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Expressivism and Resistance: Graffiti as an Infrapolitical Form of Protest against the War on Terror*

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Cet article explore, à partir du thème de la « guerre contre le terrorisme », la capacité des graffitis protestataires à éveiller ou maintenir une conscience oppositionnelle. Les graffitis sont abordés comme forme infrapolitique de mobilisation : leur signification n'est pas rapportée à un mouvement social à part entière dont ils seraient une manifestation secondaire ou annonciatrice, mais ils sont interprétés comme une manière particulière d'intervenir dans l'espace public ayant, au-delà de ses limites, une valeur et des vertus propres. Celles-ci reposent notamment sur le caractère paradoxalement personnalisé d'inscriptions, en général anonymes, qui chargent d'émotion la formulation de messages protestataires. Partant, le caractère souvent énigmatique, voire contradictoire, du message de tels graffitis ouvre en réalité un espace d'indétermination qui renforce leurs potentialités politiques.

Graffiti is an ancient mode of expression which historians value as a useful source in order to identify the techniques available to perform it, accurately determine when a tomb was violated, or gauge evolutions in popular or oral speech (Riout 12; Lindsay; Garrucci; Reisner). Graffiti is also a vehicle of resistance. In World War Two Spain, inscribing “V” signs on the walls after RAF bombings signified support of the Allied forces, whereas during the Civil War anti-Franco activists wrote the letter “P” as a call to protest, using graffiti as a communication device to propagate censored information (Riout 16). Graffiti on the Berlin Wall from 1961 to 1989, and on the “Security Fence”

currently separating Israel from part of the Palestinian territories are on the side opposite the builders', thus expressing resistance to the building.¹

Existing literature on graffiti as a protest medium highlights for instance the May 1968 uprising in France, whose situationist-inspired motto was to change life here and now without waiting for the Glorious Day (Riout 61; Harding 133; B. Macdonald 25-26). May 1968 graffiti expressed unauthorized social and political aphorisms, such as the famous "take your desires for realities" (No ©opyright 10). Murals are also a part of various popular or resistance movements: in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s, social realist artists such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siquieros made political use of the *pulquería* tradition—decorating the outside walls of stores or other buildings (Chaffee; Nevaer). This tradition was famously revived in the United States in the 1960s by the Chicano movement (Reed 106). Similarly murals in Ulster enhance either community's cohesion by paying tribute to heroes or by reiterating and exalting the tenets of the conflict (Rolston).

But murals differ from graffiti in that they are usually made with a building's owner's or occupants' assent. Being illegal or unauthorized, graffiti amount to what Hank Johnston calls "oppositional speech acts." These are crucial when it is difficult to engage in oppositional political acts: "when political opportunities are severely constricted, much of the doing of contentious politics is talking about it" (108). In unfavorable political circumstances, oppositional speech acts create what Francesca Polletta terms "free spaces": physical or symbolical spaces where it becomes possible to develop oppositional frames (Polletta 1-38; Johnston 109-110). For instance, Philippe Artières and Pawet Rodak describe graffiti in communist-led Poland as one of the main ways in which, in an "urban space that is dominated by a graphic order . . . social actors engage in a resistance movement whose main weapon is written words" (134).

This contribution explores the oppositional potential of protest graffiti by highlighting the various implications of its being an infrapolitical form of intervention in public spaces.² Drawing from the work of James Scott, Richard Fox and Orin Starn, and Robin Kelley, I regard as infrapolitics those practices which verge on being political, but lie below the threshold of what qualifies as such. As studied by Scott, Fox and Starn, or Kelley, infrapolitics refers to subjects in subaltern positions resisting by means of their own devising, usually for lack of access to, or opportunities in, the legitimate political field. This article does not so much address the issue of graffiti authors' subaltern status, as the disqualified status of their medium of expression. This is why, unlike studies which approach protest graffiti as a not-quite-political manifestation of otherwise fully-fledged social movements, I hypothesize that protest graffiti achieves a peculiar form of intervention in the public sphere due to its being infrapolitical.

I base my argument on a sample of protest graffiti against the War on Terror and the Iraq War. This focus is both opportunistic, due to the availability of abundant material, and scientifically pertinent: examining public inscriptions of dissent on a highly political topic helps highlight the significance of a protest vehicle which remains below the threshold of the political. Conducting interviews with graffiti authors would help assess their *intent*, but this article purports to grasp what protest graffiti may *effect*. This somewhat depersonalized approach paradoxically points to indirect forms of personalization, which are central to graffiti's political significance, since graffiti are visual artifacts that confront their viewers with challenging messages, which often even defy intelligibility. After briefly contrasting the expressivism and resistance conveyed by graffiti, I focus on graffiti that have an explicit political referent to discuss whether the infrapolitics inherent to the medium limit the extent of its significance. I finally suggest that this infrapolitical medium allows complex virtual interactions between authors and viewers, which associate pleasure and emotions with the deployment of an oppositional consciousness.

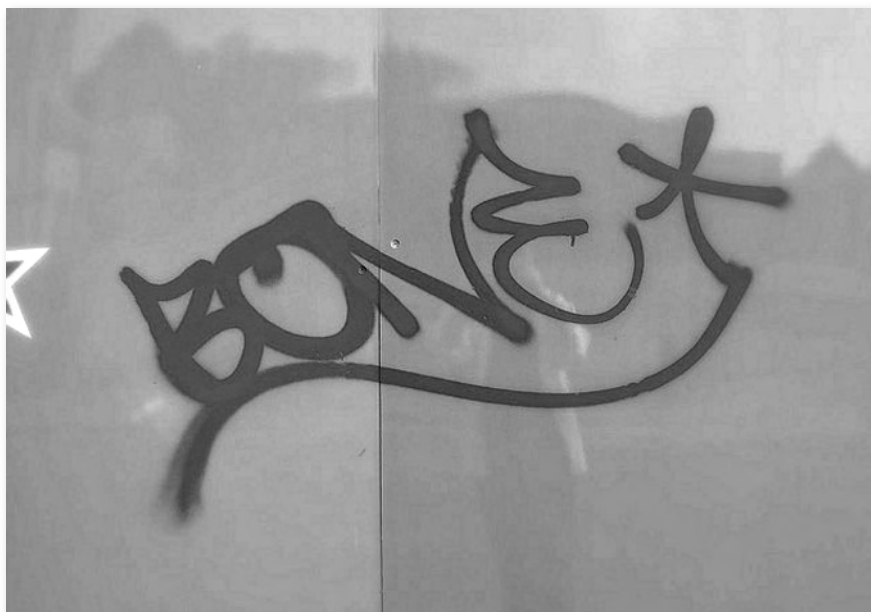
Expressivism

Graffiti can be seen as scriptural manifestations of social movements whose actual existence does not depend on them, but can graffiti be regarded as channels of a protest that is idiosyncratic to them? Or does being a form of public exhibition imply that graffiti are essentially individualistic displays of solipsism (Riout 14-15)? Part of the answer lies in the fact that graffiti is not always meant to be *understood*, as when it is used as a secret code. Vagabonds and thieves sometimes leave marks to indicate that a house is vacant during the day, accessible from the rooftop, or inhabited by a particularly welcoming woman (Riout 19; Salmon). Such graffiti can be read as passwords rather than as rallying cries (N. Macdonald 184; MacGillivray and Curwen 358–362).

Graffiti is often a *non-political* form of expressivism if not a mere vindication of individual existence, as in tags and throw-ups (illus. 1; illus. 2), individual signatures whose main ostensible purpose is to



Illus. 1. *11 Spring Street Throw-up* (New York).
© Photograph by Ivan «Van» Corsa (2006), used by permission. Source: GlobalGraphica, <http://www.globalgraphica.com>.



Illus. 2. *Tag* (Derby, UK). © Photograph by Dan Foy (2006), used by permission. Source: Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com>.



Illus. 3. *South Philly Piece* (South Philadelphia). © Photograph by Lois Stavsky (2009), used by permission. Source: Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com>.

resist anonymousness: “Fame, respect and status are not naturally evolving by-products of [the graffiti] subculture, they are its sole reason for being, and a writer’s sole reason for being here”(N. Macdonald 68). Graffiti often tend toward pure hedonistic gratification rather than political contestation. In the 1970s and 1980s, tags evolved into large, elaborate usually multicolored pieces (illus. 3) (Cooper and Chalfant; Fitzpatrick). Painted on broader surfaces, these colorful pictorial graffiti emphasize the quality of the graphics and are “obstinately devoid of meaning” (Riout 92). But, as American artist Claes Oldenburg put it: “You’re standing there in the station, everything is gray and gloomy, and suddenly one of those graffiti trains slides in and brightens the place like a big bouquet from Latin America” (quoted in Fitzpatrick 187). Jean Baudrillard thus characterizes graffiti as simulacra, which “resist every interpretation and connotation, no longer denoting anyone or anything. In this way, with neither connotation, nor denotation, they escape the principle of signification and, as *empty signifiers*, erupt into the sphere of the *full signs* of the city, dissolving on contact” (78-79; emphasis in original). Such graffiti basically perform resistance to the excess of signification with which urban environments are saturated.

Resistance

But graffiti also allow forceful claims for space (Ley and Cybriwsky; Nandrea 113-115). Tags are sometimes used by gangs to claim territory (Milon 109; Ley and Cybriwsky; Phillips), although tagging is far from being systematically gang-related (Ferrell 84-86; MacGillivray and Curwen 354, 366).³ The authors of the amply documented “top-to-bottom” pieces covering New York subway trains (Austin; Lange) vicariously haunt the whole city beyond their own, usually poorer neighborhoods (Myre 4; Ortiz). Subway pieces literally run counter to the ecology of social relegation by circulating the stigma of social problems out of their “natural” habitat.

A good index of graffiti’s disruptiveness is that they are considered to justify costly removal policies (Ferrell 80-82). In 2006 the yearly cost of graffiti removal in the United States was estimated at 15 to 18 billion dollars (BBC), whereas in 1998-1999, New York City’s Giuliani administration spent 25 million dollars on graffiti removal and prevention (Segal; Kramer; Dickinson). Loosely referring to the “broken window” theory (Kelling and Wilson), and rightfully convinced that graffiti breeds more graffiti (Myre 4; Milon 111), the New York municipality applied “zero tolerance” to graffiti, as the Bloomberg administration has since (Chan; Rahimi). But “generating scandal and panic is graffiti authors’ goal, for that is the means to express their resistance—rather than a sanction that may prevent them from it.” (N. Macdonald 173) In this sense, enforced prohibition ironically reinforces graffiti’s resistance potential.



Illus. 4. *I-pot* (Bristol, UK). © Photograph by Simon Robinson (2006), used by permission. Source: Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com>.

By focusing on examples that do convey political meaning, I propose furthermore that graffiti can be all the more effective a *vehicle* of resistance for being infrapolitical. Although it is difficult to draw a firm line between political and nonpolitical content, I use examples whose political critique is explicit in order to single out the significance of this infrapolitical practice. Simple, sometimes wordless messages can suffice to highlight that graffiti does not involve the exchange of money, thus expressing dissent from the consumer society.⁴ Graffiti sometimes also challenge the saturation of public spaces with commercial messages through “subvertisement,” either by producing images deriding well-known brand



Illus. 5. *Feminisn't* (Vancouver). © Photograph by jerm IX (2008), used by permission. Source: Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com>.



Illus. 6. *Torture, Outsourced Atrocities* (Wisconsin). © Impeach, photograph by OrganizedArt (2011), used by permission. Source: <http://www.flickr.com>.

names or icons (illus. 4), or by superimposing a critical message on an actual advertisement (illus. 5).⁵ Whether visually or verbally, such protest graffiti is meant to make viewers laugh and think: precisely *because* it is mimetic of advertising—proliferating on the same surfaces, using the same codes and imagery—it potentially causes them to question their own opinions about a specific brand or advertisement, or about branding and advertising in general. With protest graffiti the medium *is* indeed the message, as I now show with graffiti expressing protest against the War on Terror and the Iraq War.

An Infrapolitical Medium

The word “torture” in multicolored capital letters on a freight train car is evocative of the graphic style of subway pieces (illus. 6). It brings up the image of purposeless, gratuitous dirtiness customarily associated with tags and pieces, but turns it into a signifier to be ascribed to the US armed forces’ interrogation methods in the War on Terror. The ironic twist is underlined by the shape of the letters, suggestive of an advertisement for a side-show. Though characteristic of the likely author’s style, Impeach, the stylistic difference with other freight-train pieces is emphasized by the addition of other authors’ names, Servo and Alamo, “shouted out” in tribute on the left-hand side (illus. 7).⁶ And on the right-hand



Illus. 7. *Alamo Servo* (Minneapolis). © Alamo and Servo, photograph by Benchomatic (2009), used by permission. Source: Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com>.

side, the appended oxymoronic caption “outsourced atrocities” juxtaposes the businesslike euphemism “outsourced” next to the very straightforward denunciation “atrocities”—thus enhancing the latter.⁷

The idiosyncratic language *and* metalanguage of graffiti are also part of the political significance of the juxtaposition of a paste-up tersely saying “fuck Bush” below a more elaborate stencil with a threatening cartoon-like representation of then Vice-president Dick Cheney’s sneer, bearing the caption “you don’t know Dick.”⁸ There is no telling with certainty whether the “fuck Bush” paste-up came after the Dick Cheney stencil—although this looks likely considering the gray smudge on which “fuck Bush” is pasted and which seems to be part of the stencil. But *to the viewer* the paste-up reads like an appended commentary or subtitle to the stencil, whose coarseness overdetermines the otherwise dubious innuendo in the more cryptic “you don’t know Dick.” The virtually intrinsic link between graffiti and excretion⁹ or ejaculation¹⁰ (Riout 21-24) is coextensive with graffiti being generally disparaged as irresponsible and immature behavior. The gratification of leaving one’s filthy stain on a public surface is akin to “a reminiscence of the young child’s scatological mode of expression in the anal sadistic stage” (Milon 121). The Cheney stencil uses a subtle reference to the downfall of Richard Nixon—which many, especially younger viewers likely miss—to signify either a threat directed at the Vice-president, or that Dick Cheney *is* a threat. But this original message becomes secondary to the cathartic utterance of offense.

In this instance, the less political—the more *infra*-political—the mode of expression, the more protest graffiti verges on being a sheer outlet for angered citizens' (both author and viewers) frustration with an administration leading an unjust war in their name and violating civil liberties in the process.¹¹ Does the cathartic dimension of insult defuse the resentment, make it less political? Scott challenges this “safety-valve hypothesis”: far from hampering “true” resistance, such minor offenses as petty thefts perpetrated against an abusive master or employer, make up a “hidden transcript” of resistance. Being able to develop this hidden transcript discreetly *nourishes* the spirit of resistance, like embers ready to flare up into flames when the circumstances become favorable and a *public* transcript of resistance can emerge (188-191). I argue that the very *jouissance* of verbal offense in an act of vandalism—literally an *offense*—generates such infrapolitical resistance.

Of course, graffiti is anything but hidden. Its very essence *is* to be seen. Arguably, plain and visible though the message might be, it is delivered anonymously, which is in itself a form of disguise (Scott 140-152). But, I further argue, this graffiti's language and metalanguage stage it in a way that creates indeterminacy. The tagging subculture underlying the “torture” piece rather obviously likens it to a hidden transcript, because its language is not quite understandable to all viewers. But in the latter example, the coexistence of two messages and the elliptic nature of one leave the whole open to the viewer's interpretation—or puzzlement, or indifference. As a result, even though the piece is on broad display and one of its component messages is rather blunt, it is “emerging ‘onstage’ . . . in disguised [form]” (Kelley 8).



Illus. 8. *Guantanamo* (London). © Banksy, photograph by Steve Cotton (2005), used by permission. Source: <http://www.artof-thestate.co.uk>.

“Studies of everyday resistance,” according to Fox and Starn, make it possible to better grasp “the dialectic of compliance and opposition that takes into account the concealed as well as the visible, the scattered as well as the organized, the small as well as the massive” (3). I argue that the effectiveness of protest graffiti *qua* infrapolitical resistance lies in the personalization it allows. Not all of the famous British graffiti artist Banksy’s works convey explicit political content. But in representing an orange-clad, hooded kneeling figure (illus. 8) he quite literally *embodies* a critique of abusive extrajudicial detention in the War on Terror. In order to represent this life-sized evocation of an Abu Ghraib prisoner, the author had to assume a posture similar to that of his subject—close to the ground—and the outcome puts the viewer in the presence of a literally *humiliated* life-sized figure, which rather concretely brings home to the attentive passerby the reality of the far-off detention centers of Abu Ghraib or Guantánamo.¹²

The Infrapolitics of Form: Pleasure and Emotion

That attention to form is essential for interpreting the political significance of protest graffiti is clear when comparing the simple scrawling of a slogan on a highway overpass¹³ with a sidewalk stencil graffiti imitating the shadow of a stop sign and substituting the word “stop” with “war” (illus. 9). The former example puts forth a direct, explicit, univocal message in a location where many people are bound to notice it. The second one by contrast reaches fewer viewers, since most drivers will presumably not see it, and not all pedestrians will. But the latter has a potential for triggering an esthetic emotion in the passersby who notice it and are likely to reflect on the cleverness of the visual device. This graffiti’s *lack* of obviousness serves its message by sparking off surprise and catching viewers off their guard. The amount of thinking and time involved in its conception and execution may touch the viewers with a sense of connectedness with the author. This is not to say that it necessarily will, as many viewers will be indifferent or annoyed, but its execution poises it to prompt certain kinds of viewer responses that other protest messages do not.¹⁴ By being evident yet concealed, this graffiti is likely to both reach its viewers’ gray matter, and cause them an esthetic emotion, which may in turn associate the deployment of an oppositional consciousness with pleasure.¹⁵

James Jasper argues that a movement’s goals cannot suffice to sustain actors’ participation, if they do not derive some gratification from it. But if engaging in protest is pleasurable enough to justify participation, social actors are provided with an opportunity to be themselves and to find self-accomplishment: “The joy of protest . . . is very like the playful potential of art, which creates another reality for us to ‘try on.’ This other world often feels more real than our everyday life, for we can try on our ‘real’ selves there, penetrate to deeper

truths and identities normally blocked by our everyday routines” (227). The emotion stirred by a clever graffiti may similarly generate a subjective sense of authenticity, whereby the viewer feels moved by the recognition of a deep identification with the author. It is the graffiti’s *lack* of instrumental purposefulness that endows it with this resistance-generating potential.

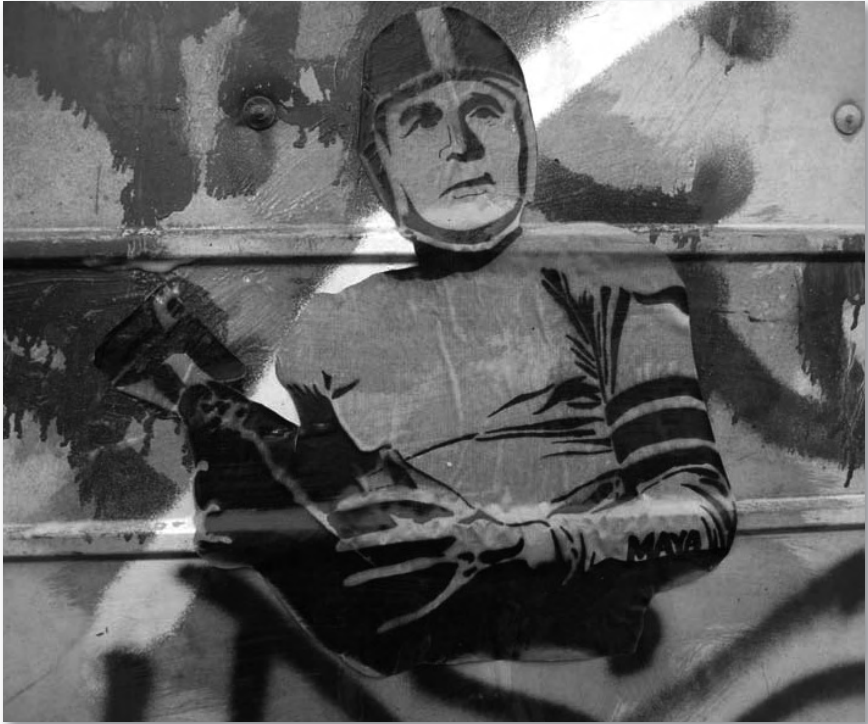
Thus, I suggest, pleasure creates empowerment by displaying personal, subjective creativity as a form of intervention in the public sphere. In a stencil photographed in 2008 the author represents then-presidential candidate John McCain embraced by Satan, whose right hand is clutching McCain’s bleeding heart, over a caption reading “Four More Years.”¹⁶ The image’s composition conveys a meaning that is far from univocal, or even evident. The discrepancy between the caption and the fact that John McCain was not an incumbent candidate implies that, try as he may to distance himself from George W. Bush, if elected he would not be such a different president. Additionally, the contrast between McCain’s reassuring facial expression and Satan’s sardonic smile may suggest opposite interpretations—either that McCain is just another embodiment of the devil, or that he is not even aware of being in the Great Deceiver’s grip—which both amount to a scathing mockery of the Republican candidate.

The sarcasm conveyed here is a form of humor which could not be expressed in the conventional political arena and pertains rather to satire. Beyond the importance of humor in social movements (’t Hart; Obadare), this example suggests likening protest graffiti to what Jasper calls “post-citizenship” movements, which fail to address the state, not for lack of opportunities—as

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Illus. 9. *Stop War Sign* (unknown location). © Stencil and photograph by Stefan Benchoam (2006), used by permission. Source: Proyectos Ultravioleta <http://uvuvuv.com>.



Illus. 10. *Bush Bomber* (Cambridge, UK). © Photograph by Maya Deren (2008), used by permission. Source: Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com>.

political opportunity structure (POS) theory would have it—but because such is not their *choice* of tactics (235-237). Taking the forms of protest seriously requires a focus on its cultural, expressive dimensions, which, in the case of protest graffiti, are the very *substance* of action. This suggests that the interactions between emotions and cognitions are crucial, and especially that emotions can play an important part in the emergence of oppositional cognitive frames.¹⁷ Such emotions as hostility can prove essential in enhancing a movement's cohesion by providing an enemy or sustaining adversarial feelings (Goodwin et al. 13-20).

Two paste-ups—both photographed in 2008—representing Vice-president Cheney as the Star Wars villain Jabba the Hutt with President Bush as his jester, Salacious Crumb, squatting next to him,¹⁸ and Bush in football gear poised to throw a bomb in lieu of a ball (illus. 10) thus reframe anti-Bush antagonism by resorting to ridicule. In the former example the real villain is Cheney, and Bush is cast as his helpless slave, an ironic mockery of the president's hyper-masculinized posture after 9/11 transformed his public image from that of Cheney

and other neoconservatives' puppet into that of a war president. The latter example reframes President Bush as his oft-derided Yale-days self, busier playing football than studying. The resulting image is that of a watered-down Dr. Strangelove, with none of the exhilarating edge and lunacy of the Kubrick character, so that the critique is paradoxically more political than if Bush were portrayed as a madman: depicting him as a sports jock harks back to the reasons why he should not have been elected in the first place, which was politically pertinent in a presidential election year when he was *not* running for reelection.

Humor in protest graffiti generates a sense of complicity between subjects who are not, and are not *meant to be*, in each other's presence. That is often an important dimension of "oppositional speech acts," especially in authoritarian societies where, unlike the contemporary United States, upfront oppositional speech involves a direct risk of life and limb (Johnston 123-124).¹⁹ But the messages in the protest graffiti studied here would not be palatable to institutional or conventional channels of expression, nor is their form suitable for most print media, especially since the War on Terror *has* brought legal restrictions on freedom of expression and discouraged conventional media from conveying provocative discourse.²⁰ The links between form and message—signifier and signified—show that these graffiti give voice to oppositional consciences which resort to an alternative medium in order to express alternative meanings.²¹ In this sense humor operates in the same way as the above-mentioned esthetic emotions: the less ostensibly political the denotative statement, the more effective protest graffiti can be in generating such connivance.

Thus not only does the infrapolitical medium of protest graffiti convey political meaning, but the graffiti's discursive message is embedded in their graphic vocabulary. A piece photographed in 2008 features President Bush as a distressed-looking character with a balloon that reads "stop me before I kill again".²² Casting Bush as a serial killer out of a cartoon may in itself seem less daringly humorous than the above-mentioned Star Wars impersonation. But superimposed on this image is a series of pink hearts, all but one of which are outlined in black and inscribed with a peace sign. Whereas their differing graphic styles safely indicate that the black-ink stencil and the pink hearts have different authors, it seems impossible to decide whether the pink hearts were intended to bear peace signs, or whether that is yet a later addition. But the hearts partly cover the stencil, so that the visual effect results in a palimpsest where the various layers influence each other's meaning. Not only does the subsequent inscription superimpose a "peace and love" signifier upon the original image, but the graphic *style* of the hearts transfigures it: their shapes and lines have a childish touch which is enhanced by the color pink, so that they smack of innocence and freshness in a way that contrasts with the half-threatening, half-ridiculous stencil figure. In addition, their various shapes and sizes, and their randomly slanting distribution make them

look like flying balloons—or butterflies like the paste-up on the left—which may inspire the viewer with light-heartedness and a sense of elation.

The resulting image is largely accidental and certainly unintended on the part of the original author, and probably of the subsequent one(s).²³ But this should not disqualify its complex, multidimensional, partly contradictory and not totally understandable meaning. This outcome is reified by virtue of its various components being in each other's presence at a given place for a limited period of time. The accidental co-presence of various authors' and various viewers' subjective expressions and perceptions transforms the wall into a graphic forum where a virtual conversation is taking place (Iddings et al. 8). Its substance is emotional as much as it is discursive, and it gives voice to an oppositional conscience which cannot fully be expressed with words.

Conclusion

Do these remarks mean that what makes protest graffiti significant as infrapolitical vehicles of resistance is that they prefigure subsequent “real” political action? “Culture becomes political when meanings become the source of processes that, implicitly or explicitly, seek to redefine social power,” Arturo Escobar writes (42). I suggest, rather, that graffiti are infrapolitical vehicles of resistance in the sense that they make up a “subterranean magma of oppositional speech” which does not necessarily lead to fully-fledged political mobilization, but does literally make up the *substance* of the “volcanic eruptions of protest” on which social movement scholarship tends to focus (Johnston 113). As a form of infrapolitics, protest graffiti achieve covert victories when they touch the conscience of receptive viewers with their idiosyncratic oppositional meanings. In the final analysis, taking protest graffiti seriously makes it necessary to focus on the interplay between the cultural and political dimensions of dynamics of social protest, and thus points to the problematic gray zone between individual discontent and collective action (Fox and Starn 3-6).

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NOTES

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1. Graffiti on the “Security Fence,” however, is often produced by Western visitors and resented by Palestinians who “see it as beautifying something that is essentially ugly and which must be torn down” (Bishara 75).

2. I do not engage in a discussion of the notion of public space, as famously theorized for example by Jürgen Habermas, but I use “public space” and “public sphere” almost interchangeably to refer to the abstract locus of—respectively—political debate and civil life, and I use “public spaces” to refer to physical spaces whose access is, in theory, open to all.

3. Tagging can even be a way of *avoiding* recruitment in gangs (MacGillivray and Curwen 362).

4. See: *Smashing Magazine* (2009-05-06), <http://media.smashingmagazine.com>.

5. Such forms of culture jamming are performed by the Billboard Liberation Front (<http://www.billboardliberation.com>) and Adbusters (<http://www.adbusters.org>).

6. I thank photographer Benchomatic for clarifying this point (email to author November 10, 2011).

7. The graphic similarity with the signature suggests that the slogan is part of the original design.

8. See in color folio notes, p. 118: “You don’t know Dick / Fuck Bush” (Los Angeles), photograph by Kamal Nicholas (2003) (used by permission); also available in Mathieson and Tâpies (23).

9. Incidentally the word “piece,” which is short for “masterpiece” and refers to a large-sized multicolored tag, ironically evokes both fine art and defecation.

10. On gender in graffiti, which the scope of this contribution does not allow me to explore, see: Bruner and Kelso; Arluke et al.; Otta et al.

11. Although the graffiti does not specifically target the War on Terror or the Iraq War, the photograph was taken in 2007 at the height of President George W. Bush and Vice-president Dick Cheney’s unpopularity, which was largely rooted in resentment at the breach of civil liberties and of the rule of law in the name of national security—as exemplified in the various scandals which broke out at the end of the second Bush presidential term.

12. Interestingly, as is evident from some of my sources, this identification process is transnational, as was the controversy surrounding the Bush administration’s foreign policy decisions following 9/11, and the disrepute in which he and his close associates subsequently fell. Additionally, since the Internet knows very few national boundaries and graffiti nowadays are widely disseminated online, the transnational nature of these processes is enhanced.

13. See: “Troops out now!” (location unknown), posted by Filip Spagnoli (2009), source: <http://filipspagnoli.wordpress.com>.

14. Iddings et al. similarly highlight “the way people, [graffiti] ‘text,’ and context act on and interact with one another to produce meaning” (6).

15. My analysis intentionally focuses on the significance of protest graffiti for potential audiences likely to deploy an oppositional conscience in agreement with that of graffiti authors. Whereas Iddings et al. study how graffiti in a São Paulo neighborhood generates critical awareness (*conscientização*) in the local population, I suggest that graffiti associates emotion with preexisting critical awareness. But graffiti’s inherent provocativeness is equally likely to arouse hostility or anger, which are no less politically significant.

16. See: “John McCain Satan heart rip graffiti” (Freemont, WA), posted by Andrew Boni (2008), source: Jetcomx, <http://jetcomx.com>. Dating is an issue: due to weather and

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removal, graffiti are rather short-lived. But, since I focus on the *virtual* interaction between author and viewer, I contextualize the examples with the date of photography as date of viewing.

17. On framing theory, see: Benford and Snow; Hunt et al.

18. See: "Dick Cheney as Jabba the Hutt" (New York), posted by Andrew Boni (2008), source: Jetcomx, <http://jetcomx.com>.

19. Nor do the authors of such graffiti necessarily hold subaltern social positions, as Scott or Kelley's subjects do.

20. As is visible in my sources, however, the Internet does provide an efficient means of broadcasting protest graffiti. But whereas a website's viewers initiate the viewing, graffiti in physical space *impose* their tangible presence to the viewer—which is why they are commonly considered a nuisance.

21. Other alternative media would include fanzines, and anecdotal evidence suggests that the worlds of graffiti authors, graffiti lovers, fanzine publishers, and fanzine readers largely intersect. But I argue again for the significance of graffiti's unsought-for physical presence in open public spaces.

22. See in color folio notes, p. 118: "Stop me before I kill again" (Melbourne), photograph by Louisa Billeter (2008), source: Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com> (used by permission).

23. Nor would all viewers necessarily adhere with my interpretation of this piece—or of the ones discussed above. Iddings et al. similarly point out how a given image's meaning can be "exophorically" determined by its environment (8-9).

24. All web pages were last accessed in November 2011.