

**ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES AND RESISTANCE:  
APPROPRIATION OF POSTCOLONIAL ECOSYSTEM  
IN JAMES CAMERON'S FILM, *AVATAR***

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Street Art is a visual tradition that has subsisted for over forty years and continues to evolve and modify the street, which is a huge cultural laboratory. Commonly known as Post Graffiti, Street Art fortifies the value of surveying the ongoing materialization of art at street level as a foreshadowing of the coming trends in leading cultural institutions. Modern street art has become an unavoidable visual element of the urban landscape in nearly every city around the world and positions this form as the quintessential art movement of the twenty-first century.

One can recognize the recurrent appearance of certain street artist's pseudonym or tags. They are exceptional as they are unsanctioned interventionist practices, challenge the art institution and commissioned public art and fundamentally question the ethos of ownership through the process of creation. During travel, one could notice the unique styles of street art particular to different geographic locations. When street artists choose to make the move from creating art in the street to creating art style work in the gallery, the meaning and experience of the work changes. Modern street art are re-contextualized from a free, public setting to a private, institutional space, such as a gallery or museum, which is inextricably connected to established systems of regulation and valuation. It then ceases to function as a democratizing means of communication and instead becomes part of a dialogue that has historically privileged certain voices while excluding others.

Street art, a form of expression ancient and modern, public and private - is a medium of communication that crosses boundaries among academicians, cultural theorists, public policy experts and laymen. Deciphering street art requires a perception of the extant literature, centered around the history of the form or a typology of inscriptions or art styles. Work based around problems or themes that highlight diverse contexts, histories and styles of this art form is rare in the prevailing literature. Street Art by nature is cross disciplinary; a breadth of research underlies its universal appeal and its efficacy as a form of literature. Expressing oneself through visual narrative, symbolic languages or iconic marks is a tool in our quest as humans to make sense of the world and ourselves. Today, the act of scrawling figures in spray paint over a surface does not always engender praise. Nonetheless, these unsanctioned messages have become embedded in the visual culture of the late twentieth century and early twenty first century. Scholars know that erasing drawings with swaths of white paint will not stop their expression; street artists will merely adapt their drawings and morph their imagery to new contexts and other surfaces. Incising an image or art on a wall, tree trunk or fresco, painting a billboard or a train and reshaping stone are socially embedded acts that invite the viewer to engage in a dialogue. Experiencing these texts, it asks them to see differently.

The experience of viewing street art in a constructed gallery space is not at all the same as discovering a new work of art, commonly referred to as a 'piece' in one's city streets. The simple replication or simulation of aesthetic style does not necessarily involve the transference of street art's unique style. According to a 2012 article, in *The Independent*, written by Michael Glover, street art is 'art made on the run'. Glover goes on to describe the unique nature of street art. The uncertain lifespan of street art works, as well as its

inherent spirit of urgency and rebellion, make for unique encounters. With this form, there exists an important sociopolitical aspect linked to a work's geographical location, the work's placement within a community and within a system of relations. As art historian Miwon Kwon states, in street art, the site specificity should be considered 'not exclusively as an artistic genre but as a problem idea, as a peculiar cipher of art and spatial politics. It combines ideas about art, architecture and urban design on the one hand and with theories of the city, social spaces and public space on the other.

The concept of vandalism in the form of spray can markings and contemporary ordinances evolved during the late 1970s. Contrast between brash colours, black contour lines and compressed drawings were hallmarks of the 'wildstyle' from almost 40 years ago, a style that continues to this day. The rapid proliferation of this aggressive style of art appearing on the walls of urban centers all over the world has become an international signifier of rebellion. In 1993, culturalist theorist Jean Baudrillard described the art of the streets as a positive, if not revolutionary act, calling it the 'symbolic destruction of social relations'. Baudrillard took pleasure in the levelling effect on social mores induced by the tags and wildstyle calligraphy he saw in subway tunnels. He cheered their subversion of official signs and the chaos that ensued. The pervasive, repeated marks that he found aggressively painted on walls and trains were largely unintelligible to Baudrillard. Thus they became 'empty signifiers' and, for a post structural semiotician, they symbolized an act of war that bombarded the banality and excess of the twentieth century life.

Street Art is omnipresent in both the built and natural environments of virtually every country and culture in the world. This universality makes it hard to define and its malleability is both its strength and weakness. The very presence of art on a wall or on a

train, incised on architecture or inside a church ,scrawled on a bathroom stall, displayed in a gallery or seen among ancient ruins, allows it to become a catalyst for dialogue and controversy .When art in these many contexts are juxtaposed, it becomes a complex expression that can be explored as a cultural document and as a witness to human experience that rarely coincides with dominant cultural narratives. It tends to run parallel to or intersect at hard perpendiculars to such narratives.

Street Art itself is a polyvocal medium. It is composed of ideas, expressions and emotions translated into brief written phrases or visual codes with fluid meanings. Baudrillard enjoyed the visual anarchy in the 1970s, but the 'nonsense -forms' he identified significant meanings for those creating these tags. In at least one sense he was right, art on the streets did start a revolution that was related to past 'unofficial' expression and yet it gave birth to a wholly different visual text. It is a meaningful visual expression or text and is almost entirely dependant on two elements: context and form. For example, an artist crafting latrines on bathrooms walls is speaking to a smaller to a graffiti writer who goes around city using a can of spray paint on a moving train. Similar scaled differences hold true when examining arborglyphs found in the forest of Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico, ancient Maya palace graffiti and personal commentaries found scratched into early 16th century frescoes from a church in Northern Italy.

Post Graffiti can be seen as parallel text within a culture. It is composed of signs that are inspired and shaped by societal context and physical environment. Like written language, it can be read as a text that communicates meaning through its composition, style and use of syntax. However, it can also be analyzed through its forms and designs. Formal visual elements are characterized by the qualities of

lines, colours, shapes, textures and patterns. The size and scale of piece, relative to its physical environments, affects how a viewer reads and experiences street art. Understanding the subject of a particular graffito, inscription or image is more subjective; these expressions are driven by emotions and often spontaneously made, but they can also be carefully planned texts with sober messages. Scholars and civic leaders alike will stumble over interpreting the messages of these works, modern and ancient, whose meaning can be direct or ambiguous. Swaths of paint, carved masks and scratches might be seen as defacement, as clever, or even as artistry. It is contradictory; at the same time a snapshot, a witness of human experience and an archive of these experiences.

This art form can be considered a form of communication that is an unedited mirror of culture. Explored in this way, it is a separate genre of expression occupying a unique place in the study of texts and images. Humans may have communicated first through sound the speech. Later, experiences became codified, archived and open for interpretation when these expressions, emotions and ideas were translated into signs and visual narratives. Historically, street art in the form of carved masks, scratches, tags and inscriptions-has been dismissed as the musings of societal outcasts or belonging to the visual detritus of urban life. Yet these largely anonymous expressions complicate and challenge our understandings of built environments and the official narratives these structures convey. In transforming our past and our notions of self into universally coded and shared histories, little room has been left for alternative forms of storytelling and of archiving information. The drawings examined on the streets are representative of these other expressions and other narratives. Their omnipresent existence in ancient, historic and contemporary life shapes how one defines public space, official stories and

vandalism.

Examples of street art across the world present new interpretations of old imagery such as arboreal art, ancient art , 'burners' on subway cars, latrinalia, carved rocks , inscriptions on army barracks and writings on sacred saint's portraits. Theoretical tools culled from cross -disciplinary sources along with close examinations of form, content and subject matter has inspired these re-readings of texts, which were dismissed previously as mere vandalism. Street Art invites dialogue. Critics show that viewing these etchings can be transformative, didactic and disturbing. They highlight the visual codes, unusual semantic structures , imagery , colors and media unique to a culture or subculture in creating and codifying meaning. It conveys an emotional immediacy that is valuable both for those inside a subculture and for the outsiders, including those who study it. Ironically, these essential anarchic features also make it target for devaluation and erasure.

Street Art offers profound social, political, psychological and cultural insights. It facilitates a discourse that refuses to adhere to any normative protocol. The discourse is inherently democratic because all persons possess the capability to initiate and participate in an uninhibited manner. One could say, it is a means of venting frustrations, to say things one would normally not dare speak about. No rules define or constrain graffiti discourse; individuals are unrestrained to determine the topic, the language and the duration of the interaction. This autonomous quality represents an integral and distinguishing component of Street Art. One may also use a semiotic perspective to facilitate a different insight into gender differences in it. They contend that a thorough understanding of gender can only be achieved by moving beyond positivistic and psychoanalytic perspectives to the underlying level of meaning found in the art form

and by constructing an interpretation that considers data from all strata of the society. The semiotic perspective begins with the recognition that street art are communication, a discourse among anonymous persons. To draw in a public space is to communicate since the form is in visible areas. The contention is that this art form allows for open discourses (sexist, racist and homophobic speech) that organizations cannot sanction, but which may also act to establish or reinforce the privileging aspects of patriarchal practices, thus supporting the hegemonic disorder. What emerges from the street art is that context affects the message and meaning.

Participants of street art create a social world that is maintained by language themes and rules. The streets become an interchange of language, interpretations and ideologies by members in a group; it is an organized system where language functions, social practices and agencies such as dominance, resistance, conflict negotiation, critique, commands and challenges, are intertwined and whereby writers deploy these practices to actively reproduce and transfer aspects of culture. These drawings break the hegemonic hold of conventional style over the urban environment and the situations of daily life. As a form of aesthetic sabotage, it interrupts the pleasant, efficient uniformity of "planned" urban space and predictable urban living. For the writers, public art forms disrupt the lived experience of mass culture, the passivity of mediated consumption. Street Art is art. Aesthetic criteria and motives behind the artist's work far outweigh arguments on legality or unconventional presentation. While vibrantly rich in history, graffiti has a controversial past, present, and future that will likely continue to be the subject of debate, especially with the insurgence of street art, an art form that often overlaps graffiti art in subject matter, media, aesthetic appearance, and placement as a public form of art. Street art has historically been

viewed as a form of vandalism, a curious enigma, and a menace to society. Infused in the emergence of the hip hop culture, the public art revolution primarily took place in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, urban youth began extensively spray-painting subway cars, trains, and walls, providing a voice to the disenfranchised, anti-authoritarian rebels seeking an identity to be seen, felt, and heard by all. It seems that this style of graffiti-inspired art is still present, yet transformed and altered such that it now blurs the boundary between it and another art form called street art. Close contemporary to the street art revolution, graffiti has a foothold into contemporary, mainstream urban culture, yet still maintains its roots in street art, with influences that are unmistakable. While graffiti art is traditionally seen as an art form emphasizing self-proliferation of a namesake via use of creative, bold lettering with spray-paint, street art knows no boundaries, often incorporating lettering but also using stenciling, painting, wheat pasting, and sticker “bombing” as art forms that share a similar aesthetics.

Scholars have praised street art for its unique ability to give a voice to minority groups and marginalized people. Critics see the act of creating street art as both a ‘celebration of existence’ and ‘a declaration of resistance’. Slovenian feminist writer Tea Hvala views street art as ‘the most accessible medium of resistance’ for oppressed people to use against dominant culture due to its tactical, non-institutional, decentralized qualities. Hvala views street art as an example of what de Certeau called a ‘spatializing practice’ that ‘may challenge or complement our understanding of how diverse individuals inhabit the city and perform their experiences of such habitation. This could be connected to Edward Soja’s concept of ‘thirdspace’, which refers to ‘lived spaces of representation’ in which various social forces and institutions, as well as hegemonic values



and beliefs collide` with the reality of various modes of lived experience'. As such, when encountering street art in urban `thirdspace' such as alleys or underpasses, the viewer `engages in a form of mapping urban space.'

In a genre that is often remarkably stable in form and tone, street art is also continuously evolving and presents scholars with many unknowns. The value of this art form as an intimate, sub-rosa narrative will be better when we consider graffiti as yet another tool in our quest to make sense of our world and ourselves. Modern street art form has developed completely and separately from traditional, institutionalized art forms. Street artists today draw inspiration from art history at times, but it cannot be said that this art form drew directly out of any such canon or typology. Modern street art did not begin as an art form at all, but rather, as a form of text-based urban communication that developed in its own networks. Whether abhorred or adored, street art provoke passionate debate, reflecting the prominent role they play in the cultural landscape and consciousness of a city.

### Works Cited

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