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BERLIN, THE CITY OF SATURATED WALLS

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The results of the project "Urban Imagery in the Systems of Communication (from Fifteenth to Twenty-First Centuries)," carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University–Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2015, are presented in this work.

"Saturation" is the term suggested by the authors to describe the present state of the visual environment of Berlin, the city that acquired a reputation as the European capital of street art. Saturation is a consequence of the gradual infiltration of graffiti and street art into everyday life and the visual environment of Berlin, and their acceptance by city residents. Berliners' fondness for street imagery is enhanced by the experience and memory of the independent reappropriation and rearrangement of urban space the city underwent after unification. The memory of the Berlin Wall plays a significant role in sustaining Berlin graffiti and street art cultures. It makes evident the history of the images and their creators and their role in urban communication. Simultaneously it normalizes the ephemerality of street imagery. Visual saturation in Berlin is complemented by the activities of "mediators," who draw various audiences' attention to graffiti and street art and encourage the interaction of all interested parties.

Keywords: Street Art; Graffiti; Saturation; Berlin; Berlin Wall; Memory; Urban Space; Urban Communication; Urban Mediators

These days the mention of Berlin and graffiti or Berlin and street art in the same sentence would be no surprise to anyone. Over the last two decades Berlin has acquired a reputation as the European capital of everything to do with the culture of these vernacular city images (a representative of Montana-Cans—a manufacturer of spray paint—states in the documentary film *Unlike U* that Berlin and Paris comprise their two largest markets[1]). The recent history of this endlessly changing city in-

[1] *Unlike U: Trainwriting in Berlin*, documentary, 90 mins., directors Henrik Regel and Björn Birg, Germany, 2011.

cludes the burgeoning of the European graffiti movement during the late 1980s–early 1990s, followed by street art's rise in popularity in the early 2000s, as well as the—so far poorly described, yet clearly noticeable—contemporary state of the urban visual environment, which we in this article call "saturation." This saturation results from the simultaneous presence, overlapping, and interrelation of a wide variety of practices and techniques, working conditions, and agents producing images on the city walls.

Our research into Berlin's street images arose in a predictable manner, as we asked ourselves what caused this scale of saturation, surpassing anything other modern European big cities have to offer. What functions does it serve? We started out with the assumption that a researcher can learn a lot about a specific city by scrutinizing and deciphering its urban visual language, by identifying the "conversations" in this language and making observations about the number and the composition of participants. We did not just research contemporary graffiti and street art in Berlin, we looked at the city itself, and primarily at urban communication, through the lens of graffiti and street art, making them a means of studying the city.

While exploring Berlin through graffiti and street art, we tried to single out factors in the city's history and present-day arrangement that we believe have helped street art to become a means of communication among various groups of Berliners. We describe these factors in four sections, beginning with an overview of the basic types of street imagery typical of contemporary Berlin. We wish to demonstrate that graffiti and street art are, in fact, well-fitting and, in a sense, very special elements of the city's history, its traditions of urban development and transformation, and of typical communication practices among residents. We define and analyze the role of institutions and agents who support and develop street art as part of Berlin's unique cultural landscape and facilitate cultural translation for various agents in zones of social tension, undoubtedly present in such an active environment.

At the same time, we hope that this article will contribute to debates about street art as a means to understanding a present-day city: a complex enactment of its communicative relationships, commercial opportunities, and power practices. That is why we focus mostly on graffiti's and street art's communicative value, as opposed to their aesthetic principles, economics, or legal standing, all of which have been discussed elsewhere.

This article draws on the authors' fieldwork in Berlin in 2012–2014. We first entered the field on short research trips in 2012, when the multitude and variety of Berlin's street imagery captivated our imagination. In the spring of 2013 we returned for a reconnaissance study, which included observations, photographing of graffiti and street art, unplanned conversations with local residents, and thematic guided tours and exhibitions. The major period of fieldwork was carried out during the summer and fall of 2014. By then we had already defined the focus of the research and decided to use purposive sampling. We had also decided that our approach must combine an array of methods that would allow us to grasp the complexity and multidimensionality of street imagery. Particularly, we had to take into account not only the spatial but also the temporal dimension of street art: for instance, the images'

renewability or connection (or lack thereof) to singular events, such as street art festivals or protest actions. We complemented the above-mentioned methods with semistructured interviews with key mediators of urban communication: persons who draw public attention to graffiti and street art and who have observed the development of street art in Berlin over a significant period of time. Overall, we conducted eight interviews: seven in English and one in Russian.

In addition to interviews, we supplemented our research toolkit with a study of materials from dedicated websites, social media, and other sources which various forms of street culture use as important media for representation (YouTube videos, DIY films by graffiti writers, fanzines, subcultural journals). This set of tools notwithstanding, our study has largely preserved its spontaneity, through which we were able to remain acutely attuned to even the slightest day-to-day changes on the streets of Berlin. A lot depended on chance, such as whether we happened to be at the right place just in time to record Berliners' spur-of-the-moment reactions to the appearance or disappearance of images. Unplanned conversations—chats with bystanders, who are often curious about people photographing street art, stories we heard from multiple local acquaintances, exchanges with tour guides during city walks—played a significant part in our research. In addition, our arguments build on an extensive photographic material we have collected over the three years of observing the streets of Berlin.

SATURATION

We would like to make "saturation" a starting point for our discussion of Berlin's graffiti and street art and a means of understanding the contemporary city. We are well aware of the distinctions between the various types of street imagery and the diverse practices used today by producers of these images, as well as by researchers, city dwellers, and city legislators (Dickens 2008; Waclawek 2011; Samutina, Zaporozhets, and Kobyshcha 2012; Young 2014). In many contexts graffiti is differentiated from street art (e.g., signature-based "tags," "throw-ups," and "pieces" versus figurative images); a local train bomber is different from an international street art star (in terms of publicity or the economic parameters of their activity); a multicolored mural is not the same as a tiny political sticker (in terms of its political function or material characteristics). However, we would like to draw our readers' attention first to the unprecedented scale of coexistence of all of these types of images in present-day Berlin, covering a significant part of the city's territory, including the districts of Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg, Neukölln, and, to a lesser degree, other areas.[2] The city is full of images, messages, and "traces," which together pro-

[2] The distribution of graffiti and street art throughout Berlin's districts is hard to classify in a linear and unambiguous way. They are equally widely spread in the former West Berlin (Kreuzberg, Neukölln) and East Berlin (Prenzlauer Berg). They sporadically show up in various places in the city center (Berlin Mitte) and cover railways almost all through the city. Their presence is minimal in the recently almost-fully rebuilt area around Potsdamer Platz and the most bourgeois part of contemporary Berlin to the West of the geographical center.

duce an intense urban visual fabric, generating a variety of relationships with city dwellers and one another. On top of that, informal imagery actively communicates with other types of urban images of a different status: advertisements of every kind, official monuments, and architectural forms and textures.

Even a brief summary of the basic types of street imagery and techniques present in Berlin would take up a lot of time—let alone a detailed characterization of their functions, target audience, and history in the modern urban context. Compiling a "visual dictionary" of this sort is beyond the scope of this article; let us name just a few of the most active components of Berlin's saturated wall imagery. Firstly, there are murals—large symbolic images by internationally renowned street artists (such as Blu, Roa, Os Gêmeos, and Victor Ash). Some of these murals have even come to symbolize the city: they are reproduced in tourist guidebooks, souvenirs, and, most notably, in other forms of street imagery, such as shop signs or café designs (Figure 1).

Figure 1. An iconic mural by Os Gêmeos in Kreuzberg: reality and representation.[3]

Secondly, there are multiple street art projects of varying scale, style, and nature. Local and international artists have turned the city streets into an open-air gallery and city walks into quests for insiders and a source of income for alternative tour guides. According to the guides for street-culture tours from the Al-

[3] All photographs that appear in the article were taken by the authors in Berlin between 2012 and 2015.

ternative Berlin company, no fewer than 700 street artists worked in Berlin in 2013–2014 (interview with one of the guides, R., 2014). Street art projects are executed in different techniques (painting, stencil, paste-up, collage, sticker, urban sculpture, and more). They may differ in how conceptual or figurative they are (from an angry Little Lucy—El Bocho's character—chasing a cat all through the city to the number 6, painted for many years on temporary city surfaces by an artist known as Mr. 6 who bikes around Berlin with a bucket of paint). They also vary in size. They spring up in the yards of art galleries, art schools, squats, and other places where street art is "legalized," as well as all across the city (Figure 2). Alongside recognizable images by famous street artists, the walls of Berlin are filled and inhabited by hundreds of characters, pictures, and inscriptions, which by all measures may be classified as street art, whether created by a well-known street artist or an art-school student.

Figure 2. Berlin street art in all forms, techniques, sizes, and places.

Thirdly, Berlin remains a city with a rich graffiti culture in its most basic sense: as a culture of informal communities who produce primarily illegal signature-based images (Macdonald 2001; Merrill 2015). Berlin's complex public transport system has a great appeal for train bombers, many of whom come together in highly qualified, by this subculture's standards, crews. Berlin graffiti writers are capable of spectacular group actions, from such widespread achievements as "the whole train" and "the whole car" to, say, painting an entire graffiti calendar for 2015 on the walls of the

Eisenacher Straße U-Bahn station.[4] Many graffiti writers, in particular the best-known and sizable Berlin crew 1UP, see the entire space of the city as a canvas for graffiti and practice train bombing and wall painting with equal eagerness. The most reckless graffiti crew of recent years, Berlin Kidz, reclaim the city in a similar way. They combine graffiti writing with train riding, parkour, and city climbing, and cover walls in their home district, Kreuzberg, with red-and-blue graffiti ligatures of unprecedented scope. Berliners have grown accustomed to the bright pieces, spectacular throw-ups, and countless tags constituting the basis of their visual cityscape (Figure 3). Even some forms of wall painting that are quite rare elsewhere are present in Berlin: for instance, giant blind firewalls serve as a canvas for writers such as JUST, who uses a fire extinguisher filled with paint.

Figure 3. Berlin graffiti by 1UP, JUST, Berlin Kidz, and many others.

In Berlin graffiti aesthetic has become not only a constant background but also a noticeable, frequent design element, most often used on the "ground level": on shop and café exteriors and interiors, on newsstands and food trucks, in hostels and on minibuses (Figure 4). Notably, graffiti design is not limited to "self-evident" forms, such as eye-catching characters or recognizable views of the city: for example, the interior of Kreuzberg café and music club Wendel features pixação tags, typical of

[4] Urbanshit, "12 Graffiti & 1 U-Bahnstation: Subway Session Calender 2015." *RBNSHT* (blog), January 19, 2015 (http://urbanshit.de/12-graffiti-1-u-bahnstation-subway-session-calender-2015/).

São Paulo, Brazil, and favored also by the Berlin Kidz crew (Figure 4). The vividness of shop signs, making it attractive to customers, the relative affordability of this kind of décor, the proximity of commissioners to artists, who often come from the same community—all of these factors have facilitated the spread of graffiti aesthetic in Berlin. Although an experienced "wall reader" would easily be able to tell a commissioned piece from free artwork, the saturation of Berlin's visual landscape with graffiti is to a great degree the result of residents gradually acquiring a taste for and accepting this aesthetic. Let us stress once more that it is being promoted and commercialized by ordinary people: from furniture movers and kiosk renters to hostel owners and music club proprietors who understand that graffiti style is part of the "coolness" that makes Berlin so alluring.

Figure 4. Graffiti as an element of the "ground level" design.

The last but not least visible layer of visual fabric covering Berlin's walls are the multiple marker and pencil markings—political slogans, drawings, jokes, and love letters. These are most common on temporary surfaces but are generally present all over. "Transform your city into a sketchbook!" (Figure 5)—this slogan does not seem accidental in a city that has, at a certain point in its development, banked on its reputation as a hub of "creativity" and is in no hurry to waste money whitewashing the walls. At the same time, walls have become a means of urban communication regarding the up-to-the-minute municipal and local issues. For example, in the district of Neukölln—the new hip area, where real estate prices have skyrocketed in the last

few years[5]—we have seen a number of wall inscriptions and paste-ups calling to fight gentrification, whereas Kreuzberg features quite a few graffiti and stickers decrying tourism. Berliners talk to each other by the medium of walls, and these conversations are sufficiently varied: they serve many functions and are not limited to ads or stickers of local clubs, although the latter are numerous enough.

Figure 5. "Talking walls" of Berlin.

Formally, the legislation regarding illegal imagery[6] in Berlin is quite strict: defacement of private property is punishable by substantial fines and, in some cases, imprisonment for up to two years.[7] However, an "unspoken social pact" says otherwise. According to all of our informants from graffiti circles, in practice these laws treat graffiti writing rather mildly (except for train bombing), reflecting Ber-

[5] Two of our informants, residents of an international communal student lodging in Neukölln, admitted in an interview that they are literally packed and ready to go: what used to be primarily an immigrant area with cheap accommodation is quickly gentrifying.

[6] Every street image painted without the written consent of the building's owner is considered illegal, although in mid-2015 the Berlin police made an important clarification that "mere announcements, declarations of love, and political expressions or symbols are not considered graffiti" (https://www.berlin.de/polizei/dienststellen/landeskriminalamt/lka-2/artikel.320396.php).

[7] The website of the Berlin police (http://www.berlin.de/polizei/) provides detailed and regularly updated information about the current legislation for the edification of graffiti writers. It also encourages them to use specially designated legal walls and to participate in graffiti festivals.

liners' tolerant attitude to graffiti and street art as inevitable elements of urban culture that also bring profit and generate a recognizable city "brand." Due to its multiagent nature, the culture of street images in Berlin does not only facilitate the visual "saturation" of city walls but also leads to the effective decriminalization of many street art practices. This is especially relevant for the most ephemeral types of street imagery, such as paste-ups: if caught gluing a picture to a wall, the worst that can happen is that the perpetrator would be asked to remove it. The technique of paste-up has become exceedingly widespread in Berlin in recent years: among other things, one finds printouts of poems, photos, ads, and many other things glued to walls—even children's drawings, which clearly bring their creators more joy when displayed on a wall or by the building's entrance than at home, tucked away in a folder.

When asking ourselves about the causes and functions of city walls' saturation with images and texts and wondering what this saturation tells us about Berlin as a modern metropolis, we compared it to the city where we (usually) live. Moscow is radically different from Berlin as far as its saturation with informal street imagery is concerned. Graffiti culture and street art do exist in present-day Moscow, just like in any other metropolis, but they do not yet serve as a means of horizontal public communication. The city has few visuals other than the ones representing either commerce or the authorities. Moscow is largely an "estranged" city with a hypersemioticized center, and the policy of "expurgating every trace" (all informal images, including tags on temporary surfaces, are regularly buffed off in downtown Moscow) leaves no room for visible expressions of other opinions about public space. Graffiti perseveres only along railway lines and in a few yards—secret pockets in an outwardly totally controlled and "censored" city.

The situation with street art in Moscow is simultaneously better and worse than the situation with graffiti: a few years ago municipal authorities decided to enhance their reputation by promoting the fashionable culture of street art. This, on the one hand, resulted in street art festivals, public lectures, and in appearance in the city of many legal murals, some of them by acknowledged artists. On the other hand, the authorities' understanding of street art's functions is limited to that of décor only. The kind of art they support through commissions and permits is, as a rule, devoid of any problematic content and, overall, resembles the murals of peace and well-being once used to decorate the sides of Soviet buildings. Portraits of famous writers and abstract compositions executed in the framework of such actions as the street art festival *The Best City on Earth* (2013–2014) represent art that is "beautiful" (from the viewpoint of mainstream tastes), "high-brow" (portraits of the classics), and completely uncontroversial. Judging by an interview with one of *The Best City on Earth*'s organizers, street art activist and Street Kit gallery owner Sabina Chagina,[8] the very organization of festivals like this is the best indicator of the utter bureaucratization and confusion of power and property

[8] "Vsia pravda o LGZ," an interview with Sabina Chagina by Kirill Kto. *Vltramarine*, February 18, 2014 (http://www.vltramarine.ru/mag/streetart/interview/1787).

relations in the city. They also make perfectly clear the fear and mistrust all officials, even on the lowest level, feel toward any new practices and voluntary initiatives. Present-day "official" Moscow street art testifies to communication problems among groups of city dwellers and manifests the impossibility of tolerating different views on the city and the rights of others to express them. No wonder it presents a stark contrast in size and content to the humane and ephemeral illegal projects by Moscow's best street artists. Paradoxical inscriptions by Kirill Kto and Kostia Avgust's autumnal maple leaves pop up unexpectedly all over the city; bright geometric experiments by the avant-garde project *Aesthetics* virtually break out of the long stretches of dismal concrete fences and garages in the suburbs. But, however smart and successful in and of themselves, these projects are nowhere near creating Berlin-like saturation, whose historical and contemporary causes we have yet to fully untangle.

A MOVING CITY, A TALKING CITY

Berlin's unique configuration of urban culture, which is not limited to street art, was the first to draw our attention. Our desire to identify Berlin's specificity in a number of aspects is typical of many researchers studying the city. Paraphrasing Matthias Bernt and Andrej Holm, with their characteristic assertion that Prenzlauer Berg is certainly an example of gentrification, but one "of a special kind" (2005:121), one can speak of Berlin as a city going through many of the same phases any contemporary big city does—expansion, urban development, gentrification, marketization—but in its own particular way. Contemporary brand makers, whose goal is to position Berlin on the global arena, are certainly at least partially responsible for the production of this image of the city's uniqueness. Making Berlin look exotic is an efficient way of enhancing its appeal to new residents, tourists, and investors: "Tolerance for sexual, social, and cultural difference, and alternative practices of all kinds became a large part of Berlin's self-fashioning" (Allon 2013:293).

Yet, it would be incorrect to see Berlin's specificity only as a successful global marketing strategy. Firstly, as Janice Ward acknowledges in her book, "locality and virtuality go hand in hand" in any contemporary city (2004:252). Secondly, Berlin's unique history makes a significant contribution to the development of some of its specific features or, at least, endows the universal with particular meanings. Berlin is "in significant ways different from other Western European capitals, in terms of its history as a capital and as an industrial center as well as in terms of its buildings" (Huyssen 1997:59). Lastly, the present-day image of the city has largely come together spontaneously, from the bottom up, through the efforts of many actors and infrastructures, rather than being imposed from above by brand or policy makers. Berlin has been, and largely remains, a city of urban pioneers—seekers of new places and experiences, both related to street art practices and not. Berliners are aware of and note these "waves" of quickly changing phases of urban development over the past two and a half decades, starting from the fall of the Berlin Wall:

> Tourism in Berlin began on a specific date—in 2004, with the arrival of EasyJet. Prior to that, tourists were thrill seekers of sorts.... And before that, Berlin used to be a special military zone. (Informant N., composer, who has lived in Berlin since 1994)[9]

> We first started to really bomb the trains in the west in 1989. That is why it was a small and motivated core of writers ... the fall of the Berlin Wall and the growing possibilities called for a new generation of writers that may had not [sic] believed in themselves that much before.... From all the districts of West Berlin the writers travelled to the trains in the East. Suddenly you could see trains with new names like SNOR, BOLE, INKA, TOUR, REW, ESHER, and CRASE, just to mention a few, to list them all would be too much. This helped to develop a real train writing scene in Berlin steadily. (Poet, one of the pioneers of the Berlin graffiti scene, cited in True 2 the Game Industries 2003)

The characteristics of an urban lifestyle—"the way people live their lives in the city, their cultures and customs, the way they treat strangers, their differences and indifferences" (Pile 2005:2)—constitute the environment, opening windows of opportunity for graffiti writers and street artists. They also, in their turn, "add color to the bleakness of the everyday."[10] Among the many circumstances and events contributing to the visual saturation of the city and to residents' acceptance of this saturation, we would like to point out city dwellers' experience of independent reappropriation and rearrangement of urban space. In the late 1980s–early 1990s Berlin was extensively retailored by its residents. This experience greatly affected the culture of urban communication, as well as the culture of using public spaces.

The fall of the Wall and the unification of the country provided an impetus for an all-encompassing rearrangement of the city and, primarily, transformed its "social architecture"—the practices of use and occupancy of the city. It was a time when residents got going once again. Some left for good: "Berlin was losing 20,000 inhabitants per year in the late 1990s ... stabiliz[ing] at 3.4 million inhabitants" by 2000 (Ward 2004:245); others moved in; yet others transferred into new districts. The city quickly acquired "urban voids" (Huyssen 1997)—empty spaces, abandoned buildings, vacated apartments. A significant number of these voids came about due to the intensive migration of East Berliners to the West in search of work and better living conditions. By the early 2000s, the mass population displacements of the 1990s had resulted in "about 130,000 empty apartments in the city ... as people migrate[d] westwards" (Ward 2004:245).

Over the subsequent ten years, new residents filled these voids. In fact, nothing radically new happened in Berlin in the early 1990s. Squatting is an indispensable part of any modern city's experience and an immediate consequence of changes in

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[9] Unless stated otherwise, interviews cited in this article were conducted by the authors.

[10] "There will always be people making sure the cities remain colorful," says one of the narrators in the documentary about the graffiti crew 1UP, made by the crew itself (*One United Power*, documentary, 77 mins., Germany, 2011).

the logic of urban usage after a war or in the period of deindustrialization. In these cases, empty spaces become "a regular feature of contemporary society … [where] people decided to take matters into their own hands by squatting in a diversity of spaces: office blocks, factories, theaters and bars as well as houses" (Squatting Europe Kollective 2013:11).

Berlin, however, had an impressive previous experience (for instance, the events of the early 1990s are described as the third wave of squatting in Berlin). In addition, space was reclaimed at a mind-blowing scale: "A bunch of young East and West Germans from very different backgrounds launched something of a social experiment and created their own version of a unified Germany on ungoverned land…. Roughly 130 buildings were occupied in East Berlin shortly after the Wall fell."[11] As witnesses report, the Berlin of the 1990s is best compared to a sort of urban carnival, with all its recklessness and boisterousness. Urban space was not just a stage for action to take place, rather, space was an equal participant in these changes. Locations were being rearranged on the fly. Some of these newly emerged places such as flea markets, car boot sales, beer gardens, sports grounds, waterfront beaches, community gardens, and techno clubs (Colomb 2012; Pachenkov and Voronkova 2014) stayed around for a while, while others changed their functions depending on the situation and on the needs and creativity of their users. These experiments with urban space felt almost boundless: the distinction between public and private spaces had temporarily lost its importance, just like the usual limitations, habitually excluding from use "nonfunctional" spaces such as roofs and abandoned lots.

The consequence of these experiments was a normalization of transgression, trespassing on the habitual boundaries of urban spaces, as well as the creation of "expanded" urban space—a space in communal use, outside of the usual restrictions and conventions:

> In Berlin in the 1990s, there was no distinction between official and unofficial places. It was hard to obtain a license to open a restaurant, that is why restaurants operated in private apartments. My friends organized a place they called A Place to Satisfy Primary Needs, where they organized incredible themed dinners and screened rare films, until they were busted. There were private concerts, roof parties, where people played mini-golf, there were disco parties in deserted bars—whatever one wishes. (Informant N., composer, who has lived in Berlin since 1994)

In today's Berlin squats are more of a historical urban myth, objects of nostalgia, and part of the antigentrification discourse, although some elements of transgressive "collective coexistence" still persevere in areas such as Neukölln. Over the course of our study, we have observed in Berlin shared apartments, open parties in ground-floor spaces used as little art galleries, and the very homely habit

[11] Kati Krause and Ole Schulz, "Our Own Private Germany." *Matter*, November 8, 2014 (https://medium.com/matter/our-own-private-germany-6ce44ac93a7b).

of using the streets for an improvised collective soccer viewing on TVs brought outside. However, many DIY spaces whose roots go back to the 1990s–early 2000s, such as flea markets, beaches, urban gardens, and the like, have been closely integrated into the urban everyday and are objects of attention, pride, and debate for local residents.

On the one hand, today these places suggest *la peau de chagrin*—the magic skin, shrinking under developers' pressure. On the other, both the memory of the 1990s and the present-day use of these spaces keep local residents convinced of their right to participate in urban space and its use. It is no wonder that in the last few years attempts to close down such spaces have met with adamant resistance from locals, instantly mobilized in response to any threat. For instance, local residents succeeded in protecting a huge field in Neukölln, where the former Tempelhof airport used to be, from a proposed housing development, preserving it as a historical landmark. The fate of the field was determined by a referendum initiated by a group of activists. Tempelhofer Feld remains a place for urban gardening, sporting activities, musical events, and other informal activities. Just as keenly, residents have been fighting to preserve a multicultural music-on-the-beach zone known as YAAM (Young and African Arts Market) along the Spree. These defenses of DIY spaces, from singular protest rallies to a citywide referendum, are convincing illustrations of local residents' willingness to fight for their right to the city.

The city's visual saturation is maintained not only through its residents' conviction of their right to the city but also through the culture of intense and democratic urban communication taking place in Berlin's public spaces. During our fieldwork, through focused and consistent "reading" of the walls and through observing other "readers," we have concluded that informal and illegal images complement and reinforce this communication, which is carried out in a number of other ways as well. Berlin's surfaces (walls, informational posters, advertisement hoardings, underground passages, etc.) not only instruct passersby by giving them directions through signage and street names but also talk to them in a variety of languages on a variety of topics. Some banners, posters, stands, photographs on walls, kiosks, and even entire open-air museums tell pedestrians stories requiring close scrutiny, at times even attentive listening—as in the street museum of the Wall on Bernauer Straße, where anyone can listen to recordings of Berliners' stories about life in the divided city (Figure 6). Sometimes a phrase, an image, or a colorful patch simply cries out to passersby, catching their eyes for just a moment. From time to time, various groups of city dwellers take to the streets with their own visual material, slogans, or other kinds of information. They bring their artistic or theatrical projects to crowded areas and instantly draw notice. Intensive street communication in Berlin, involving tourists as well as local residents, is the best demonstration of how well diverse users utilize the city's public spaces and how vivid and vibrant the city's communicative culture is. In fact, the city is debated on the city streets.

Figure 6. Urban exhibitions and their viewers.

Graffiti, street art, other informal images and inscriptions join Berlin's saturated communicative environment, undergo its influence, and, in turn, produce and reinforce it as, among other things, a culture of using urban space in the residents' interests. In this case we share many a researcher's opinion regarding the cultural significance of these practices for the production of public space:

> Participating in such activities, like graffiti, or even thinking of their occurrence, is not a matter of expressing an opinion or an opposition; it is a matter of helping to produce both the spaces for public use and a *new culture* of public use. A bunch of kids, in our case graffiti writers, realized that. In the end of the day, graffiti turns out to be an energizer of social relationships because it "connects bodies known and unknown through the proliferation of images." (Avramidis 2012:18, emphasis in the original)

The integration of graffiti and street art practices in Berlin's urban life, the typical attitude toward these practices, and the ways of solving related conflicts may serve as a perfect starting point for a discussion of urban communication in general. This communication often involves diverse groups promoting their own vision of the city, including newcomers and local ethnic communities. In Kreuzberg—since the 1970s primarily an immigrant, Turkish neighborhood in former West Berlin, which in the last decade has undergone active gentrification—relations between graffiti writers, street artists, and building owners provide characteristic examples of successful self-regula-

tion. Graffiti and street art bestrewing building facades, arches, and doors never fail to attract and amuse tourists, café goers, and designer boutiques' customers, while oftentimes informing them of local residents' annoyance with round-the-clock partying and "beer tourism"; the amount of antitourist graffiti is especially high in Kreuzberg. This, admittedly rather rude (for wandering city visitors), way of passing judgment on gentrification is, nevertheless, also an understandable part of discussing the problem. In contrast, internal courtyards, where Turkish families reside, remain mostly untouched; graffiti in Kreuzberg ends where public space becomes private, thus serving as a sort of a marker. A curious idler walking over this dividing line is met with suspicion. A local kindergarten, on the other hand, has its wall decorated with both the kids' own drawings and a cheerful red inscription by graffiti crew Berlin Kidz: "Life = Gluck (Happiness) = ÜF" (Über Fricks is another name for the Berlin Kidz crew).

One more example of direct communication between street artists and Kreuzberg's local community is the mural, created a few years ago, by internationally acknowledged Belgian street artist Roa. This case, as narrated to us by informant R., had every reason to become an epic fail. Instead, it illustrates the way to achieve an understanding and a voluntary compromise without resorting to authorities, the law, and especially to violence. The organizers of Roa's visit in Berlin had chosen for his artwork a virtually ideal wall: with few inscriptions, not blocked by other buildings, and visible from afar. He started to paint several dead animals, characteristic of his style and ecological message. All went well until representatives of a local mosque contacted the artist working on the wall. By this time, he had already painted a pig among the animals on the wall. As it turned out, the mosque's windows were overlooking exactly this wall. Negotiators requested that their feelings be spared and the image slightly modified, which is exactly what was done, as promptly as was practicable, to both parties' satisfaction. A tea party for street artists and the imam celebrated their mutual agreement. Thus, a brewing conflict was successfully diffused thanks to the street artists' and the local community's willingness to hear each other out and collaborate. This preparedness for a direct dialogue, for an understanding and acceptance of residents' interests, is an essential feature of contemporary street art, which makes it capable of securing support of the local community (Visconti et al. 2010). In a city like Berlin, residents' interaction with street artists is capable of taking the form of a dialogue.

HISTORY, EPHEMERALITY

Over the two and a half decades since the Wall fell, Berlin has acquired a very special place in considerations of the modern culture of memory (Till 2005; Staiger, Steiner, and Webber 2009; Ward 2011). The unique situation of a city rebuilding itself again after many breaks, gaps, and voids and, in addition, once again becoming the country's capital necessitated a complex and multifaceted policy for the treatment of monuments, ruins, reconstructions, and traces—as they are classified by Rudy Koshar (2000), author of one of the best-known contemporary books on the politics of memory, who deliberately began the book with Berlin and the Wall.

Decisions made in Berlin regarding various memorial locations, historical legacies, and commemorative events have given rise to heated debates and stimulated further conceptualization of the urban heritage and active creation of different forms of the representation of the past, whether ideological and intellectual or more banal and commercial. "Tourists and entrepreneurs (some adding their own graffiti to Wall fragments for authenticity's sake) turned the marketing of the Wall into an unofficial heritage industry; everyone got a piece of the past" (Koshar 2000:3).

In present-day Berlin, a person curious about the city's recent past and historical culture has dozens of sites to visit: from the new Deutsches Historisches Museum to the various memorials, exhibitions, fragments of ruins, and tourist attractions related to the history of the Wall and the period of the city's division. The latter make tangible the variety and multiagentive qualities so typical of Berlin: among them, the well thought-out Berlin Wall Memorial and Documentation Center in Bernauer Straße, managed by a community trust, and the private Checkpoint Charlie museum—hugely popular among tourists but scolded by historians for its randomness and kitsch. There are also such attractions as *The Wall Panorama* executed by renowned panorama artist Yadegar Asisi and presenting a fictitious view on the Wall from Kreuzberg in the autumn of 1980. East Side Gallery is also all the rage among today's tourists. This is a segment of the outer construction of the eastern part of the Berlin Wall, painted on by a number of artists in 1990 and partially restored in 2009, by which time most of the drawings had sustained too much damage. (At the same time, this restoration destroyed an impressive graffiti gallery on the western side of the Wall—a constantly renewed "Hall of Fame" for Berlin's graffiti community.)

Along with many other things associated with mass tourism and an artificial reproduction of once more-authentic practices, East Side Gallery in its present state annoys current practitioners of street art. Among those we interviewed, not a single connoisseur of or participant in the Berlin graffiti and street art scene had a good word to say about this open-air gallery ("East Side Gallery? I think it's a waste of money," says Adrian Nabi, founder of a journal and graffiti and street art festival *BackJumps*, who has been active in the Berlin graffiti scene since the mid-1980s[12]). Guides from Alternative Berlin tours demonstratively avoid East Side Gallery in favor of the nearby multicultural YAAM beach and street art in the adjacent courtyards. However, every informant spoke emotionally and passionately of the Berlin Wall itself and the history of graffiti practices in the city. Present-day Berlin's complex and highly conceptualized attitude to its historical past in general could not help but reflect on how this city historicizes practices of street art communication. Commodification, inevitable for tourist attractions, does not monopolize Berliners' ways of thinking about the past. The city has room for many other voices. For example, the historically reflexive street art project by artist JR, entitled *The Wrinkles of the City*.

[12] For another indignant testimony, along with rare photographs, see "East Side Gallery Sucks," *Poet73* (blog), January 20, 2011 (http://poet73.blogspot.ru/2011/01/east-side-gallery-sucks.html).

Enormous photographic portraits of the local elderly are attached to buildings, so they will eventually get older and decay along with the building or, inversely, present a dramatic contrast to a clean, freshly restored wall. "I can only do it in cities where there has been a strong history, where the walls speak for the city," said JR in an interview with Deutsche Welle.[13]

The history of graffiti culture and other aspects of public visual communication in Berlin have long drawn the interest of researchers and documentary photographers (Schmitz 1982; Henkel, Domentat, and Westhoff 1994; Eickemeyer, Eickemeyer, and Ulrich 2001; Klitzke and Schmidt 2009; Papen 2012). This history lives on in the memory of involved communities and finds ways of being documented in periodicals, books, and videos and lately also in blogs and Internet archives. Sources such as the documentary *Unlike U* provide quite a bit of valuable information on the formation of graffiti culture in Berlin and convey graffiti writers' own reflections on their history. Thus, Poet talks in this film about the place and the spirit of graffiti writers' late 1980s meetings at the Friedrichstraße subway station: "I believe that back then the Berlin we know was founded—the graffiti metropolis."[14] Starting from the mid-1990s, the phenomenon of graffiti was documented first in fanzines and then in periodicals (see, for example, the series "Graffiti Art" in *Berlin und Neue Länder* no. 6, from about 1997–1998).

We would like to emphasize two equally significant facts about Berlin's street art culture in relation to the city's history. Firstly, the Wall has a special place in the urban imagination not only in and of itself but also in connection with graffiti and street art. For West Berlin, starting from approximately the early 1980s, the Wall became more than just a divider—it turned into an enormous canvas for writing. In 1982, Helmut Schmitz's book of photos already contains a large section on the Wall showing with it clearly visible political slogans, drawings, jokes, and messages to various addressees (1982:37–72). The Wall became a unique communicative medium, which is exactly how it went down in history: with thousands of inscriptions and images, which today can be seen in myriad photos and albums for tourists (Kuzdas 2009); with calls for protest and children's drawings; with all the meaningful episodes of its artistic history—the multicolored heads by Thierry Noir, graffiti by Keith Haring, the *White Line* action, an episode from Wim Wenders's *Der Himmel über Berlin*, and so on.

Secondly, it is indispensable in this context to stress the qualities of street imagery that are essential to its historicization. These images are ephemeral; they are rooted in the lived communication practices of residents and urban communities; they are inseparable from the changing urban context. The Wall's elimination, its physical destruction (together with all the images) was Berliners' own choice made on the spur of the moment, in the heat of the peaceful civic revolution of 1989. The

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[13] Susan Stone and Kseniia Pol'skaia, "Morshchiny na (u)litsakh Berlina." Deutsche Welle, May 27, 2013 (http://www.dw.de/морщины-на-улицах-берлина/g-16793507).

[14] *Unlike U: Trainwriting in Berlin*, documentary, 90 mins., directors Henrik Regel and Björn Birg, Germany, 2011.

authorities' move to replace it with a surrogate East Side Gallery was contradictory and ambiguous, especially considering the costly decisions the city made about this memorial in 2009. This example demonstrates the tension with regard to interpreting urban memory and to the question of who is entitled to preserve it and how. However, specifically as applied to Berlin, there are many other examples showing how the memory of visual communication practices connected to the Wall is kept alive in the city, finding expression in various places.

For instance, one of the interior walls of Asisi's *The Wall Panorama* looks like the Berlin Wall but is made of paper; visitors have an opportunity to leave a signature or an inscription, and many eagerly do so. At Berlin graffiti festivals and other events, where participants of any age are encouraged to draw on walls, the drawing surface also frequently takes on the form of the Wall. Due to Berlin's unique history, its residents have developed a very good sense of the ephemeral, whether these are images, monuments, objects being built and modified, or a series of events. The Berlin Wall—as a canvas for ever-changing images and as a vanished artifact that continues living in urban memory and keeps being reproduced in a multitude of ephemeral forms—serves as one of the city's basic reference points. Berlin has also every chance of becoming a city of the very advanced, very modern politics of memory for graffiti and street art cultures.

Due to recent interest in street art all over the world, both its practitioners and researchers have started to discuss the ephemerality and mobility of street culture forms, as well as their relationship with traditional "heritage frameworks," strongly bound to objects' "authenticity" and "physicality" (Edwards-Vandenhoek 2015; Merrill 2015). On the one hand, graffiti and street art do not just sometimes call for their preservation as images but also stimulate discussion about protecting whole neighborhoods and groups of buildings as specific locations with their own histories: "Signs of the continued expansion of street art's heritagisation to affect subcultural graffiti are already becoming evident. In Berlin, for example, politicians in the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg recently requested that subcultural graffiti associated with their local area's history of house squatting be placed under heritage protection" (Merrill 2015:382). On the other hand, although we too feel grief over the inevitable loss of our favorite street images, as specialists in street communication practices we cannot help agreeing with Samuel Merrill, who states that "it can be seen that the application of heritage frameworks may have negative consequences for the authenticity of the traditions of graffiti subcultures and provoke a critical re-questioning of the role that heritage practitioners and institutions should play in their maintenance and preservation" (2015:382).

Not only graffiti but any urban street images remain a tradition of the communities that produced them and, as such, are entitled to all the functions for which these communities had produced them. They have a right to change and to converse with each other, to be a weapon and an argument, a sign of protest or even a gesture of desperation. In this sense the gesture of street artist Blu, who in December 2014 destroyed his iconic murals in Kreuzberg that were mentioned in

every travel guide, to protest against developers' destruction of the district's life and spirit, seems to us and other observers of Berlin's urban scene a completely justified and adequate action of an artist who uses street art exactly as it ought to be used. This gesture "prompts a dialogue with the city's reality, stressing the capability and social function of artistic interventions where others fail to advance" (Henke 2015:295).

Berlin has many positive examples of using art to work with ephemerality, of capitalizing on the experience of street communication for the sake of reinforcing and developing live cultural memory. We will close this section with one of them. It made a great impression on us and many other participants of the event, which was conceptually simple, inexpensive to carry out, but extremely powerful in its impact. On November 7–9, 2014, Berlin celebrated the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Wall. Ephemeral art, supported by the city, became the principal element and the major event of this celebration: the light installation *Lichtgrenze* (Border of Light), designed by Christopher Bauder and Marc Bauder, made up of white helium-filled balloons, was erected for three days along the former line of the Wall, covering 15 kilometers in total (Figure 7). On the anniversary of the Wall's fall, the installation was symbolically destroyed: volunteers let glowing balloons fly into the sky. Being biodegradable, these balloons did not leave any traces other than photographs and participants' memories. However, in the three days of its existence, the ephemeral installation *Lichtgrenze* managed to do a lot for the cultural memory and the actualization of urban identity. All through the short time of its existence, it enjoyed a great popularity among Berlin's residents and tourists. It also functioned as a kind of historical simulator, in that it helped even those born too late to see the Wall. The installation also served as a street exhibition: stands with information about this period of Berlin's history, with photographs, eyewitnesses' accounts, documents, and monitors screening films were placed all along the "glowing wall," so that people coming to this temporary memorial would be able to obtain accurate information or refresh their memories of the period. In addition, the installation triggered personal commemorative rituals: over these three days, many Berliners undertook pilgrimages along the entire length of the wall, on bikes or on foot, touchingly armed with a walking stick (Figure 7). Lastly, the temporary wall served as a cause for communication of all kinds, from supplementary art projects, like collecting personal memories about the Wall, to conversations among Berliners about the difficult moments in the city's history and its current problems. Due to their age, for many of them this was the first occasion to realize what this rigid divider would have felt like—now, when its soft and ephemeral reincarnation suddenly blocked their daily routes. The temporary installation *Lichtgrenze*, which combined the functions of an art object, a temporary memorial, and an open-air museum, has become for the city also a conversation platform—in complete accordance with this city's important traditions.

Figure 7. The ephemeral installation *Lichtgrenze*, November 7–9, 2014, Berlin.

MEDIATORS

"An open-air art gallery." This is how websites and guidebooks advertise Berlin—a city saturated with images directly addressing a mixed crowd of onlookers. However, in contrast to gallery visitors, with their a priori focused attention to explanatory plaques under each artifact and exhibition guides, the average city dweller does not always notice or cannot always read street imagery. At times, even the most conceptualized street art images remain in a "zone of invisibility," let alone the "urban wallpaper" of graffiti and stickers (for street art's role as an "exerciser for vision" see, for example, Samutina forthcoming). We argue that mediators play a special role in "making the invisible visible"; they make graffiti and street art enter into city residents' field of vision and their public discussions. The last section of our text on Berlin's visual communication is dedicated to them—those we call "communications mediators." These are enthusiasts, groups, and organizations who complement Berlin's visual saturation with a kind of cultural interpretation or translation. Their actions draw various audiences' attention to graffiti, street art, and other urban creative activities, make them a relevant topic for discussion, and enable their understanding. They promote coexistence—a conscious interaction of all interested parties, as occurs, for example, on tours offered by Alternative Berlin:[15]

[15] http://alternativeberlin.com/.

> Naturally, people go to cities to see historic things or landmarks, things like that. That's one part of the city. The other part of the city is what people do. And that's all we are about. We try to show this side of the city. People have these urban gardens, people have water filtration, they are extremely happy that someone can come along and have a word with them. (Adrian Sampson, Alternative Berlin)

As in urban life, where street culture is inextricably intertwined with daily routine, mediators' interest in graffiti and street art is inevitably linked to other themes and fields of concern:

> The idea was that the youth have problems with the public presentation. It had two elements such as an archive and a publisher to enhance the public dialogue, to represent the youth culture. Seventeen years later we have public projects, we work at schools, people from Archive of Youth Cultures go to schools to talk about youth cultures and social problems. The culture is used as a key to talk with teens about social problems. (Carsten Janke, Archiv der Jugendkulturen)

People interested in street imagery and street culture give credit to all those who tell, show, publish, preserve materials about Berlin's graffiti and street art or those who simply are passionately keen on them. Alternative Berlin's street art tours, the educational, publishing, and archival work carried out by Archiv der Jugendkulturen (Archive of Youth Cultures),[16] street festivals and publications by BackJumps—all these and many other varied and dissimilar Berlin's activities cause a vivid response from different publics. "This was easily my favourite part of 2 weeks in Berlin" is a typical review of an Alternative Berlin guided tour.[17] These mediatory initiatives differ as to their organizers, sources of funding (varying from tour participants' give-what-you-want tips to governmental grants), organizational structure (from a few volunteers to a small staff on payroll), and delivery format. Some, like BackJumps, have been around for 20 years; others, like Alternative Berlin, are less than 10 years old.

By initiating exhibitions and festivals, guiding tours, communicating with various audiences, explicating reasons for one or another situation in interviews, Berlin's mediators maintain and reinforce street culture. For most of them participation and interest in it is both a lifestyle and a purpose, as we have learned after becoming acquainted with three notable actors in this rather far-flung, saturated milieu. Our first encounter with the Alternative Berlin project took place in 2013, when we read enthusiastic online reviews about its street art tours and decided to join them. A subsequent interview with the company's founder and several tour guides, participation in tours, and numerous extremely positive reviews on various websites helped us get a handle on Alternative Berlin. Founded in 2006 by Adrian Sampson, who moved from Australia to Berlin about 15 years ago, this company has been offering graffiti and street art tours and workshops (which allow their participants to try out stencil making), along with other tours devoted to various aspects of life in the city. Alternative Berlin's tours, whether

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[16] http://www.jugendkulturen.de/.

[17] Raz S., review of Alternative Berlin Tours on Yelp, December 10, 2013 (http://www.yelp.com/biz/alternative-berlin-tours-berlin).

on street art or otherwise, are better defined as ways to familiarize oneself with the city in the company of locals, for tour guides create and cultivate a spirit of friendliness, equality, and intimacy, which defies classical tour-guiding principles and traditional notions of tour-guide behavior. Tour guides introduce tourists to Berlin's real life in the same way that we would show personal guests around our hometown. For example, on tours by artist P. and former graffiti writer R., they told us, among other things, about their personal experiences of living and working in Berlin.

We found out about Archive of Youth Cultures, created in 1998 by journalists and activists, thanks to the events it organized in Neukölln. By now, the organization has at its disposal a substantial library on street culture, which includes academic texts as well as small subcultural journals, fanzines, and police reports carefully documenting Berlin's graffiti and street art. The Archive's staff organize numerous projects aimed at familiarizing Berliners with various forms of youth culture, facilitating discussions on social issues, and protecting youth's interests. The Archive's work is mostly funded by grants. A few years ago the organization branched out into publishing books on aspects of youth cultures.

We met Adrian Nabi, founder of the nonprofit organization BackJumps, connoisseur and organizer of Berlin's street art scene, thanks to Archive of Youth Cultures, which cooperates with BackJumps in organizing joint projects. Both the foundation of *BackJumps* magazine in 1994 and Adrian Nabi's subsequent work as an organizer and mediator were determined by his personal quest for street art's meaning and potential and his attempts to conceptualize graffiti as an art movement and street art as a new communication field. When asked to talk about the first issue of *BackJumps* magazine, which was rather hard to find in Nabi's gigantic personal archive of Berlin's graffiti culture, he poignantly remarked, "It was not a magazine, it was a fanzine. It was something I wanted to do with the people around me for the culture."

In 2003 this discussion about street art changed format and turned into an event known as *BackJumps Live Issue*. This moved the discussion from the magazine page into an art gallery. Berliners were introduced to works by Banksy, Shepard Fairey, Brad Downey, and other street artists who would later become international stars. Over six weeks, 12,000 people visited the show. Berliners' introduction to the big names of the international street art scene continued in 2005 and 2007. Last year BackJumps marked their 20th anniversary with a street art festival, and in late May 2015 they unveiled the exhibition *20+1* presenting the organization's invaluable archival materials: photographic collages, drawings, letters, and video records. For many years, BackJumps addressed a variety of audiences ("I like to make something for kids … for me it is important to reach normal people … somehow I believe that art can enrich people's lives," says Nabi) and aimed at using street art to create a communication platform, which is exactly what people praise their events for:

> Rarely has an exhibition attracted so many young people, and it also succeeded better in integrating children and residents from the neighborhood as many well-intentioned Street festivals did. (*Zitty*, Berlin city magazine)[18]

[18] Promotional blurb for *BACKJUMPS: The Live Issue #3* (http://www.fromheretofame.com/books/backjumps.html).

> For me it felt like this selection of items did not only represent the history of Backjumps but the development of the relationship between street art and the society.[19]

During our research in Berlin we have realized the impossibility—and the impracticality—of describing this kind of mediation associated with street communication practices in stringent terms of industries or stable structures. We believe mediation to be a very personal endeavor. In this particular case, communication and networking largely depend on the "cultural interpreter's" individual features, personal experience, and preferences. These salient features are doomed to slip away, fall through the cracks of generalization describing depersonalized status positions or abstract relationships. Mediation is based on friendship and personal arrangements, on sympathies and antipathies: "We are in touch with … two companies [doing historic tours], and they are quite friendly. We can have a drink. I respect what they do, I think they like what we do" (Adrian Sampson, Alternative Berlin). At the same time, this enterprise is accepting of everyone who is open to a dialogue, rather than a specific audience. It appeals to people of all ages from every walk of life: we have personally observed elderly people participating in street art workshops held by Alternative Berlin, whereas Archive of Youth Cultures and BackJumps take pride in their work with young children. "We do not have only backpackers or students on tours.… We are open to everyone. I can't say: 'You can't come on the tour.' I can have my point of view, but it is not us that brainwash people" (Adrian Sampson, Alternative Berlin).

Communication mediators dealing with street culture possess an impressive ability to defamiliarize urban life and to make the unnoticeable visible and fascinating. All changes notwithstanding, even in a city as "on the move" as Berlin there exists a routine filled with multiple automatic actions and seemingly self-evident habits. Hardly noticeable from within, this routine has a great appeal to outsiders, who note the local technique of opening beer bottles with the help of street fencing and remark on the presence of "tiny hotels for the insects" in allotment gardens or other small wonders making up the fabric of the city's life (Brednikova and Zaporozhets 2014). We have noticed that in Berlin mediators such as tour guides, initiators of educational programming, and workshop organizers are frequently expats from faraway cities and countries. Their prior experience, distinct from Berlin's realities, makes them sensitive to the little details and differences and helps them understand their value and connection with the whole—and to introduce them to others. City tours dedicated to contemporary urban culture and discussions and seminars on various issues of urban communication represent a kind of (unstable) balancing of different experiences and a way of talking about and conceptualizing modern social practices. A communicative mediator is indispensable for this conversation.

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[19] Artconnectberlin.com, "Review on Backjumps 20+1." NewsCentral, May 28, 2015 (http://newscentral.exsees.com/item/cad86681a6645d5e66a3ebddc07c0c89-75caca98c56f3f884383d14eda522bf7).

CONCLUSION

Street art's rapid international development in the 2000s gave rise to multiple discussions regarding its causes and specific features, its objectives, and even its impending "death" by commercialization and removal into the estranged gallery space. For us, the issue of street art is inseparable from conversations about other informal practices of urban visual communication and from scrupulous research into specific urban contexts. Among other things, we chose to study Berlin, one of the modern cities most saturated with street imagery, so that we could prove that street art "does not exist in a vacuum." Rather, street art is just one possible medium of communication in the city, one that corresponds dynamically with all the other street voices or, as in some cities, finds itself in a zone of telling silence, which modifies both its potential and objectives.

Berlin's saturation, which we have attempted to research and describe with the eagerness of inquisitive city visitors, attentive readers, and, in a sense, mediators, provides us with the context of our argumentation and its principal subject matter. We have attempted to show how full of meaning and function this saturation is and how greatly it depends on Berlin's unique history and development, on the specific features of its visual communication and on the historically established behavioral practices of Berlin's residents. Lastly, we would like to stress the invaluable contribution to this communication of every passionate urban mediator.

Paradoxically, some present-day researchers tend to see street art and many other forms of grassroots activities (such as urban gardening) as phenomena existing in increasing accordance with the logic of major structures, such as the art industry (Bengtsen 2014) or neoliberal urban governance (Rosol 2010). The usefulness of macroapproaches revealing the modern city's structural foundations is undeniable, yet we consider a different perspective imperative—one adequate to the internal logic of street culture, its multifaceted nature and humanity. In this case, we support the call for "developing a more nuanced set of criteria" (Iveson 2010:28), regardless of which elements of urban culture we are looking into.

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Берлин, город насыщенных стен

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В статье представлены результаты проекта «Городские образы в системах коммуникации: от XV к XXI вв.», выполненного в рамках Программы фундаментальных исследований НИУ ВШЭ в 2015 году.

Состояние визуальной среды современного Берлина, обладающего репутацией европейской столицы уличных изображений, авторы обозначают термином «насыщенность». Насыщенность – результат постепенного врастания граффити и стрит-арта в повседневную жизнь и визуальную среду города и приятия их берлинцами. Лояльность уличным изображениям поддерживается опытом и памятью горожан о самостоятельном распоряжении пространством города после объединения Германии. Особую роль в поддержании берлинской граффити- и стрит-арт-культур играет память о Берлинской стене, делающая очевидной историю изображений и их создателей, их роль в городской коммуникации, и одновременно нормализующая кратковременность и эфемерность городской образности. Визуальная насыщенность Берлина усиливается действиями «посредников», привлекающих внимание к граффити и стрит-арту и способствующих взаимодействию всех заинтересованных сторон.

Ключевые слова: граффити; стрит-арт; Берлин; Берлинская стена; память; городское пространство; городская коммуникация; посредники