were to be *trustees* of the public rather than delegates. In other words, the constituents (the people) are suppose to trust their representatives, who ideally knew better.

The End of History in Liberal-Republicanism

Madison argues that even within this type of elected, representative system the government needed to be governed, as well. As he famously wrote in #51, “ambition must be made to counteract ambition.”¹⁸ The people cannot do this because they have given over their political power through elected representatives, but representatives may not always be the most virtuous. If this is the case, then the government would need to check itself and the states would need to have the power to check the new federal government.

These features of the new Constitution created what is labeled as *Madisonian democracy*, which I argue is a hybrid of republicanism and liberalism; republican in that there is a desire for a public good and system that allows the right persons to find and protect that good; liberal in its negative views of human nature in that Man is individualistic and generally motivated by self-interest and property. Madisonian democracy creates a governing mechanism in which the there is a supposed compromise between the powers of majority and minority groups. External mechanisms keep these groups in check, such as through governing institutions and laws, rather than internal checks (i.e. cultural and political socialization).¹⁹ These

¹⁸ Hamilton et al. 2003, 319

¹⁹ Dahl 1956, 4-19

external checks are such things as elections and divided powers within the government branches, such as two houses of Congress (one representing state and one representing people) to write laws, an executive to enforce laws, and a court to judge laws.

What is interesting about Madisonian democracy (or liberal-republicanism) is that it establishes a governing system that steers away from direct participation in order to create a system that does not allow for intense or radical change. Democratic theorists refer to this type of system as *protective* democracy.²⁰ This protective model establishes a governing system that allows for indirect participation from the majority of self-interested and partially unreasonable people in order to protect the public good, which allows for the interests of the minority of less fickle and more reasonable and enlightened few to flourish.

Property Protection as Politics

Problems facing the founding elite under the Articles of Confederation were that the rebellious energies from the revolution had not receded (e.g. Shay's Rebellion); the ongoing westward expansion and violent encounters with the indigenous populations (plus, the fact that the British and Spanish control areas to the west of the young states and territories); national war debt; and the desire (by certain founding members) for economic security in order to compete in the global market.²¹ In other words, property (either protecting established property or acquiring new property) was a key concern, just as much as the democratic energies

²⁰ Macpherson 1977; Krouse 1983

²¹ Parent 2010, 219; Parker 1991, 99

that could hinder or help this protection. The founding elites debt to Lockean liberalism becomes all too clear at this point. The public good and the interests of the founding elite were those that have a basis in individual liberty and property that secured that liberty.²² The great influence of John Locke's liberal theory of government and property—the state of nature/contract theory and natural right to property—must not be ignored.²³ For Locke, property was what one could gain for themselves without the need for others. On one side, for Locke links freedom directly to a right to property, because ownership of self and resources allows for consent.²⁴ However, what this ideal of consent and property ignores is the democratic behaviors of the majority of people, who, having not been born in a state of nature but in established structured society, do not have the access or opportunity to acquire property without taking it from some one else. In other words, democratic energies will lead to the taking of the property from those who have it.²⁵ In the case of the founding elite, this property was economic resources, such as contracts, bonds, paper, and credit, just as much as it was physical resources, such as land and agriculture.²⁶ With all of this in mind, it is necessary to discuss not only what type of government the founding elite desired, but also what was necessary to create a single state, as opposed to a confederacy of states. A

²² Cunningham 2002, 25; Hudson 2006, 5-10

²³ O'Neill 2013

²⁴ Mansfield 1979, 37

²⁵ O'Neill 2013, 322

²⁶ Dolbeare 1987, 123

constitution that created a strong centralized government would be needed to create a state that protected the property of the elites.²⁷

The Liberal-Republican State

The Weberian definition of the state is that which has a legitimate monopoly of the use of force for a defined landmass.²⁸ What is important about this definition is what is the power of enforcement through this monopolistic, legitimate use of coercion. However, there is more to the use of force. Based on Charles Tilly's work on European state-making²⁹, in which a state is that which "1) controls a well-defined, contiguous territory; 2) it is relatively centralized; 3) it is differentiated from other organizations; and 4) it reinforces its claims through a tendency to acquire a monopoly over the concentrated means of physical coercion within its territory". What this definition centers on is not just force or coercion, but legitimate wielding of power to affect the physical landscape *and* the power to affect the minds of those in society (i.e. patriotism and loyalty)—the state needs people to believe that the state *legitimately* holds power in order to extract and maintain resources (i.e. property).³⁰ As Hamilton argued, a strong national government was necessary for the young country to hold its own not only militarily, but also, in an economic market, in which the United States would be competing with well-established global empires.³¹ In other words, the state needed to be a commercial state, where landed

²⁷ Here, I am not referring to the *Union*, which took center stage during the American Civil War. Rather, I am discussing a more abstract conception of a *state*.

²⁸ Graham 2002, 6

²⁹ Tilly et al. 1975, 27

³⁰ Parker, 1991, 98

³¹ Dolbeare 1987

property could mix freely with monetary and industrious property—i.e. wealth-producing property.³² While there was debate at the time of the ratification of the Constitution between the federalists and the anti-federalists about the role and power of a national government and its effects on democracy and self-government, the split between the agrarian vision of Jefferson versus the commercial vision of Hamilton is not as stark when it comes to the role of property in the new state. Heide Gerstenberger argues that most of the founding elites (both the plantation owners in the South and the merchants in the North) were already in the American bourgeois class. There was little debate about the role of the working and enslaved classes in the more centralized economy.³³

While a more centralized state was necessary to protect the propertied class, the pacification of another strong element of American society is necessary in order to keep this class in power. This element was the basic revolutionary energies that had not dulled enough since the war. In context of the ordinary people living under the Articles, their democratic energies, which were a necessary mentality during the war with Britain, were becoming a source of strain for many founding elite. As stated above, it was not necessarily just their energy, but that they were attempting economic reform, as well as political reform. One should not ignore the impact and influence of Shay's Rebellion on the founding elites and its use as evidence for the failures of the Articles. Madison wrote that Shay's Rebellion was the "*ripening event*"

³² Diamond 1959, 52 and 66.; Rahe 1994, 23-30

³³ Gerstenberger 1973, 109. Quoted in Mosley 1976. She points out that once Jefferson, a staunch opponent of Hamilton's centralized economy, took office that he adopted similar protective elements (such a tariffs) in order to protect the young mercantile economy.

that took place between the Annapolis and Philadelphia Conventions, which exposed the need for a reformed system.³⁴ However, certain elites did not find this rebellion as a completely negative event. Jefferson infamous statement in reference to the rebellion “The tree of liberty should be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.”³⁵ However, it should be noted that scholars have contributed the Whiskey and Fries’ Rebellion to the founding elites’ desire for a stronger national government—one that can protect property and create a centralized economic institution that can deal with debt, money, and taxation over people and states.³⁶ In the spirit of our time, John Adams, in letters to Jefferson, referred to these events, not as rebellions or insurrections, but as acts of terrorism.³⁷ The indebted class, who had fought against Britain for what they assumed would be more political and financial independence, were still attempting to gain that independence now not from now a state or government, but from another class of individuals within the same state. The goal was to redistribute the governing power gained from the relatively recent independence from the British Empire.

Electoral Habitus

The Liberal-republican state that was designed through the *Federalist Papers* and implemented through the ratification of the Constitution set up a state in which

³⁴ Madison 1984, 29. Quoted in Parker 1991

³⁵ Jefferson 1950, 356. Quoted in Parker 1991

³⁶ Connor 1992

³⁷ Cappon 1959, 346

democracy is linked to electoral politics and a representational system in order to protect the propertied class. So, how does this new democracy sustain itself if there is mistrust between the democratic peoples and the ruling elite? Or, those with property and those without it. How is it that a government based on popular sovereignty does not allow for participation that is more direct and rule by the multitude of people in it? In other words, how are the governing mechanisms perceived as legitimate?

In order to answer these questions, I rely on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his understanding of the concept of *habitus*. Within the United States, we have, know, and work within an *electoral habitus*. However, before I go any further, it is necessary to analyze and define what Bourdieu means by habitus and how it functions within society and politics. While Bourdieu's own definition of the term changes throughout his career, while working within the discipline of sociology, he attempts to place habitus outside of pure determinism and a structuralist framework, and instead to find a middle ground between constructivism and structuralism.³⁸ He attempts to explain not only why people behave in a certain way, but also how they came to behave that way. At a basic level, a subject with a certain habitus has a *practical sense*, in that she is an active and knowing agent.³⁹ Habitus is a "generative principle," from which we act out our place within a social order; while simultaneously, through these predispositions and tastes, we reproduce the

³⁸ Hilgers 2009

³⁹ Bourdieu 1998, 25

social order.⁴⁰ Giddens refers to this ‘practical sense’ as a *practical consciousness*, in which we are simultaneously aware of the social rules and unaware that we are necessarily following rules.⁴¹ And Elias refers to it as a *second nature*, in which thoughts and behaviors are learned early on and are out of sight and therefore out of mind.⁴² It is the actions and thoughts that allow us to fit in within a social situation.

It is important to state that habitus is not merely rule-following. Rather, it is when rules, in this case social rules and behaviors, are habituated and the rule(s) is internalized and its point of origin is forgotten; it has become naturalized. When we act, we are simultaneously consciously acting and unconsciously reacting to the external environment and to other people.⁴³ Habitus is not restricted to the pure social world, such as coffee shops and fundraisers. Rather, there are multiple types of habitus, within the political and cultural realms, and at an individual and collective level, which are played out within different fields—or sites of action and reaction.⁴⁴ However, each of our dispositions begins within the social world, through either parenting, cultural activities, school, etc. This socialization takes and mixes the natural world and the social world—giving meaning to the naturally occurring world (such as weather and geological features) and naturalizing the socially occurring world (such as social position, politics, gender, etc). Agents

⁴⁰ Bourdieu 1977, 78

⁴¹ Giddens 1984, xxiii

⁴² Elias 1994; quoted in Haugaard 2008, 190

⁴³ Bourdieu 1991, 12; Bourdieu 1989, 19

⁴⁴ Wacquant 2014, 120

“internalize objective reality and help reproduce the categories they have perceived, because they situate their own acts in relation to this perception of the world. In a certain sense, through practice, agents make what they perceive exist. They externalize their internalization.”⁴⁵ Hilger means that the objective reality exists external to the agent; that the physical and natural world exists without the agent. For example, the Mississippi river as a body of flowing water will exist regardless of our knowing or perceiving it; however, the concept of a *river* does not exist without us, and what and how that river is and ought to be used is dependent on our collective understanding of it. What is more important for this project is the naturalizing of the social world and subjective reality and the process of this socialization. Here, it is necessary to employ more of Bourdieu’s theory of socialization in order to understand how American citizens develop their electoral habitus as the naturalization of democracy as electoral politics, but simultaneously lack legitimate expressive capital.

For Bourdieu, the social world is made up of fields, or sites of action and reaction, which are established through social rules.⁴⁶ In other words, fields are where agents and habitus can be observed, such as the cultural field of art; or, in the case of this project, the political field. Within these fields, an agent has more legitimacy based on their *capital*. Bourdieu uses the term capital in a similar logic of economics, in that capital is a type of resource that can be acquired and used. There are multiple types of capital, but the two main ones are economic (material wealth),

⁴⁵ Hilgers 2009, 736

⁴⁶ Ibid., 741

and cultural (education, knowledge, skills).⁴⁷ As Bourdieu explains, “agents are distributed in the overall social space, in the first dimension, according to the overall *volume* of capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the structure of their capital—that is, the relative *weight* of the different species of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their assets.”⁴⁸ Capital allows for a certain level of legitimacy and therefore power within a social space, which can be used to make the subjective social world appear to be objective, legitimate, and unchanging. In other words, capital is used to create, divide, and limit the social world.

One’s capital is linked with one’s habitus, as well. In fact, one’s capital is *embodied* in their habitus. Through time and cultivation, the habitus becomes internalized, or naturalized, which means, one’s level of capital becomes naturalized. One appears to be in the right place, speaking the right way, or eating the right way, or, in the case of this project, being political in the right way and expressing their “politics” in the right way-i.e. electing and consuming. Furthermore, capital is externalized in the formation of cultural artifacts and commodities, such as books or films, which can only be fully appreciated by those with the right capital. Like an acquired taste, certain commodities only make sense or are only fitting for certain populations or classes. Capital reaches its final state when it becomes *institutionalized*, which means that one’s capital is fully recognized as legitimate by others through the accumulation of institutionalized artifacts, such as a education

⁴⁷ Bourdieu 1991, 14; Bourdieu 1986

⁴⁸ Bourdieu 1989, 17 [emphasis added]

degree or certificates of qualification.⁴⁹ In the case of the United States governing mechanism, the people lack the capital to be truly political because we have habitualized the liberal-republicanism argue for by Madison and Hamilton in the *Federalist Papers* and interlaced in the Constitution. When we vote, we use what little expressive capital we are given. This capital is reinforced with little things such as the “I voted” stickers, which are capital artifacts meant to show others how responsible and fitting we are in the space of liberal-republicanism. In other words, we legitimate a governing mechanism that was constructed out of the distrust of the very people who now proudly wear their “I voted” sticker. However, the governing mechanisms are designed to keep out those of us who choose to reject this limited space of electoral habitus, but lack the expressive capital to be as best taken seriously, at worst appear as threatening.

How do the people develop a democratic habitus, which lacks expressive and political capital, but is still considered legitimate? As mentioned in my analysis above, the founding elite was hesitant to give direct power to the majority of the population. Instead, they developed a protective governing mechanism that hinders direct control by the people and restricts radical change. At this moment, the US populace knows to vote and believes that voting is a key to democratic governance. How did this happen? For Bourdieu, it happened through the state itself—more specifically, through universalizing education. Through schooling, we are not only taught about society in general, but about the economy and the state itself. He

⁴⁹ Bourdieu 1989, 39-40

argues that those who possess the institutional capital to teach about the state actually help reproduce the legitimacy of that state.⁵⁰ Through education, the state becomes 1) a governing institution (with a judiciary, policy-making capabilities, administration, etc), and 2) it became an idea and concept that must be constantly thought about in order to be reproduced.⁵¹ Therefore, we have a state that claims to be democratic, but through its founding elite, reproduces a type of democracy that is distrustful of democracy itself. The monopolization of education by the state resulted in the pacification of the rabble demos that the founding elite distrusted.⁵² In other words, as Haugaard argues, state education created a habitus of nationalism, and with it, a docile and homogenous demos.⁵³ As mentioned above, one of the state characteristics is the monopolization of coercion and physical force; however, through the education system, the state was able to monopolize another type of violence—symbolic violence.

Before one can understand symbolic violence, she must understand symbolic power. This symbolic power is the power behind capital and the naturalization of habitus. It is the power of shared social belief in the legitimacy of social positions within a hierarchy or an institution.⁵⁴ Haugaard's theorization of power opens Bourdieu's theory to new areas of discussion concerning the state, violence, and authority. Symbolic power is the power of legitimacy, in which force or violence is

⁵⁰ Bourdieu 1998, 35-38; Haugaard 2008

⁵¹ Bourdieu 1998, 40. Quoted in McDonough 2006, 634

⁵² Gellner 1983

⁵³ Haugaard 2008, 199

⁵⁴ Bourdieu 1991, 23

unnecessary to achieve one's goals. For Haugaard, it is the *power to* do X.⁵⁵ Habitus and capital allow a person or a collective, or even an institution, to act without resistance. It is the opposite of physical force, which constitutes a type of *power over* others. This type of *power over* is the type of violence that Weber discusses in his work on the monopoly of coercion within the state.⁵⁶ However, symbolic violence is a type of coercion that is used when the legitimacy of one's capital and habitus comes into question by another social agent. In these cases, the violence used is a cognitive and discursive violence, in which the agent in the weaker position (either lower position in a social hierarchy or with less capital) accepts their weaker position and naturalizes the social ranks.⁵⁷ This type of violence, unlike its physical alternative, is a soft violence; unseen and unheard.⁵⁸

These two uses of power are key to understanding the development of the United States democratic institution. The founding elite did not need to use physical force to control the people (otherwise, they would have put themselves in the same position as King George III). They needed their social position protected, but done in such a way that made the new government legitimate. They needed to develop a system that incorporated power of *the people* in theory, but rarely in practice. In other words, they needed to create a democratic habitus that restricted the ability of the everyday person from gaining any competing capital, which would result in a competing political habitus. The people no longer had any legitimacy to directly

⁵⁵ Haugaard 2008, 194

⁵⁶ Ibid., 195-196

⁵⁷ Haugaard 2008, 198

⁵⁸ Bourdieu 1991, 24

influence the governing mechanisms on an everyday basis. Instead, legitimacy and authority are placed within the canonical text of the Constitution. This was done through the framing of democracy not as the *power over* the government, but as the *power to* interact with the government and its institutions. In other words, this is achieved through superimposing a republicanism element over the democratic elements of governance. The people, through the representational system, have the power to elect, or to choose. What is created is a system in which people are socialized into believing that democracy is what they are living in, and that their duty as citizens is to vote—to choose their representative. This is what I refer to as an *electoral habitus*, in which we internalize our position as ‘the people’ as being below our representatives, and that politics and democracy begin and end with choice. While we have expressive capital to vote and choose/consume, we have internalized this limited capacity for capital volume and weight within the politics. The consequence of the electoral habitus and lack of expressive capital is at first the isolation of politics to the avenues of state interaction, but ultimately, to the demise of any sort of pluralistic vision of 1) society and 2) political claims of injustice and 3) forms of claims of injustice. In the end, the protective system works so well that politics disappears from the minds of the people and is replaced with a system of policy formation and expressions of consumption.

Police, Politics, and Democracy-the (Neo)Liberal-Republican Order

As I argued above, the founding elites’ distrust of direct democracy and its subversion with liberal-republicanism must be understood in context of the

founding fathers. The founding elite created a protective system, in which social and political and economic orders could be established and sustained without risking adulteration from the direct inclusion of the demos or the destruction of this order by the political energies of the masses outside of the state avenues. In order to address these questions it is necessary to examine the work of Jacques Rancière and his conceptualization of politics and democracy. His work is based on three important concepts: police, politics, and democracy. For Rancière, there is a significant difference between politics (*le politique*) and policing (*la police*). I will discuss each of these in turn in order to explore the relationship between each.

Politics

Rancière argues that at the basic level, politics for the ancients was about speaking about justice, but more precisely, those *qualified* to speak about justice.⁵⁹ For Aristotle, speaking is the major distinction between animals and humans' political nature; speech is the action of determining the just from unjust, as opposed to the mere noise of a being with only a voice without reason. The distinction splits expression into two—speech acts and phonic acts; or, as Rancière argues, to demonstrate and make visible versus merely indicating.⁶⁰ Communities are split between those who speak and those who indicate; or, put differently, it is split between those who *know* justice and can speak *about* it, and those who can only express injustice through the indication of pain. This second group can only speak

⁵⁹ Rancière 1999, 2-5

⁶⁰ Rancière, 1999

an incoherent noise, and therefore, are left at the peripherals because they cannot understand notions of justice. Those left on the margins must accept their place by accepting the insider's notion of justice and division. "To be marked as a body that fails to possess the *logos* means to lack the capacity for politics, to find oneself outside the political domain within the order of the city."⁶¹ In other words, those on the peripheral are nonpolitical agents because they do not know and cannot speak about justice.

Police

Rancière opposes politics to the notion of *police*. Police and policing are not merely the *petty police* or rank and file police. Instead, Rancière means the policies created and that reinforce the boundaries around who can speak and who can only make noise. Policing is not only about physical barriers, but it sets up sensible barriers, as well. This is done to create a partition about what is sensible and acceptable and who is included.⁶² The function of policing is not merely to enforce certain behaviors, but instead to make sure that certain behaviors remain outside of the social order sensibility—to remain unseen and invisible. As he states, the police slogan is "move along! There's nothing to see here!"⁶³

⁶¹ Chambers 2013, 119

⁶² Rancière 2010, 36

⁶³ Ibid.

Democracy

Rancière states, “democracy is the institution of politics itself.”⁶⁴ What does he mean by this? It is the mode of political subjectivation. Coming away from Foucault’s work on power and the subject, democracy is the force that creates a person or group as a agent of politics.⁶⁵ Rather than the management of a population of a place through an institution, democracy is the very disruption of a hierarchical order that creates a political subject. Similar to how Foucault theorized, a subject is simultaneously a subject with a will and agency and a subject to the power relations.⁶⁶ In other words, one is a subject with power and a subject to power. While this sounds like a new angle on theorized inclusivity of the deliberative democratic tradition, it goes beyond mere inclusion and deliberation. Democracy is not merely the inclusion of a group, but the power to define one’s own terms of inclusion through changing the nature of the deliberative order (e.g. the rules of engagement; the subject matter under deliberation; the forms of deliberation). Democracy should not merely be viewed and understood as the demanding of inclusion in existing rights or the satisfaction of interests or electing officials through voting. These understandings leave democracy isolated to state mechanisms of politics, in which, *ideally*, the will of the people is the guiding force for government. Instead, democracy as a political ideal is about people’s power to create and control, or at least intervene in the power structures and hierarchies that

⁶⁴ Rancière 2010, 32

⁶⁵ Rancière 1999, 99 – 100; Chambers 2013, 98 - 101

⁶⁶ Chambers 2013, 98

greatly influence people's identities and the very constructions that define the people's relation to rights or interests. Democracy, therefore, is not only about inclusion but also about recognition and being understood. In order to do this, democratic energy is used to disrupt and/or dismantle not only state order, but other social or economic orders that may affect or restrict this very creation and recognition.⁶⁷

For Rancière, democracy is the underlining assumption, yet restriction of egalitarianism. In the context of the police partitions, the problem with this division is that those who *know* justice tend to put themselves on the inside and define justice through their own interests—they naturalize their own vision of justice and speech acts. Rancière argues that while these ordered divisions create hierarchies and inside/outside, that none of these theorizers can escape the simple fact that these divisions start from a place of equality. This equality is the true nature of politics. For politics “occurs because, or when, the natural order of the shepherd kings, the warlords, or property owners is interrupted by a freedom that crops up and makes real the ultimate equality on which any social order rests.”⁶⁸ This equality is in the fact that both sides of the order—the politically justified elite and the babbling masses—have to understand one another in order for the social order to be established. Rancière argues that, “there is order in society because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey an order at least two things are required: you must understand the order and you must understand that you

⁶⁷ Rancière 1999 and 2010; Chambers 2013

⁶⁸ Rancière 1999, 11

must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you. ... In the final analysis, inequality is only possible through equality.”⁶⁹ Inequality comes from the notion of someone having the right and qualification to rule—such as birth, strength, knowledge, or ownership, versus those who lack the current qualification to rule—in this case the masses.⁷⁰

In the end, what we consider democracy and politics within the United States is actually policy formation. Our electoral habitus is ultimately about choosing who will create policies, but we lack the expressive capital to question for whom the policies are meant. By disconnecting the people from direct control over the government and determining that the governments underlying role is to protect the property, property policies take on the form of politics and elections turn into the limited form of proper (read safe) expression.

Room for expression: Graffiti as disruptive expression

As I have argued up until now, the governing mechanism were created not to install a vibrant politic state, but instead an isolated, liberalized property order in which the people legitimate their own secondary role through the habitulization of democracy as choosing. While this seems like a total system, with little room for dissent or disruption, I believe that there is potential or possibility for challenges to the order. In other words, that there is space for politics, yet these politics tend to be illegal in form and/or location, and lack any sort of state rights protection because

⁶⁹ Rancière 1999, 16-17

⁷⁰ Rancière 1999, 16; Rancière 2010, 31

they lack the legitimacy because these forms of expression lack the capital. One of these illegitimate types of politics and forms of expression is graffiti and writers' battle with urban officials over each groups understanding of the urban aesthetic and the role of the urban environment in everyday life and the economy. Ultimately, "...the 'end of politics' involves a search for new *political* areas of struggle, new territories for the massification of the struggle."⁷¹ When agents and their expressions directly collide with state and economic officials, we witness of form of resistance to the entrenched social order and the policies that reinforce them. In the case of early graffiti, we witness both a conceptual and physical confrontation between writers, city officials, and the property protection policy order.

What is graffiti?

I am taking on a broad definition of graffiti in that I am including not only the spray-can tag, but including stencils and plastering as well. Like many activities and cultures, there are purists, who consider graffiti a spray-can form of art and expression. I admit that there is a great deal of difference between style and production of images when examining pieces of spray-can graffiti versus stencil or sticker graffiti; such as the ease with which a stencil can be thrown up versus spraying a tag freehand. However, I use this broad definition for two reasons. The first is because any form of writing or image production that is done illegally is considered graffiti by authorities. The second concerns the simultaneous development of different styles and methods of producing images in the streets. With that said, the history of graffiti in the United States first developed in the

⁷¹ Lotringer and Marazzi 2007, 12

1970's in urban environments—specifically Philadelphia and New York City—and has since become a worldwide phenomenon.

Brief history of the beginning the act

The act of graffiti is traced back to the Ancient Greeks and Romans, who would scratch messages and images into walls; its etymology rooted in the Italian (*sgraffiti* and *sgraffio*, the former to draw or scribble on a surface, latter to scratch) and Greek (*graphein*, to scratch).⁷² While the act of contemporary graffiti has been around for decades, with writers tagging boxcars and walls since the early twentieth century, two figures tend to be credited with the popularity and rise modern graffiti.⁷³ It is in Philadelphia where the first “kings of graffiti” was based.

CORNBREAD began writing his name all over North Philly in the mid-1960's in order to capture the attention of a girl.⁷⁴ While this is the beginning of the writing subculture, it was in New York City that the graffiti writing caught the attention of mainstream culture. The name TAKI 183 began to be seen throughout New York,

⁷² Manco 2002, 9

⁷³ Synder 2009, 23. This category of urban graffiti discounts the monikers on boxcars done by rail workers and also the arguably first famous graffiti “writer”, James Kilroy, a worker at Fore River Shipyard in Quincy, Massachusetts during World War II, who, as a riveter, began writing “Kilroy was here” with a yellow grease can on ship hulls to mark where he stopped and where the next on shift riveter should begin. The phrase caught on at the yard and when the war broke out, many of the younger workers, now soldiers, took the phrase around the globe, creating a worldwide fame around the phrase. (For more, see Gastman, Roger, and Caleb Neelon. *The History of American Graffiti*. New York, NY: Harper Design, 2010. Print. Chapter 1).

⁷⁴ Gastman, et al. 2010, 48; Snyder 2009, 23

and in 1971, the *New York Times* did an article on TAKI, bringing the writer to the masses.⁷⁵

After the TAKI article hit the streets, graffiti culture took off within New York. Initially, writers had stayed within their own neighborhoods; creating, localized writing gangs and styles. However, as more people began write, frequency and saturation of a writer's tag became less significant, while space and location became an important feature of the act. Joe Austin explains that "individual writer[s], having set himself or herself apart by the number of times his or her name appeared to the public eye, might add to that distinction through any number of other means. These writing acts were varied, but frequently involved being among the first to get in a particularly well-known but unexpected or inaccessible place."⁷⁶ The most recognizable move toward new places was to the NYC subway cars. While serving as a relatively easy place to access, these cars provide mobile canvases. A writer could now show the entire city their signature. By 1972, the subway was the canvas of choice for many writers in New York, which lead to a development of more intricate styles and forms as writers in Brooklyn were sending their tags to Manhattan and other boroughs.⁷⁷ However, as graffiti took off on the subway, city officials began to crackdown on the act, especially on subway cars. Eventually, adopting a policy by the late 80's of refusing to use any car with writing on it, in order to gain an audience, the act returned to the walls. By the times of this return to the walls of the

⁷⁵ Snyder 2009, 24; Austin 2001, 49

⁷⁶ Austin 2001, 53

⁷⁷ Gastman, et al. 2010, 74

city, graffiti had transformed considerably from its early roots of tags. Walls were now covered in throw-ups and pieces, as well as tags.

Brief history of the form

The contemporary form of the act takes on multiple forms, including spray-cans, paintbrushes and markers, to stickers and stencils.⁷⁸ These early writings were known as *tags*, and at first were to mark a boundary and claim a territory amongst gangs. However, as youth became increasingly exposed to these tags in their neighborhoods, they mimicked the form but created their own reasons for the act. In addition, the early tags were as much about form as they were location. Until the *Times* article about TAKI, graffiti was very much a world that existed only for and between writers. The form of the writing created a competitive nature for graffiti; with each writer tried to develop a new and intricate and large form to show off to fellow writers; in other words, tags were the writer's signature—unique and individualized to each writer. Early forms of tags were done primarily with markers and were small, but could be done rather quickly. Eventually, writers began to use spray-cans to write their names, allowing for larger, yet still quick, tags.

In order to stay relevant or move up in the graffiti culture, writers developed more larger and colorful signatures. Beginning on the subway cars, writers, developed 'masterpieces', or *pieces*. Pieces are large and incorporate a range of color, shapes, and depth, which allowed writers to develop a new graffiti styles that was as much artistic as it was a signature.⁷⁹ Stepping away from the tag as a single

⁷⁸ Manco 2002, 9

⁷⁹ Snyder 2009, 34

piece, writers began to develop styles and forms for individual letters. From this, they began to tie each letter to another to create large, three-dimensional pieces. This new form is the first step away from the signature as the form of the message and toward the image as what conveys a message. The more unique a writer's lettering and form was, the more unique the writer.⁸⁰ The desire for uniqueness went as far as to develop pieces in which the lettering was so complex that they were unreadable by those outside the graffiti culture. These pieces were coined *wildstyle*, and further developed the idea of signature as image rather than words.

Due to the link between the clandestine nature of the production graffiti and desire for an audience, there is a split within the writing community between those who wish to disseminate their name through the production of intricate piece, and those who wish to through the high frequency of encounters with their name. These latter writers, while still trying to develop graffiti past the tag, produce *throw-up*. A throw-up is similar to the piece in that it takes up a large space and includes color and special lettering; however, throw-ups gets its name from the fact that it is considered a simplistic and quick piece, "something just 'thrown up'...without must effort or style".⁸¹ Writer, QUIK, describes a throw-up as "2 color names or abbreviations done in volume to take over a subway line; usually a simple misted fill-in by a fat cap with an outline sparing as little paint as possible."⁸² The throw-up was to counter the style of the piece. Those writers, who produced throw-ups, were

⁸⁰ Austin 2001, 113

⁸¹ Snyder 2002, 39

⁸² Quoted in Austin 2001, 115

called bombers (as oppose to 'piecers') and would bomb an entire area or subway line, by putting up as many tags and throw-ups as possible.

While the tag to pieces make up the foundation of modern graffiti, there are multiple other forms and methods of image production that exist in today's world of graffiti. Concerning these additional forms, one of the major forms and most related to traditional graffiti is *stencil* graffiti. The stencil is a template that can be painted through with a spray-can or paintbrush to make the image on the wall. While Banksy is arguably the most well known stencilist in the world, its roots come from across the Channel in Paris. Blek le Rat started stenciling Paris in the early 1980's after a decade long inspiration he encountered with traditional graffiti in the 1970's on a visit to New York. Instead of creating a tag of his name, Blek started stenciling an image of a rat across Paris (hence the name Blek le Rat). Like traditional graffiti, stencilists are concerned with the placement of the image and who is the intended audience. In addition, like traditional graffiti, stencils allow for image and words, but unlike traditional graffiti, the form of stencil writing is an intentional replica of authorized, authoritarian writing within the urban environment.⁸³

Graffiti as Politics

What is important for this project, however, is the nature of graffiti culture in relation to democratic agency and political significance. The key questions for urban residence is: "what kind of city do people want to live in?"; and "what would a wildly decorated city look like?"⁸⁴; and "who gets to decide what is decoration?" When

⁸³ Manco 2002, 12

⁸⁴ Austin 2001, 1

examining graffiti through the lens of not merely an art form, but a cultural and political act as well, it is clear that artists' motivations are rooted in an expression of sub-cultural identity and an alternative understanding of the urban aesthetic.⁸⁵ However, the beginning of this culture is typically chained to the unlawful tagging of violence associated with gang markings and territorial boundaries.⁸⁶ The early distinction between graffiti as art and graffiti as vandalism, while a significantly important distinction, does not go far enough. While art can be used to be political and/or destructive or progressive, it is the potential for critical expression that should be addressed when examining graffiti.⁸⁷ It is form of speech and expression of this invisible culture, one that ignored property and cultural boundaries in order to claim ownership of not only one's own life, but of the physical world that has been subjugated through racial and economic discrimination.⁸⁸ It was a way for these invisible groups to become visible through creating distinct styles depending on one's neighborhood. In the beginning, the motivation of writers was to gain visibility within their own community. Writers stayed within their own neighborhoods and used graffiti as a way to cover up the decay that surrounded them and to show off that one is willing to risk their life to tag the most difficult spot in the area (e.g. the underside of the an overpass or the tow of a cable bridge). Initially, writers had stayed within their own neighborhoods; creating, localized writing gangs and styles. However, as more people began write, frequency and

⁸⁵ Gómez 1993, 637

⁸⁶ Gómez 1993, 644-645; Austin 2001, 36-37

⁸⁷ Sommer 2014

⁸⁸ Austin 2001, 20

saturation of a writer's tag became less significant, while space and location became an important feature of the act. Austin explains that "individual writer[s], having set himself or herself apart by the number of times his or her name appeared to the public eye, might add to that distinction through any number of other means. These writing acts were varied, but frequently involved being among the first to get in a particularly well-known but unexpected or inaccessible place."⁸⁹ The most recognizable move toward new places was to the NYC subway cars. While serving as a relatively easy place to access, these cars provide mobile canvases. A writer could now show the entire city their signature. And more importantly for this project, by tagging the subway cars, writers began to not only venture out of their neighborhoods, but also they began to disrupt the urban aesthetic of the financial center—Manhattan.

Graffiti as Political Expression that Lacks Capital

The political agency of writers and their political significance came twofold in NYC. In the beginning, the work of writers was simply to beautify their communities; they thought of themselves as youth engaged in and with their community.⁹⁰ City officials felt quite differently because it is a form of expression, one that ignored property and cultural boundaries in order to claim ownership of not only one's own life, but of the physical and aesthetic world that has been subjugated through discrimination based on racial and economic orders. For urban residents, the city "is written over with names of store owners, corporations,

⁸⁹ Austin 2001, 53

⁹⁰ Ibid., 181

brands, performers, and stars.”⁹¹ While early writers were intentionally defacing property, regardless of it being private or public, they were coming from sectors of the urban landscape that had been ignored and left to decay after the rise of suburban communities. These early writers saw graffiti as a way to be perceived and to gain recognition from their position of invisibility—to be accounted for in practice instead of merely in theory.

Graffiti writers felt that they were not destroying the city, but creating a vision of an ideal urban landscape; one in which residents could be a part of, as opposed to outside interests and power.⁹² Even outside of pop culture, writers use familiar forms and language to communicate with a fellow residents and admirers/audience, even if to poke fun at authority. Stencil lettering mimics that of authoritative messages, which gives it a kind of ironic authenticity.

In the beginning, graffiti writers had little intention of directly confronting corporate elites or city officials in that they were neither going to take up arms or protest outside city hall. At first, this was a method for individual and loosely collective resistance rather than a aesthetic confrontation. However, as the art form grew and more people began to create their own tags and develop new styles of graffiti--such as throw-ups and pieces—graffiti transformed into a form of indirect confrontation with elite powers and interests. Writers created a new language of expression and organization that traditional forms of state power could not confront because of the new site of interaction; rather than through spoken words in a debate

⁹¹ Austin 2001, 39

⁹² Ibid., 183-186

or demonstration, or the expression of voting, writers presented their message through paint and on walls.⁹³ The writers rejected politics as policy formation and rejected expression as voting. Writers have been aware of their position within the urban economic order. They had “no illusions of power.” Targeting subways was an ideal form of showing off one’s work, but it was also a symbol of the elevated preference toward business and modern homogeneity in the city; as bringing the suburban residence into the urban at the cost of displacing the urban residence.⁹⁴ Furthermore, writers co-opted the techniques of public advertising. They recognized that every advertising sign broadcast at least one common message: ‘Don’t forget this name.’ and that “to see one’s ‘name in lights’ is to achieve an exalted public status in the eyes of the world.”⁹⁵

A Space for Politics

This awareness of power relations and attempts to disrupt them has created a dual role of graffiti, one of art and form and one of the message and context. Both roles concern the political significance of urban activism and the right of citizens to control their spatial landscape. By the nature of the form of the expression, the graffiti writer is able to utilize everyday space and features in order to be political by altering the aesthetics of the urban environment and the economic order used to justify that aesthetic. Instead of creating something from nothing, the writers can create something new by disrupting the norms of everyday space. Similar to John Fiske’s idea of a semiotic democracy, in which “individuals can become both

⁹³ Lotringer and Marazzi 2007, 20

⁹⁴ Austin 2001

⁹⁵ Ibid., 39

producers *and* creators, able to re-inscribe and re-code existing representations”, graffiti is about reacting to power but also about creating and maintaining culture.⁹⁶ Furthermore, this claim to the landscape and space takes on multiple forms. While traditional graffiti primarily used spray-cans and walls and trains and appropriated popular cultural artifacts that surrounded them as youth; they “poached” media images and recontextualized them to illuminate their own alternative status quo (ignoring the legal claims around intellectual property as well as physical property); even more overt forms of subversion and claiming of space took place.⁹⁷ A prime example of this is the act of *culture jamming*, which Dery defines as the act of disrupting the “manipulation of symbols” through such acts as *subvertising* and *billboard banditry*. Dery describes these acts as the production and dissemination of anti-ads that deflect Madison Avenue's attempts to turn the consumer's attention in a given direction, as an ubiquitous form of jamming. Often, it takes the form of “sniping” ---illegal, late-night sneak attacks on public space by operatives armed with posters, brushes, and buckets of wheatpaste.”⁹⁸

The Return of the Policy Order

A political expression in a piece of art is difficult to gauge for its political effect and significance. However, as Havelock Ellis put it, “An artist has not always to finish his work...so he may succeed in making the spectator his co-worker.”⁹⁹ The significance of this statement gets to the heart of the intersection of cultural and

⁹⁶ Katyal 2006, 490

⁹⁷ Austin 2001, 174

⁹⁸ Dery 1993

⁹⁹ Ellis, Havelock, *The Dance of Life*. Quoted in Sommer 2014, 49.

political expressions. The work of graffiti writers is not always in the control of the writers themselves, but in the hands of those passing by a piece everyday or those who begin to recognize the same tag at numerous points across the city. However, what that spectator thinks of the tag or art piece can be easily framed by the city officials and their campaigns to either hinder the writers by labeling them as graffiti vandals or promote the writers as graffiti and urban artists. In this vein, the framing by authorities attempts to differentiate between two forms of writing in the shared public spaces, those of business and advertiser and those of regular individuals. In other words, officials can legitimate the economic order and its financial capital and its aesthetic and delegitimize the writer for its lack of expressive capital.

As I have argued, graffiti is a public and artistic act with significant political implications. However, when examining the relation between graffiti writing and city officials' reaction and narrative of it, the politics of the act become even more obvious. For New York City officials, the early writers were engaging in a form of what city officials considered "semiotic guerilla war" in an attempt to take control and make a claim of their urban surroundings.¹⁰⁰ What this framing exposes, intentionally or not, is that pieces of graffiti, from tagging to stencils, are about expression and the right of groups to decide what their neighborhoods and communities ought to look like outside of the bland, steel, and concrete urban landscape. The basic reasons against graffiti tend to be around the protected concept of property. Even if a piece is done legally, the official frame was that it was destructive and done illegally because the writer was trespassing or the piece was

¹⁰⁰ Austin 2001, 157

occupying the wall or railcar side was a form of aesthetic trespassing, and therefore, it should be removed and replaced with the single color coat of paint.¹⁰¹

In New York, city officials at first used public psychologists to frame graffiti as the work of “insignificant people attempting to impose their identity on others.”¹⁰² This quote highlights the relation between officials and their commercial interests. Ironically, their labeling of writers as *insignificant people* sums up officials’ attitude toward these groups of youth and displaced communities. Officials projected their understanding of these groups onto the general population; meaning, these writers and communities are insignificant and do little to contribute to the official narrative of the city, and therefore, ought to be further ignored. In other words, there is nothing to see here. However, after this did not stop the problem, officials began to label graffiti as a symbolic *broken-window*. In essence, they no longer thought of these groups as insignificant, but as dangerous and their activities as gateways to violence and destruction. Officials attempted, somewhat successfully, to impose an identity of not insignificance but of violence and drugs. Austin states, this framing of graffiti was intentional by NYC mayors in order to redirect attention away from the decaying city and make it appear that the city’s problems are being solved, and therefore, the city is becoming safer for people and business.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Gómez 1993, 651

¹⁰² Austin 2001, 81

¹⁰³ Even through the use of these framing techniques and developing new transit authorities to crack down of the “graffiti problem”, New York failed to stop writers from tagging walls and subway cars in the 1970’s. It was not until the late 1980’s

Framing graffiti as an economically and physically destructive act creates a world in which individuals have less of a voice in the aesthetics of their surroundings. Authorities favor business and their words, while demonizing the expressions of the necessary, but fickle people. Authorities that engage in this framing, with the use of media, create a message and narrative for residents with a preferred reading; one in which the status quo of elevated business preferences and message are the only acceptable form of color and decoration within the urban landscape. Because of their economic and political position, these officials have the capital to create the “legitimate”, and therefore, single definition of and reason for the act without granting a voice of writers or admirers, while at the same time creating the legitimate aesthetic of the urban. In other words, instead of investing in community development and communal art projects, the city officials claimed that a mono-colored aesthetics means clean and therefore safe.¹⁰⁴ In addition, this framing allows officials to reinforce their power over individuals in the city; to “rescue people from their fear” and “to restore elites’ image as effective, tough, and caring patriarchs.”¹⁰⁵ Simultaneously, however, they created cultural barriers between multiple sectors and groups within the urban environment by redirecting residents’ fear of violent crime toward a writing culture made-up of “non-white youth.”¹⁰⁶

that Mayor Koch and his administration succeeded in stopping writers from ‘vandalizing’ subway cars and the use of millions of tax money.

¹⁰⁴ Hall 2003, 52

¹⁰⁵ Austin 2001, 149

¹⁰⁶ The idea of writers being of a single class of racial minorities is utterly false. Graffiti culture in the 70’s and today is a racially and gender diverse culture. While is

Democracy and the politics of graffiti

With all this on the table, is it correct to say that graffiti writers were challenging conceptual barriers around politics and expression? Were they a democratic force, in the way Rancière understood it? The answer is beyond a mere yes or no. Writers' primary motivation was to challenge the aesthetic understanding of the urban through their disruption of officials' understanding of the urban—one that promoted economic dominance and racial and social isolation and decay. As stated above, for Rancière, the purpose of democracy is to create a political subject; however, in order to be considered a political subject, a group is to be included within the order and hierarchy one is targeting by claiming a wrong and an alternative. The act of dissensus he argues as the activity of inserting a new subject and heterogeneous objects into the hierarchy; in other words, to disrupt forms of belonging.¹⁰⁷ Graffiti writers are political agents through their efforts to disrupt the aesthetics of the urban in order to expose their exclusion from not only the steel, brick, and glass of the urban, but of the aesthetics of who are deemed proper urban residents. They were not seeking the power to express their aesthetics and to expose the entrenched social and economic order that existed in American cities at the time, but were off the table of policy politics

As stated elsewhere, writers were not looking for protection as writers.

Harvey argues that urban residents have a right to the city because urban residents have become the laborers in the reproduction of the city and the urban for the sake

it true that female writers receive less attention than their male counterparts do, this is more of an issue of reporting than of fact.

¹⁰⁷ Rancière, 2010, 2

commercial power and concentration.¹⁰⁸ Writers are not writers but laborers or workers, whose role is to build the new residences for the gentrification of the urban. While during the mid-20th century and the exodus of the economically secure and mobile from the urban to the suburban, we now witness the return of these suburban groups and the gentrification of the ignored urban neighborhoods, resulting in the further displacement of residents. Through the identity of workers and the producing and reproducers of the urban, writers introduce a new image of the urban with its many colors and styles and murals.

Because they lack any expressive capital, writers' mode of expressing their identity and wrongs is a reason for their exclusion. Writing is not seen as language and expression of creativity and alternatives, but as mere aesthetic noise polluting the walls of the city. Writers do not speak, but rather merely express incoherent noise and destruction. The official framing of graffiti was to label it as violent and anti-social, therefore illegitimate and unworthy of recognition as speech and an expression of a wrong. Writers' disruption was not just about aesthetics and production, but also about new methods of expression through art. Their expressive creativity was the nature of their disruption; one that could not be handled by officials and excluded from the order of the city.

Conclusion—Street Art: Expression with(out) Capital

In the context of graffiti and democracy, examining the current status of graffiti—that as art versus that as vandalism—there have been clear gains by writers; legal spaces for graffiti have appeared; the worldwide fame of Banksy.

¹⁰⁸ Harvey 2012

However, a clear example of the murky water is the work of Shepard Fairey—who gained fame by plastering up the ‘obey’ images across the US before designing the famous Obama ‘Hope’ poster used in the 2008 presidential election. It appears that there is a contradiction between the early work of Fairy—‘obey’—and the ‘hope’ poster. Has the state and official discourse changed so much that urban art is an acceptable form for a presidential candidate campaign poster? Or, the fact that graffiti style is now used to create graffiti billboards in order to sell new cars. Or, . The resentment of Banksy and officials’ acceptance of his ‘art’ while still erasing the ‘graffiti’ of an unknown writer. Is graffiti being accepted into the official order of the urban? Alternatively, has it gained expressive capital on its own right?

This acceptance of graffiti by high Culture has lead to two major consequences for graffiti—the privatization of the act and a utilizing of the form to reinforce corporate and commercial interests. With the expansion of street art exhibits and the selling off to those who can afford it, graffiti’s challenge to the urban aesthetic and economic order gains a certain level of expressive capital, but only through its gain in cultural capital and the potential for it to be absorbed into the policy order. In other words, graffiti becomes street art and becomes a form of property, and therefore worth protecting. Increasingly, ‘street art’ is losing the *street* aspect of the act and art; leaving those in the public sphere fewer opportunities to receive the alternative aesthetics and disruptive nature of graffiti.

By appropriating graffiti, even in an attempt to legitimize it, cultural agents’ act of transferring it to the galleries, construct the galleries as the appropriate site for the artwork. In other words, the political potential of graffiti is lost in order to

create cultural artifacts. Once the art form is in the galleries, it is expected to go home with someone. It is now confined to the walls facing inward for a select (and looking at the price of many works, a rather wealthy) audience. This is the dichotomy of street art and graffiti. While both are artistic, framing the one as art from the street creates a misrepresentation, in that the “street” is not the location but rather the form/style—like abstract expressionism. Graffiti is still seen as illegitimate because it is on the street, while street art in museums is given its own status of legitimacy for being in the style of the street.

This is transforming graffiti and the battle for control of the urban landscape. Businesses utilized the form of graffiti to continue their commercial assault on urban communities. The large difference between this type of commercial street art and that of the storefront mural is that the storefront is located within the community and is an attempt by the artist and store owner to beautify their surroundings. Corporate graffiti is not about beauty but about profit and the further exploitation of urban style; to further legitimize the current economic order and the policy of order of property protection.

To take a lesson from Blek le Rat, who would place figures around street corners “to create an element of surprise for the viewer. ...the public would be fooled into thinking there was a real person there”¹⁰⁹, let us not be fooled into thinking that the image we see is real. If graffiti is to maintain its political and aesthetic significance, it is important to make a distinction between that of appreciation and that of appropriation of the art, the act, and the message. While

¹⁰⁹ Manco 2002, 38

providing space for the writers is great, we cannot let spontaneity and the surprise of the pieces be lost in the protection of the conformity of expectation.

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