



ESTO ES  
GRAFFITI



# Ornament and Order

## Graffiti, Street Art and the Parergon

Rafael Schacter



## ORNAMENT AND ORDER

*For my parents*

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Graffiti, Street Art and the Parergon

Rafael Schacter

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Grooves repeated in succession – man's first aesthetic expression – betray a sense of order, symmetrical grooves show even a certain incipient sense of balance, cogitation and repose ... which to this day is the ethical basis of art.

Alphonse Marie Mucha, 1966

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## Foreword

Dr Schacter asked me to write this foreword because he knows that for over 20 years I have been OCD with graffiti. I started young like many practitioners and I performed the rituals that are expected of the young. I never could explain to people outside of the culture the genius that I knew graffiti was, the rebellion and the structure that formed and informed it. Dr S. has done just that with this book, he has united what has always been maligned as a violent and destructive act against society with intense theories and thoughts that help to reveal this spray-painted rose from the dark leaved brambles that lobbyists against graffiti have covered it in since its inception. Those special interests have a lot to gain by quashing graffiti and yet counter intuitively a lot to lose by suppressing it. The deep journey that this book is brings us to a place that uncovers that binary and allows the readers to decide for themselves what they think about graffiti in their cities.

In New York City, multi-national corporations, wealthy interests and corrupt politicians have stolen the city from the inhabitants and made it almost impossible for the majority of folk to get ahead. They have raised the prices and changed the rules, effectively downgrading the people who built and toiled for their lifetimes there. The tactics used by multi-national conglomerates and corrupt or inept politicians that have profit rather than the people as their bottom-line have marginalized and militarized many in the urban tribe. Neo-martial law and police-state behavior, where imprisonment is seen as a necessity for anyone dissenting against the regime, have increased war-like behaviors from the people precipitating stronger responses from the government. Ever since 9/11 total police control and the fascist-like imposition to respect the authority of the police and state has been on the rise, as they connect those corrupt forces as our only hope to be saved from the artificial threat of terrorism. When revered journalists are easily manipulated by government lies and an imposed classist culture forces all relationships to be based on commerce, graffiti may be one of the last options of public criticism and dissent left (yea I said it, all hope for the future depends on graffiti). I saw the connection of this rise of global fascism masked by a neo-liberal ideal of hyper-capitalism with

the duty of the graffiti writer to dissent loud and clear when Dr S. wrote about Habermas's description of the 'refeudalization' of public space at the end of the 19th century. This book has parts that stand out to me as a clear call to action.

Maybe. Or that's just the innate selfish radical in me, blind to other ideas, projecting all that I want graffiti to be, only seeing my own reflection where ever I look. Based on my coup d'état understanding of what graffiti is, Dr S. would group me in his copyrighted academic term 'Agonistic Ornamenter', placing me neatly in a row and column, setting me aside for further study.

With the Agonistic sided for the moment, Dr S. delves deeply into what he terms the Consensual forms of graffiti, the ones that many can agree on, the pretty stuff, the ironic pieces that make the disillusioned masses giggle. The pretty stencils and the posters and the re-appropriating of pop culture icons to make a message, 'Stop Racism!', but in fact say nothing because of the inherent consensuality. The so-called art that actually serves the capitalist captains by prettying up the hood and raises rents and dislocates the inhabitants; the happy agreeable work that the masters allow for now and will buff once you turn your back, the egotistical sell-out work that you mask in benevolence toward mankind and justify by claiming outcomes of quasi-social justice yet the only tangible product being a clean quality of life corner so the next corporate pig can plant their business's flag. Ouch, that's harsh, as if I were judging the Consensual and its recent strangle hold on the conversation of graffiti and it seems like I'm saying that this consensual emperor is wearing no clothes. The Consensual Ornamenters make real pretty work and even better by the accepted premise of the day, they make that money. Who am I to be such a smug judge of others' hard work? Dr S. talks about this too when he writes on the increasing manufactured polarization of our world views. He alludes to the fact that media and television are owned by a few wealthy special interests and they have framed all debates into this bi-polarity of 'you are either with us or against us, choose a side', leaving no room for meaningful dialogue of any type, which leads me to believe that all forms of graffiti can function as the proverbial Lithium for the masses when notions of right and wrong are so strictly defined. Graffiti can be seen as a temporary anonymous break from the strictly defined roles that are set for all members of society and a way to stray from the script we were all given at birth.

Perhaps. In this book we learn of the Ancient Greek spaces that were architecturally open and by design meant to foster free argument and debate and they are juxtaposed with the walled off city of today that no one is allowed to touch unless they pay the fee to advertise their wares; the closed off spaces that are only welcome to paying customers and the many private spaces taking over our cities that are intrinsically divided by race and class. Now consider those physical barriers in position to the philosophical barriers that the capitalist-cultural world-elite has instated via idolizing Mr Ai Weiwei who vandalized Han dynasty vases and thereby questioned current policies in slave-labor Asia versus the strict dyslogistic narrative set up against any vandalizing dissenters questioning the Global North Empire. Everybody else in the world is fair game and encouraged to destabilize their notions of religion, governance and financial structures in order to keep them unbalanced, yet once we the people attempt to destabilize the Global

North then we are cast out to the dark corners of the culture and no longer able to partake in the freedom. When double standards ain't seen as double standards, the propaganda machine is working well. Dr S.'s book says to me graffiti can be a way around the propaganda industrial complex.

And yet there is something problematic in Dr S.'s thesis. He divvies up graffiti into those two modalities, Agonistic and Consensual, and claims that the Agonistic mode of graffiti is exclusive (amongst other issues) by virtue of the letters being so hard to read and the practitioners saying that they only do it for those in the know. He seems to have in some part fallen for the macho braggadocio that so many insecure practitioners of the Agonistic act out in public which disguise our truth as much as the seeming unintelligibility of our tags. He and many practitioners have accepted other people's definitions at face value for lack of understanding that they could come up with their own explanations of their actions. When a vocal few assign a label to a group, even when false, parts of that label start to become the group's identity. After realizing one's identity has been fixed by outside forces rather than one's own truth, those identities can be rethought.

A meditation on graffiti writers: graffiti writers do, as Dr S. claims, make up the Parergon of the city as canvas, that is graffiti writers make the frame of the painting that is our urban existence, yet it is a philosophical frame in as much as a Tibetan Buddhist Mandala is a philosophical work of art. Just as with the Tibetan Buddhist Mandala, graffiti is not meant to last long but instead its function is wrapped up in ritual and deep understanding that all is temporary and life is but a dream. This tag too shall pass. Its rather freeing to think tagging the walls of your city is a path towards enlightenment. What seems like agonistic aggression is in fact the acceptance of difficult truths and the physical reality and actions that go along with that acceptance.

Maybe. The more you look around the world at the graffiti on the walls the more you realize graffiti has no owner, no one truth and no definition, this painting on walls thing belongs to the people, no one subculture can claim it. Just because New York City and Subway Art made that type of graffiti look cool does not mean New York City owns it or can even set rules for how it is to be expressed; and if they try to then those rules must be broken. To hell with rules when you seek the freedom. Graffiti is for all, it is made by soccer hooligans and hipsters, it is performed by thugs and antifa political activists, it is used as propaganda for and against the regime all over the world, it's a way of writing racially charged misogynistic scribbles in toilet stalls and for bringing a community together around a simple message; spray cans in people's hands is a being of its own. This book remains faithful to a particular narrative about graffiti, the same one that I was raised with but it is certainly not the only narrative out there.

Dr S. does hint at this openness when he brings up Mouffe and her idea that agonism is not the struggle between enemies but rather competitors, competing to express the truth as they know it. Competitors who join the game of their own volition, with varying reasons behind their motivation, competitors participating in the game of words, letters and colors; competitors interested in dialogue, not domination. When looked at like this graffiti is quite simply a public debate, not

the hate crime it is made out to be. Graffiti is open to all and not an inaccessible subculture that outsiders would box it in to serve their agenda. It can be political or far removed from politics (which is more revolutionary than joining in their one-sided, always-the-same-outcome political games to begin with). Graffiti is a free democratic tool for bringing freedom to the world so that the world can be free.

Maybe. It's been a tough task for me to write this foreword. I get furious styles when I think about graffiti. I can politic on it but I'd rather just shut up and do it. Talking about graffiti in an intelligible manner is counter-intuitive to the unspoken religion of graffiti. I prefer grunts in a circle of fellow practitioners, no philosophical talk just performance and wonder. As an outsider to many other subcultures I too enjoy reading theory on those subcultures and to ponder on the hidden-in-plain-sight worlds all around me. Dick Hebdige's *Subculture* introduced me to a few subcultures I never thought about, mainly the Mods, Punks and Teddy Boys. And just as Punks and Mods would not want to read theory about their reality because they live it daily, I can't stand to read any ideas on my subculture. It feels wrong to me because I perform the rituals, I can't talk about the rituals, that would go against the ritual. The ritual is the truth of graffiti, and that truth shines bright when one performs the rituals correctly. It is not to be spoken of or asked questions about, it is solely to be performed. This book is well thought out and genuine to Dr S.'s experiences yet I as one so immersed in this repetitive doodling on walls feels the less we say about it the better.

And so by writing this text is Dr S. legitimizing graffiti? Has he just gone and ruined graffiti for the practitioners? Well I suppose everything must change. No need to hold on to the past as a zealot and yearn for the good-old days when things were pure Cornbread-Dondi style. No need to remain fixed in a single identity becoming the joke that cedes power to the capitalizers by playing into their hands. Is this book then the definitive approach to graffiti? Impossible. Graffiti is more of a phantom after reading this book, that is, as much as you write about it as much as you chase it, you just can't capture it. More doors are opened more revelations appear, less concrete anything is left because graffiti has this intangible spiritual connection to it that just can't be contained. This book does not legitimize graffiti or even set out to capture its pure essence, this book instead gives philosophical weight so open-minded well-read academics like yourself can see beyond the repetitive refrains of graffiti being immoral, of it being just about money or just about crime, just about masculinity or just about risk. This book is an opening, maybe a door for graffiti writers who are struggling with their own 20-year long fixed identities and are attempting to break into academia, or the reverse, a door for academics who want to understand what those writings on the wall are and seek to put in rows and columns that which is outside of their intelligibility. Though mostly this book is a tool for slowing down and looking closely at what has been taken for granted, by outsiders and the practitioners as well, and an opportunity to begin deconstructing more conventional dogma.

Dumaar Freemaninov,  
author of *Nov York*.

## Preface

The tale of graffiti and street-art – or what I will here term Independent Public Art<sup>1</sup> – is a sea unspeakably vast. Although less than 50 years old in its modern incarnation (and widely argued to have emerged on the East Coast of the US in the late 1960s), this vernacular art-form has been transported to nearly every corner of the globe, spawning hundreds of distinct styles (from the traditional technique of spraycan art to various highly conceptual modes of urban installation), generating thousands of local approaches (from the *pixação* of São Paulo – see Figure P.1 – to the *Salvajismo* of Buenos Aires – see Figure P.2), eliciting innumerable committed adherents to its cause (of every possible class and culture). Whilst its status as the world’s most practiced form of outsider art is I believe unparalleled, Independent Public Art as a distinct aesthetic genre has only very rarely been subject to any vigorous form of academic examination; in fact with the exception of Jean Baudrillard and Roland Barthes – whose brief remarks on the practices of graffiti are in my opinion the most insightful and profound on the genre as whole has so far garnered<sup>2</sup> – its scholarly analysis has failed to produce a study investigating the dense materiality of the images created, their status when examined from an explicitly material–cultural position.

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<sup>1</sup> Independent Public Art, a term first brought to my attention by the theorist Javier Abarca, is an umbrella label which incorporates all forms of autonomously produced aesthetic production in the public sphere. It thus naturally encompasses practices which have been called graffiti or street-art yet also includes actions which may exceed these traditional designations, building an assemblage out of variance through its intentionally broad nature. What is crucial, and quite clear by the term itself however, is that it does not include works produced in the interior domain, works outside of what could be considered as public space.

<sup>2</sup> See both Baudrillard’s essay ‘Kool Killer’ (1993 [1976]) and Barthes’ text entitled ‘Cy Twombly’ (1991 [1979]).



P.1 Cripta Djan at work, São Paulo, Brazil, 2012



P.2 Chu, *Untitled*,  
Buenos Aires,  
Argentina, 2013

Though there have been texts focussing on issues such as gang graffiti,<sup>3</sup> youth subculture,<sup>4</sup> criminality,<sup>5</sup> and the culture and history of New York spraycan art<sup>6</sup> (as well as a myriad of illustrated coffee books which are almost totally devoid of rigour), what I argue has been missing is an approach examining the formal, intentional, and practice-based aspects of these contemporary epigraphs, one which ethnographically explores both the images and their modes of construction, the product and the performance, the relic and ritual, the ornament and order.

Teasing out the aesthetic and material relationships which emerge from the realm of Independent Public Art, *Ornament and Order* will thus focus on this global aesthetic movement as it stands today, exploring the plethora of acts which emerge from its field of practice. Based on a multi-sited, two year period of fieldwork embedded with an artistic collective in Madrid (a dialogical project which is in fact still ongoing), a wider research project conducted with over 100 artists worldwide<sup>7</sup> as well as a number of high profile curatorial projects, the data collected incorporates the entire range of possible actions within the Independent Public Art movement: my closest group of informants – the collective *Noviciado Nueve* with whom I undertook my in-depth period of fieldwork – perfectly encapsulate this wide scope.

<sup>3</sup> See *Wallbanging: Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* (1999) by Susan A. Phillips.

<sup>4</sup> See *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York* (2001) by Nancy Macdonald.

<sup>5</sup> See *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality* (1996) by Jeff Ferrell.

<sup>6</sup> See *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York* (1984) by Craig Castleman and *Taking the Train: How Graffiti became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (2001) by Joe Austin.

<sup>7</sup> An illustrated biographical reference text entitled *The World Atlas of Street Art and Graffiti* (Schacter 2013).



P.3 3TTMan  
and Remed,  
*Untitled*, Madrid,  
Spain, 2009

Containing five key members, 3TTMan, Eltono, Nano 4814, Remed, and Spok, the individuals within the group produced work which extends from the most apparently 'artistic' (such as a form of contemporary muralism – see Figure P.3) to the most seemingly 'vandalistic' (such as the 'bombing'<sup>8</sup> technique of traditional graffiti – see Figure P.4), working in what I will come to term the most *consensual* to the most *agonistic* styles of public ornamentation. They thus provide an almost perfect distillation of the Independent Public Art movement today and are used to move outward from concrete specificities to broader theoretical discussions. Moreover, these same five actors were embedded within a global network of Independent Public Artists which I argue functions akin to the 'associated fraternities' formed by medieval guilds (Sennett 2008: 60). These dense webs of relations not only helped me to gather numerous other informants within Madrid (such as the artists Nuria Mora, Daniel 'San' Muñoz, and Suso33), in Spain as a whole (such as the twins Pelucas and Liqen from Vigo, Sixe Paredes from Barcelona and Dems33 from Elche), as well as all around the globe (such as MOMO and the legendary Cap in New York, Los Contratistas in Nuevo Leon, the collectives Doma and Fase in Buenos Aires, and Gold Peg and Petro in London). What unites all these various individuals however, as all the various informants whose stories and practices have been incorporated into this text, was their equivalent and unconditional commitment to the practice of Independent Public Art.

<sup>8</sup> Bombing is a technique in which an area is rapidly suffused with simple, quick images rather than more complex pieces. Quantity here *is* quality.



P.4 Nano4814, San, and others unknown, *Untitled*, Vigo, Spain, 2010



P.5 Noviciado Nueve (and friends), Belvés, France, 2012

These were not part-time painters or hobbyists, not neophytes or novices. They may have embraced the passion of an amateur, the search for pleasure rather than gain that the enthusiast evinces, but these were actors whose commitment to autonomous aesthetic production in the public sphere came to supersede (as this book will here argue) the often quite divergent formal aesthetics they constructed. The group of individuals with whom I conducted my fieldwork were thus part of a tightly linked worldwide network of comparable practitioners, full-time members of the global Independent Public Art world who engaged within it as an all-embracing way of life, who established a communal bond through their embedment within this visual regime. Yet, even as this is the case, the majority of the arguments made within this book still function for the vast majority of Independent Public Art seen on our city streets as a whole, for the multitude of acts which have been produced by part-time practitioners, by enthusiasts and devotees who may find other methods of sustaining themselves outside of the wider art world; they follow the formal, intentional, and ritual aspects of the discipline that are in many ways immutable, they follow the aesthetic and ethical characteristics of the practice which abide irrelevant of the level of expertise that the practitioner in question may possess. And they can thus reach out from the tangibility of local action to address more global concerns surrounding Independent Public Art, speaking not just for the group with whom I undertook my study but for the discourse as a whole.

Located in Madrid for the majority of my research, my fieldwork did also take place further afield, travelling with my highly itinerant informants as they conducted

projects across the world. Journeying from Mallorca in Spain to Monterrey in Mexico, from New York to London and back again (as well as meeting artists from all over the world in Madrid itself – the studio my informants occupied providing a base-camp for countless visitors to the city), it was my informants' reaction to space that became key to my study, their understanding of the various urban environments they inhabited that became indispensable to my understanding of their practices. Whilst there are of course crucial material divergences within the various cities they occupied (London and Madrid, to take a brief example, having highly variant artistic *modus operandi* due to the overabundance of CCTV in the former site, the highly permeable boundary between façade and street that is so common in the latter), what remained congruent was the obsession and fervour for the public sphere that all my informants displayed, a commitment to concrete action in the street, to physical performance in public space, which remained consistent wherever in the world they were. Rather than any specific location in itself then, the boundaries of the community examined within this text were delineated by *practice* rather than place, bounded by an understanding of space rather than space itself. It was a community of practice rather than a physically bound community that I was hence immersed within during my fieldwork (without suggesting that any community can be truly delimited by a circumscribed field), a multi-sited project in which I was rooted with specific people rather than *within* a specific place. The principal field-site relevant to this work – if any that is – could thus be argued to be 'the street' in the contemporary global city (or in the 'alpha city' as they have been called). The street was the place where the overwhelming majority of my fieldwork took place, where I would both watch and partake in my informants very public way of life, in their daily enacting of what they would term 'street-life' (I can only think Randy Crawford was to blame for this). And thus even whilst this focus on the street means I lose out on a huge amount of site-specific data which I collected throughout my fieldwork – losing out on discussing the intricacies of place which anthropology is a discipline so famed for – what I believe I gain is a more comprehensive understanding of Independent Public Art as a whole, a practice produced by highly cosmopolitan, highly itinerant social actors. Following James Clifford's (1997) imperative to 'focus on hybrid, cosmopolitan experiences as much as on rooted, native ones' (*ibid.*: 24), this monograph will thus take our understanding of Independent Public Art away from many of the established and singular locations in which it is often examined and instead push into the more global, connected networks that this aesthetic discourse truly resides.

Focussing on the work my informants produced in the public sphere itself, this text will thus concentrate on what I define as a practice of urban ornamentation, an aesthetic working through an equally adjunctive and decorative essence, one which can only exist amidst the dirt and noise of the street itself. Whilst my informants had numerous skills and worked in a multitude of visual arenas then (from design work and illustration to commercial muralism and contemporary art), these other, subsidiary practices will be set to one side within this book: although this could seem to in some way suspend my informants' lives, to exclude many of its more 'mundane' aspects, this suspension will enable a clearer focus on the way

the images they produced in the public sphere themselves function, giving us the depth to examine them as both material deposit and ephemeral trace, as objects within a latent capacity to attract and hold our attention. As such, issues such as the (now waning) interest in 'street-art' from the conventional art-market, or the (still growing) popularity of 'street-art' guided tours will be purposefully disregarded within this text: both of these markets (the artistic as much as the touristic) are governed by forces which flow beyond the agency of my informants themselves, forces which may in fact often run contrary to the wishes of the individuals in question. And thus question of whether or not artists can be 'blamed' for gentrifying low-income or industrial areas of the city then (Zukin 1993),<sup>9</sup> the subject of whether or not they can be labelled as the archetypal post-Fordist workers due to their fluid working status (Gielen 2009), are issues which I have no desire to directly address within this book. Rather than flowing directly toward the relationship between capital and culture (a relationship which I would suggest the inalienable products of Independent Public Art are inherently disconnected from),<sup>10</sup> it is the continued need to produce this form of work irrelevant of base financial gain (and often at considerable cost and danger to the actor themselves) that I am more interested in here exploring, a desire, an addiction, which cannot be explained by the force of the market alone.<sup>11</sup> Whilst the various ethical paths my informants were often forced to navigate will be at points examined then, it is the factor that demarcated them as a coherent social group – their practices of urban ornamentation – which will be the main focus of this text, their insurgent production in the public sphere which will be at the nucleus of all that follows.

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<sup>9</sup> Gentrification is an issue which is becoming more present within the Independent Public Art world, muralism often being utilized by local government or other such organizations to boost the perceived allure of an area. However, it seems that in many cases, this overt push toward utilizing Independent Public Art for gentrification is being widely noted, and critiqued. In fact, in two recent cases in London and Athens (see <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/aug/06/olympic-legacy-street-art-graffiti-fury> and <http://blog.vandalog.com/2013/08/a-street-art-festival-in-athens-about-athens-with-no-artists-from-athens/>) the clearly instrumental agenda of the organizations involved has become all too visible and thus backfired upon them.

<sup>10</sup> Of course, and quite famously, many works produced on the street by artists such as Banksy and Faile have been physically removed from their sites to be latterly sold in auction houses around the world. Yet whilst these street removals are in themselves often illegal, more significantly the artist or artists in question gain no direct financial reward for the entrance of these objects into the wider art market (and as such, any works removed from the street are never officially authenticated). Independent Public Artists may often choose to enter the market then (and quite often under different names), yet their Independent Public Art in itself must always be considered an inalienable product.

<sup>11</sup> As Boris Groys (2010) has convincingly argued: 'There is no doubt that in the context of a contemporary civilization more or less completely dominated by the market, everything can be interpreted as an effect of market forces in one way or another. For this reason, the value of such an interpretation is null, for an explanation of everything remains unable to explain anything in particular [...] Art was made before the emergence of capitalism and the art market, and will be made after they disappear' (ibid.: 17–18).



P.6 Noviciado  
Nueve, Madrid,  
Spain, 2012

Rather than the traditional focus on themes of vandalism and art, gangs and pollution, this study will present two central (and eponymous) arguments: In the first section of the book – entitled *Ornament* – I aim to take very seriously the suggestion by the architectural theorist Jonathan Hill (2006) that '[g]raffiti and sgraffito ornament a building', that graffiti is in fact 'additive rather than reductive' (ibid.: 176): As artefacts which are both adjunctive and decorative – the technical prerequisites of all ornamentation – Independent Public Art will be judged to be archetypically ornamental, a factor which not only bestows upon it an equivalent power and precarity, but which places it within the wider debate (and wider anxiety) over ornament in the architectural canon as a whole. Examining the meanings my informants ascribe to their images as well as the communicative schemata emerging out of their very form, the practices will be split into two further subdivisions (termed *Consensual* and *Agonistic Ornamentation*), subsets which will come to reflect two quite distinct politico-aesthetic responses to the city itself, which focus on the discursive potentialities of these figural artefacts. In the second section of the book – entitled *Order* – it will be the immaterial residue of my informants' spatial acts (rather than the material remnants), the explicitly performative, *practice*-based elements of their aesthetic production which will be examined. The section will thus move away from notions of 'meaning' examined in the preceding chapters and attempt to track how my informants' cultural production comes to both reflect and actively structure their moral and social worlds. As practices which are embedded within such issues as formality, performativity, traditionality, and play, the social and moral chaos they apparently present will be interpreted as a set of highly framed, orthopraxic gestures, ritual acts in which commitment to the group envelope is physically instantiated, engraved onto the skin of the city. It is hence Independent Public

Art as a system of communication *and* a system of action, its meaning *and* its practice I intend on examining within this text. Utilising both ethnographic and critical tools, employing artefactual case studies and fieldwork vignettes, it is an aesthetic which both encodes symbolic propositions about the world as well as intends to change the world itself that we will explore, an aesthetic which is both ornament and order at the same time.

## Introduction

It transforms order into ornament, the cosmos into a cosmetic.

Jacques Derrida

The actual order of things is precisely what “popular” tactics turn to their own ends [...] Though elsewhere it is exploited by a dominant power or simply denied by an ideological discourse, here order is tricked by an art.

Michel de Certeau

### THE LEAKE STREET CLASSICIST

On the morning of 1 April 2011, the architect Francis Terry (son of Prince Charles’s neo-classicist of choice and chief architect for the renovation of 10 Downing Street, Quinlan Terry), entered the ‘unfamiliar territory of “Banksy’s Tunnel” in London’s Leake Street’ to perform what could quite conceivably appear to have been an April Fool’s hoax (Art Below 2011).<sup>1</sup> ‘Using’, as the press release continued, ‘his knowledge of Renaissance ornament and proportion’, Terry spent the ‘whole day treating the graffitied walls as a classical façade’, attempting ‘to bring harmony and order to the chaos and confusion’ that pervaded the space (ibid.). Alongside the BBC News crew who appeared to ‘capture the work in progress’, Ben Moore (founder of the organization Art Below who had commissioned the work), declared the scene to be ‘wonderfully ironic – Classicists are usually seen as being quaint and conservative, and the graffiti world is the polar opposite but somehow by Francis Terry doing a piece in the tunnel [it] ends up being the most revolutionary act of all’ (ibid.).

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<sup>1</sup> What is termed ‘Banksy’s Tunnel’ is the original site of the ‘Can’s Festival’ of 2008. Please see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btm6Zq2E9OI> for a video of Terry’s installation.



I.1 and I.2 *The Leake Street Classicist*, London, England, 2011

In its charming hue of (concrete) grey,<sup>2</sup> Terry's renegade mural (or perhaps his traditionalist *trompe l'oeil*), reinstated what was a manifestly moral<sup>3</sup> order within the tunnel, an ornament attempting to counter the debauched mayhem that surrounded it. It presented a neo-classical critique of what was deemed a pollutive, lawless visuality, an ornamental construction implicitly deriding (and yet, as we will see, implicitly fearing) the scopic order that it expunged.

Not only deeply condescending of course – the first time, as the press release clarified, that 'a qualified chartered architect has done "a piece" in the Leake Street Tunnel' (Art Below 2011), a work produced with the explicit desire (as noted in the BBC interview) to rehabilitate the minds and hearts of the graffiti artists who would encounter it – the painting completed by the Leake Street Classicist will in fact here be seen to be inadvertently illuminating. It will be seen to allude toward the irrevocably intertwined relationship between ornament and order, between ethics and aesthetics, between our material and social worlds; it will be seen to allude to the inherently ornamental status of all Independent Public Art itself (as equivalently ornamental as Terry's neo-classical representation), toward the phobia and unease that these insurgent ornaments bring forth (and thus the common necessity for their destruction). And, as such, the 'revolutionary act' that Terry provides us with will not only serve as a prime example of the Latourian iconoclasm which surrounds the aesthetic we will here be examining – the fact that images are continually involved in the destruction of other images, yet that this very destruction only gives rise to yet more of them – but can act as the perfect starting point for our examination of the convoluted relationship between ornament and order, the binary pairing which will come to frame this work as a whole, the binary pairing held within what Jacques Derrida would call a parergonic embrace.

## AN ARCHITECTONIC PUBLIC

Ornament and order are inextricably linked. Not only counterparts for thousands of years within the annals of architectural history (from Vitruvius to Alberti, from Sullivan to Venturi and Scott Brown), the words themselves, as the philosopher and metaphysician Ananda Coomaraswamy has argued (1939), are in fact etymologically coupled through the Greek word *kosmos*: primarily meaning "order" [...] with reference to the due order or arrangement of things; and, secondarily, denoting "ornament", whether of horses, women, men, or speech' (ibid.: 380). This intertwined derivation can be understood to lead to a number of other logical corollaries; the original basis of Greek architectural terminology, the 'designation of the Doric etc. "orders" [...] the connection between an original "order" and a later

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<sup>2</sup> As opposed to the polychromatic order which Gottfried Semper (2004 [1863]) suggested that classical architecture was subject to, 'ancient stucco', as he says, being 'inconceivable apart from painting', acting as the base for 'wall decorations and monumental polychromy' (ibid.: 384).

<sup>3</sup> 'The concurrence here of the laws of art with those of morals, despite their logical distinction, is remarkable' (Coomaraswamy 1939: 381).