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Abstract

Although graffiti writing has been analyzed from different perspectives for fifty years, and the politics of graffiti removal are of a growing interest, the entangled practices of graffiti writers and buffers' interventions are still understudied. By considering their actual gestures in front of building façades, this text emphasizes the similarities of practices solely seen as antagonistic. Drawing on Deleuze's masterful work about repetition and difference, it notably points out the sensitive, attentional, and technical common features of graffiti writers and buffers, the choreographic dynamics at the core of their gestural performances, and the layered aesthetic rhythm resulting from their intertwined actions. Whether they take the form of a soothed dialogue moved by a shared experience, a trench warfare in performances, or an intense unintended collaboration, the relationships between graffiti writers and their buffers appear to be driven by the transformative principle of repetition.

Keywords

aesthetic • urban art • graffiti writing • graffiti removal • choreography

In an account of his introduction to graffiti writing in the early 1970s in New York City, Lee (Quiñones) recalls his discovery of repetition as an inherent act of fame (Castleman, 1982: 19). Along with his mentor Flea1, proud to have overcome his fear of crossing the unknown environment of the subway's tunnels and layups, he learns with amazement that the black and gold piece he has just made on a subway car will not be enough. The last spray of paint just out of the can, Flea1 warns his disciple: "You know after you do this, you have to keep doing it". Lee: "What? No, man! I thought you just do it once and you are famous, you've got your name all over". But painting his name on a single car, among the thousands that circulate throughout the New York transit system, means very little. His mentor therefore insists on: "You've got to keep doing it if you want to get up". To exist as a writer, so that his name is getting up, Lee had to write it down again and again, long before he was respected and admired by the other practitioners.

While Lee's mentor insistence may surprise or make one smile, it places particular emphasis on the recursive pattern inherent in the practice of writing. Indeed, is it not by inscribing his name in a multiplied way throughout New York City, along with his activity as a delivery boy, that Taki 183 has sharpened the curiosity of a journalist and that he has thus passed to posterity? Before turning to his only studio work, didn't Jean-Michel Basquiat also experience the pleasure of repeatedly writing formulas in the streets of New York City, such as "Samo© 4.U", "Samo© for the so-called avant-garde", or by way of public announcement of its decision to stop, "Samo© is dead"? Beyond the circle of insiders, the experience of recurrence is also shared by the workers in charge of removing graffiti — called "buffers" in the graffiti world. After only a week of working on the streets of a city, they quickly face the challenge of a routine restart: the writings they removed, sometimes the day before, are present again on the same walls, fences, lamps, metal curtains, doors… Whether it is this tag, this slogan, this insult or this throw-up, only the size and colors vary from one occurrence to another. Hardly disappeared, graffiti reappear and bloom. In several cities, the municipal anti-graffiti policy is based on the calculation of their "recurrence rate", by the way. Far from being accomplished once and for all, the removal operation, conversely, calls for a continuous renewal, day after day.

Keeping one's name alive, ridding the city of graffiti. Usually seen as antagonistic, the two activities do not seem so different from each other. The visual and textual assemblages resulting from their occurrences in the urban environment have already been analyzed according to diverse approaches (Chmielewska, 2007; Stewart and Kortright, 2015; Andron, 2016; Arnold, 2019). However detailed they may be, these studies remain mute about the intertwined rhythm of graffiti writers and buffers' interventions. By considering their actual gestures as close as possible, as I suggest here from an ethnographic fieldwork[1], these practices could reveal a surprising closeness. At the very least, they share a founding principle, that of repetition as a decisive driving force for action: redoing the work relentlessly, coming back to the scene very regularly, repeating the same movements over and over again. It is in the endless rhythm of this recursive dynamic that graffiti successively dress the vertical walls of the city, before being tirelessly removed. Wandering through the neighborhoods of a city literally immerses us in the heart of this dance of iterations. Along the streets, a sequenced reproduction of graffiti and surfaces freed of inscriptions is

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[1] This text comes as a step in a long-term inquiry, conducted in close collaboration with Jérôme Denis, into the existence and maintenance of diverse urban writings (Denis and Pontille, 2012, 2014). I am very grateful to him and Marie Alauzen for providing insightful suggestions and generous feedback on a previous version.

gradually unfolding, whose obvious similarity from one occurrence to another simultaneously underlines the uniqueness of their features. This progressive serialization is also based on "a power peculiar to repetition" remarkably analyzed by Gilles Deleuze (1994: xix). It makes the differentiated scansion of the two practices — writing graffiti, working towards its disappearance — resonate as much as the intensity inherent in their intimate relationships: postponed conversation, aesthetic power play, fierce graphic competition, or even creative association.

Commons features

If some similarities between writers and graffiti removers have already been identified, notably by Rafael Schacter (2008), the prism of repetition at the heart of their activities offers an opportunity to deepen this initial observation. The similitude, manifest in many ways, is present in their language expressions. Like Kevin Hickey and Conrad Lesnewski, two officers of NYC's Urban Transit Graffiti Squad in the mid-1970s (Castleman, 1982: 158-174), or Joseph Rivera, a member of the same police department between 1984 and 2004 (Rivera, 2008), the buffers know, to a greater or lesser extent, the names of local writers, and the terminology to qualify their respective styles. They can tell who are the most active or some newcomers, with which types of graphic design, and more specifically in which areas of the city. Symmetrically, the writers spot differences in the buffing of their productions, which they judge more or less successful, with specific adjectives to assess them, and which they estimate the variations according to sites, building materials, periods of activity and seasons. The repeated use of names and formulas sets the ground for a common vocabulary that provides a vehicle for the expression of preferences and sustains the production of hierarchies. From one formulation to another, are praised the writers who get up and with whom a partnership would be valuable in terms of prestige or skill learning, those whose style is original or, conversely, is simply not worthy of existing. Throughout the language expressions are also pointed out graffiti to be removed first, those that provoke emotions, or those that, without hesitation, deserve to last, despite the requirements of municipal policy.

Performed in the same urban environment, these activities also go hand in hand with a particular form of attention. Every day, writers and buffers walk the streets, their eyes fixed on the building façades, and enact an experienced vision towards inscriptions. When they do not check that the result of their latest interventions (writing graffiti, having buffed it) is still up-to-date, it is a constant search for new spots that guides their wanderings (Ferrel and Wiede, 2010). In search of available space, some explore the architectural opportunities of buildings and the transitional zones offered by vacant lots or construction works, while others hunt down any graphic occurrence to be removed in every corner of the city. This meticulously scrutinizing of the vertical surfaces of urban spaces, in the course of daily journeys, contrasts with the common attention of most city dwellers. While many of them see only ugly, dirty and meaningless inscriptions, writers go far beyond the act of deciphering. A wall filled with several tags or throw-ups is an opportunity to remember the exploits of their peers and stimulates the scripting: writers easily discern "not only who was here, but who was here first, who has beef with whom, who's more talented, who's from out of town, who's in from different boroughs, whose tags are getting better, and whose are getting worse" (Snyder, 2009: 69). This ability to perceive the world that goes with each

inscription is also shared by police officers specialized in the fight against graffiti, as the words of this former member of the NYC vandal squad make it clear.

> "Like anyone in the graffiti world, active members of the Vandal Squad became just as addicted to graffiti as the vandals themselves. Spending so much time reading tags, taking complaints, and tracking down vandals at all hours of the day and night, I was constantly thinking of new ways to apprehend them: undercover operations, searches — you name it, we were on it. By the time I retired in 2004, I could place any face with its tag name based on the intelligence I had gathered on them over the years. I could tell you if the writer was black, white, or Hispanic, male or female, middle or lower class, and where they were from. Just by looking at a tag" (Rivera, 2008: 74).

This form of attention, heir to a long history of observation of public writings (Artières, 2013), makes it possible to judge inscriptions in relation to each other, to produce hierarchies between graffiti writers, or to infer certain features of their sociological profile.

Thick and much more acute than the ordinary vigilance of residents, pedestrians or motorists, this attention also supports a fine grip on the properties of the urban environment. Graffiti writers and buffers develop an intense perception, focused on the sometimes minute details of the graffitied surfaces, considered in their intimately graphic and material compositions. When they look at a wall, some writers immediately relate graphic elements, such as line width or fineness, ink color, or paint density, to inscription techniques (categories of markers, aerosol brands, types of nozzles, range of colors available), while buffers estimate the degree of penetration of a paint into the stone, the thickness of pigments on wood, the invasiveness of an acid-based ink on a shop window. Simultaneously, they spot at a glance the materials of the building façades (concrete, brick, cement, stone, plaster...) that they consider in their textures, more or less porous, smooth, dense, granular, compact, absorbent, in order to anticipate their reaction when producing inscriptions or, conversely, to make them disappear. This means that graffiti buffers and writers do not experience the urban environment as a place to live or a space to circulate, but mainly as an intervention site.

Beyond a shared vision, practiced day after day, the gesticulation of bodies within the urban environment constitutes a major part of their common experience. Not only do their postures towards the façades alternate an orientation of the bust and a mobility of the hands following a similar rhythm to buff or write, but their clothes usually have paint stains on them, just as their skin is regularly speckled with pigments of various shades. These similarities blur the usual categories that portray graffiti writers and buffers in antagonistic positions. Throughout their activities, they share even more. Graffiti removal workers employed by municipalities spend their time painting. They know how to make precise color blends and estimate the covering power, consistency or elasticity of the paints they work with. Among the owners of graffitied house or building façades, some use paint or solvent spraycans to remove graffiti, while some anti-graffiti activists are known to systematically repaint with the same color (Ehrenfeucht, 2014; Good, 2011).

Symmetrically, erasing is a common practice among graffiti writers, which comes in various ways: going over toys, covering others writers due to intense competition (called "beef") or lack of space in a valued spot, or covering one's own piece as an update. More recently, urban artists such as the Brazilian Alexandre Orion wipe off the pollution accumulated on the walls with a simple rag to produce graphic forms, like his 160m long mural representing skulls, created in July 2006 in the Max Feffer road tunnel in São Paulo. Moreover, some

writers anticipate, or even provoke, the intervention of city workers in their production practice. A first inscription on a porous surface sometimes acts as a bet that it will become less absorbent after buffing and welcome more light, flashy colors. Translated into surface preparation and primer technique, the erasing cycle is fully included in the next productions.

Most prominently, writers and buffers' activities involve the use of relatively similar tools and equipment: paint buckets, rollers attached to the end of poles, high-pressure projection of hot water, a mixture of sand and silica beads (called sandblasting), or colored pigments in the form of aerosols (occasionally stamped "anti-graffiti"), wearing masks, sometimes a cap, and the use of gloves. In the course of their repeated movements, the progressive improvement of their gestures can even lead to the development of similar skills: while activists have turned buffing into a daily activity that makes them look like graffiti writers (Good, 2011), in the early 2000s, among the ranks of graffiti removers officially hired by the City of Paris were trained writers!

Graphic productions, gestural performances

Writing graffiti and removing it is also a matter of rhythm. The two activities inevitably come one after another and, once started, the cycle of iterations repeats itself continuously. But the rhythm also interferes in the intimacy of each action, like a motion weighter. Temporal distribution in regular sequences, it unfolds according to a certain cadence and sometimes even supports a genuine choreography.

This is particularly obvious in the gesture of the autograph signature. Sign made by the writer's hand, the signature is banal and familiar, while being part of a long history (Fraenkel, 1992). Through its line, it maintains a tenacious link between the written graphic mark and the signatory's presence beyond the mere moment of inscription. So that the occurrences of the sign constitute the multiple relays that lead to a unique, singularized referent — the one who traces them —, the signature is however subordinated to a resemblance requirement:

> "In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production" (Derrida, 1982: 328).

This homogeneity of graphic appearance also governs the particular forms of autograph signature that are the tag and, its two-color extension, the throw-up (see notably Castleman, 1982: 29-31; Austin, 2001: 115-119). To comply with the injunction, their respective lines operate in the same sequence, defining the order and direction of the strokes that make up each letter, one after the other. Called *ductus*, this sequence at the center of the graphic composition is specific to each type of inscription. Its respect gives a certain fluidity to the gestural performance.

In front of the surface, the making of a tag usually starts with the same line, followed by the same sequence of strokes that gradually form letters, with a general rounded or angular shape depending on the chosen calligraphy. Performing a throw-up follows a similar pattern (figure 1). It begins with a quick visual estimation of the future spot of the inscription, and goes on with the same initial tracing, followed by a succession of strokes, which gives way to a moment of filling in the general shape just formed, until the outline is completed, accompanied, depending on writers, by a drop shadow or a third dimension,

vibrating strokes, the initials of a crew, the current year, or a dedication. Without forgetting the photographic shooting, just after or the next day depending on the light, which completely concludes the intervention.

Figure 1. Tilt writing his throw-up (© D. Pontille)

Each new act of signature tirelessly reactivates this *ductus*, this sequence of strokes that produces a form progressively stabilized over its occurrences. If we are regularly called upon to sign in the course of our life as a legal person, tag and throw-up differ in the intense productivity that sets up repetition as a daily gesture, and makes the proliferation of names and the saturation of urban spaces the horizon of the writing act. However, the throw-up adds another specificity to this recurrence of inscriptions. At the very core of its execution, it makes the repetition of the form tracing, for the initial line and for its final outline, the very conditions of its graphic existence. Combined with the size of the inscriptions, this doubled gesticulation gives the performance a very special twist. While mastery is usually focused in the hand and wrist for tracing a signature, the whole body occupies the space for producing a throw-up. The physical performance combines a control of the flow of pressurized aerosol paint with precision of movement, including coordination between arm sweeping and lateral leg motion. The drawing of a throw-up is thus similar to

a programmed contortion, even timed in situations where there is an emergency. The succession of strokes, one after the other, then unfolds according to the rhythm of the graphic elaboration.

The graffiti buffers also act according to a ritualized movement which takes the form of a choreography (Denis and Pontille, 2019, 2020). Once on the intervention site, they get out of their vehicle with their gaze turned towards the façades, approach the graffiti to be treated, examine it for a few seconds, take a photo, and then, while scrutinizing even more closely, they invariably reach out their hand to run their fingers over the surface several times. This gesture is important in several respects: by touching, buffers estimate the material properties of both the graffiti and the surface; they explore their resistance as well as their fragility in order to choose from the range of tools and products at their disposal; lastly, they anticipate the concrete conditions for their implementation. This introductory sequence is then followed by the specific rhythm of each of the removing techniques. Let's take a look at the two most frequently used ones.

Figure 2. Making the graffiti react with chemical solvents (© J. Denis & D. Pontille)
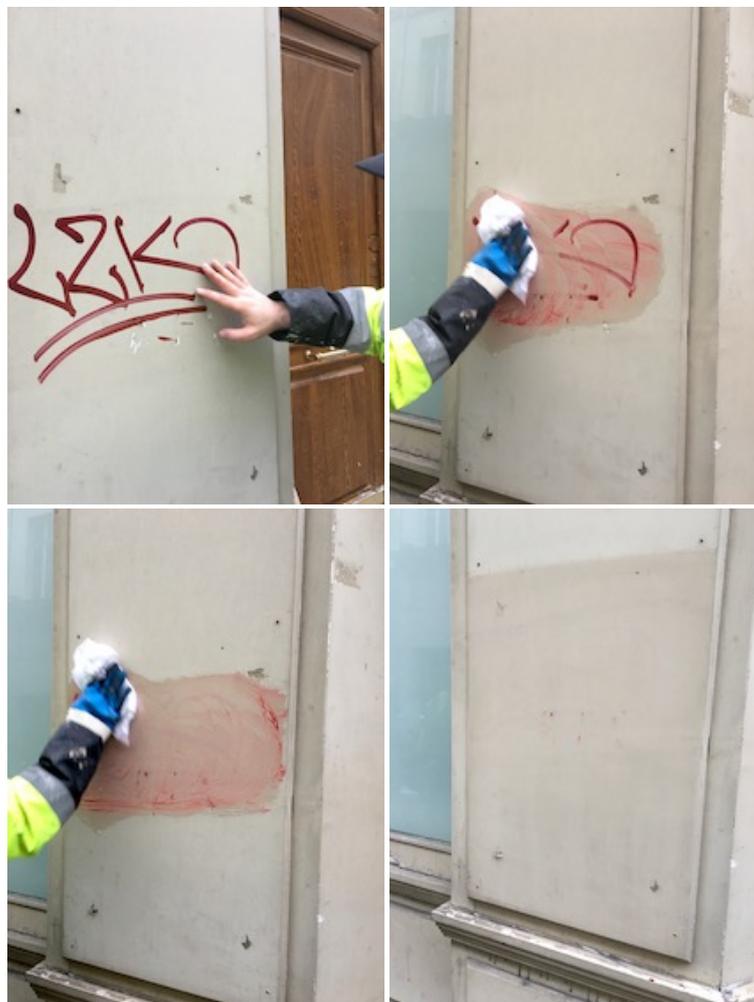
The use of chemical solvents goes hand in hand with a green scraper (a kind of dish scouring sponge) and several clean rags (figure 2). The buffers pour a small quantity of aqueous product on the scraper, coat the graffitied surface with it in small circles, and leave it to act for a short time over the inscription. They carry on their circular movements without pressing on the scraper until the letters are distorted by the ink or paint that gets liquefied.

They then remove the pasty mixture that has formed with a clean rag. Finally, they remove the remaining part with another clean rag, while drawing straight strips from top to bottom. The subtle proportioning of the products and the movement of the rags underline the importance of a timely coordination between the action of the heterogeneous elements in presence and the reaction they are likely to trigger between them. Whether the action is too light or too fast and the graffiti remains, whether it is too long or too vigorous and the surface is permanently damaged.

This rhythmical accuracy is also crucial for covering graffiti with paint (figure 3). During their interventions, some graffiti removers try to get as close as possible to the color of the graffitied surface. To do so, they make the blend directly on the building façade. They start by selecting the main shades needed: for example, gray, beige, and white. They then cover the graffiti with a thin layer of white, which when dry, still lets it appear in transparency. They dip the same roller still white in the gray paint pot, then immediately spread a thick layer by forming horizontal bands on the white. They start again with the beige paint by drawing several horizontal stripes, this time straddling the white and gray. By moving their pole with vertical movements, the three colors mix and form a homogeneous hue, which is close to that of the other parts of the façade. The balance between the layers of paint and the ballet drawn by the activation of the roller is here crucial.

Figure 3. Covering a graffiti with three paint colors (© J. Denis & D. Pontille)

The performance of graffiti writers and buffers achieve a high level of technical precision with constantly repeated movements, adjusted and refined day after day. From one iteration to another, the sequence of their movements, associated with a sophisticated mastery of their tools, follows the flow of materials towards the success of the operation: producing a throw-up that stands graphically, that is technically efficient, in a visible place; removing graffiti, while leaving as few traces as possible of the intervention itself. The aesthetics of these daily rituals is based on a choreography of gesticulations, in this "corporeality without mediation" which, as in dance, does not tolerate approximation (Riout, Gurdjian, Leroux, 1985: 67). In the art of graffiti and that of its buffing, any false movement goes without any immediate correction.

Differences

Repetition regularly refers to the preparation for a performance. It is central to many activities: from acting to sports, from oral performance in professional settings (e.g. launching a new product, announcing a scientific result) to the full-scale collective prevention measures in risk management (e.g. fire alarm). The recursive gestures of graffiti writers and their buffers are part of this common understanding. As routine can rhyme with monotony, however, it is important not to miss an essential part of their performance. As Gilles Deleuze points out: "It is rather a matter of acting, of making repetition as such a novelty; that is, a freedom and a task of freedom" (1994: 6). Or again, what is at stake is "not add a second and a third time to the first, but carry the first time to the 'nth' power" (1994: 2). Repetition is a dynamic process, it introduces micro-variations, stimulates the emergence of difference within the same, generates inescapable transformations.

Such an open conception highlights the place of iteration in the signature definition previously pointed out by Jacques Derrida (1982). Although the tracing of a signature by its writer's hand is governed by a resemblance requirement, it is simultaneously rid of any necessary reference to a model that would exist outside of it. Conversely, compliance from one iteration to the next goes with inevitable latitude:

> "Two signatures that would be superimposable in every point would be suspicious, because it is highly unlikely that an individual can reproduce exactly the same sign twice in a row" (Fraenkel, 1992: 205).

When the perfect copy would be haunted by the work of a usurper or forger, too diligent to completely mislead their world, the authentic line, free of all suspicion, unfolds in a range of resemblances that allows for variations, and must even include them.

Such a dynamic approach is particularly well illustrated by the iterations of the same throw-up that punctuate a city, street after street. While its general shape seems similar, ensuring the mandatory resemblance to designate its unique writer, it is never strictly identical. The sequence of body movements always comes with situated amplitudes: the eagerness or slowness of the gesture called for by the situation, the architectural features of the building borders, edges, grooves or moldings, the light intensity, the level of tiredness, the ambient temperature, the quality of the solvent and the paint dispensed by the spraycans used, the more or less rough or absorbent textures of the surfaces, the possibility of using bricks or blocks as a guide, the stability of the ground, its inclination to a greater or lesser extent... All of these aspects are important, but interfere with each other to a different intensity during each performance. Associated to each other, they incline the action in a singular

direction which, from one situation to another, invites to compress or stretch the throw-up. Each iteration is thus internally worked on, animated during its own realization.

The endless cycle of interventions is therefore not a zero-sum game. It provokes inescapable alterations that graffiti writers sometimes consider as momentary mistakes to avoid, sometimes as new and creative lines to accentuate in their next graphic acts. These variations inevitably haunt the buffers' work. To grasp its intensity, the usual terms, seemingly trivial and simple, are nevertheless misleading: just eradicate everything and the buildings will regain their panache, successive municipal anti-graffiti policies regularly insist. However, buffing does not consist precisely in bringing the façades back to their supposed "initial" state, as a phantasm of resetting their aesthetic counter. All those who have found themselves with a sheet of paper crumpled, or even perforated, after using an eraser know that erasing is a delicate matter. A technical operation, graffiti buffing sets in motion various materials, voluntarily provoking reactions between them in order to generate modifications. Consequently, buffers also leave minimal or fully visible traces when using their tools. Chemical solvents alter the composition of substances that frequently become drab. High pressure propulsion of sand or hot water abrades the materials that are dug up by the interventions. Despite a search for the right shade, paint coverages regularly produce geometrical shapes, often rectangular, with the dimensions of the inscription. The graffiti removal workers hired by the city of Paris even use a particularly colorful expression to describe the marks resulting from their interventions: they avoid producing "cleanliness stains."

These different variations, noticeable from one surface to another of the urban spaces, have their own aesthetic regularity, to such an extent that a categorization is possible. In his experimental documentary, based on Avalon Kalin's original concept, entitled "*The subconscious art of graffiti removal*", Matt McCormick (2001) promoted the buffers' productions as an art form in their own right. He thus elaborated a first categorization distinguishing three buffing styles. The most common, described as "symmetrical" or "conservative", produces the geometrical shapes associated with paint covering. "Ghosting" results from the scrupulous follow-up of the graffiti outline, which then remains partly readable after the removal operation. The scarcest style, called "radical", consists of a totally new shape, usually silhouettes (e.g. a cloud, a flower, an animal), made from the initial shape drawn by the graffiti writer. To these three initial styles, Matt McCormick then added the category of "redactive", which consists of using hatching, dashes or "X" to make graffiti illegible, but partially visible. By identifying specific types of buffing, this categorization takes them out of their accidental composition in the streets and gives them an artistic significance, explicitly placed in the lineage of pieces inspired by abstract expressionism, minimalism, or Russian constructivism, such as those of Kazimir Malevitch or Mark Rothko.

Subsequently, others proposed supplements. Graphic designer and co-author of the original documentary, Avalon Kalin (2015) has introduced two new categories. "Non-removals" result from processes in building construction, such as crack priming of concrete walls or color test on some areas of façades. "Reactionary" are produced by graffiti artists who extend the graffiti cleaning area by adding pictorial elements as false buffing traces. For their part, Stephen Burke and Fiachra Corcoran (2017), respectively plastic painter and photographer, have further refined this typology in a book entitled *Buff*. They notably added the "maltreated" style produced by a coarse scribble over the inscription, often with

spraycan itself, on the one hand, and the category of "etched", a result of the high-pressure water and sandblasting techniques that permanently alter the materials, thereby causing long-term chromatic compositions, on the other hand.

Such a typology is heuristic to estimate the work of buffers through a new and evolving framework, which articulates graphic forms to removal techniques. It stresses out how much their interventions, aimed at the systematic eradication of graffiti, simultaneously and involuntarily produce chromatic assemblages endowed with some aesthetic value. However, as soon as the dynamics of the gestural iterations are reintroduced, any categorization is rapidly pushed to its extreme limit. By using corrosive solvents, permanent inks, abrasive tools, protection varnishes, paints with high covering power, graffiti writers and buffers bring their own touches to the building façades. This technological equipment stimulates the innovation of the protagonists, and can be akin to a true arms race (Iveson 2010). Above all, it underlines the intimate entanglement of performances: some tirelessly go over the work of others, the ingenuity of the former giving rise to the inventiveness of the latter. This continuous intertwining generates achievements which, for a not insignificant part, escape any prior set of categories, no matter how fine they may be.

The intensity with which some building façades are targeted by interventions gives rise to fragilities that accelerate transformations. Walls made of ashlar, brick, or concrete are sometimes literally worn and used out by the dance of iterations, despite their expected high resistance to weather conditions. In parallel, this intensity highlights the activity of graffiti artists and buffers, which continuously generates a series of layers of paints, solvents and other materials, just on the surface of the urban reality. It is thus indicative of a collaboration, to which the owners of the graffitied surfaces sometimes contribute, which can extend over months, or even years, to produce a large-scale mural work. In their perpetual search for new spots and compositions, some graffiti writers even deliberately place their productions by adjusting them to the colorful background of the traces left by the buffers. The antagonism between opposing camps then gives way to an asynchronous association, operating by successive contributions, whose result can equal, in the eyes of some, the power generated by an explicit and fusional teamwork between recognized artists. In the course of this intense collaborative effort, productions with a particularly pronounced expressive radicality may even emerge in a momentary and totally unexpectedly manner. The tiny significant differences generated by the dance of iterations foster the singularization of the transformations which, as surprises at the core of the creative process, lead to material and chromatic compositions of exceptional quality.

Repeating over again

Whether they take the form of a soothed dialogue moved by a shared experience, a trench warfare in performances, or an intense unintended collaboration, the relationships between graffiti writers and their buffers are driven by the transformative principle of repetition. From gesture to gesture, in a perpetual quest for perfection, unexpected acts emerge, initiating small shifts as well as major achievements. This is what Gilles Deleuze points out about the artists' gestures:

> "They do not juxtapose instances of the figure, but rather each time combine an element of one instance with *another* element of a following instance. They introduce

a disequilibrium into the dynamic process of construction, an instability, dissymmetry or gap of some kind which disappears only in the overall effect" (Deleuze, 1994: 22).

Reiteration is productive of the performance itself; it constitutes the movement that amplifies its own power. This is by repetition, through it, in it, that graffiti appears and disappears continuously. The preliminary training in the backstage of an activity, this preparation repeated and adjusted in the course of inevitable improvisations, has little place here. Conversely, the move that operates by its own effects, the one that feeds on the competitive dynamics between graffiti artists and against buffers (Stewart and Kortright, 2015), is paramount. Central to the action, it stimulates progressive variations by its successive vibrations, and takes the creative production in an unexpected direction. Put differently, the repetition of graffiti and their buffing brings out this plural world, dear to William James (1909: 226), that remains "still in process of making."

Repeat after me! Never manifest in its explicit form, the interpellation virtually goes along with every graffiti, tag, throw-up, or even more elaborated piece. It is as much directed towards peers and oneself, like an injunction to do better — a bigger, more colorful inscription, with more style and technical audacity —, as it is towards graffiti buffers, like a challenge thrown out as a hymn to the graphic greatness of an inscription repetition: "buff me, so that I come back immediately, both exactly the same and totally different!"

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