

STREET MUSEUM WITHOUT WALLS:

A Curatorial Mediation on the Convergence
of Street Art and Digital Culture

by

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Criticism Thesis presented to OCAD University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in
Criticism & Curatorial Practice

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 2014

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ABSTRACT

This study develops a conceptual framework for a *street museum without walls* that synthesizes the social spheres of the museum, the city, and the web in order to curate street art *in-situ*. When André Malraux developed his theory of a *museum without walls*, he imagined the endless discursive possibilities of integrating photographic reproducibility within museological discourse. Redeploying Malraux's theory, this thesis examines the transformation of art and public culture via networked digital technology, in order to map the spatial aesthetic operations of street art within a curatorial discourse. This study engages with critical discussions surrounding the changing role of the museum in the twenty-first century, the pervasiveness of the street art movement within contemporary culture, the question of how digital reproducibility has allowed street art practices to occupy multiple sites within the public sphere, and, how concepts of 'site' and 'place' are mediated, extended and registered online.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been possible without OCAD University graduate studies and my thesis advisory committee.

Thank you to my principal advisor Dr. Michael Prokopow, for his ongoing encouragement and help pushing my research forward, and my secondary advisor Dr. Rosemary Donegan for her sage advice and guidance over the last two years.

I would also like to thank: Rebecca Diederichs, for her invaluable assistance and reassurance throughout the writing process, Angela Keely for her weekly pep talks, and my family Zuzana Pick and Leuten Rojas for all their love and support.

For Erik.

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INTRODUCTION

My study interrogates the limits and boundaries of museal representation. I recognize that readers may find my coalescence of museological and street art practices as being contentious. Indeed, my argument is contentious. I have purposefully conflated two seemingly oppositional fields (the museum and the streets) to interrogate the ideological and disciplinary structures of the museum that mediate the reception of artistic practices. My thesis offers a critical examination into the street art movement as a multivalent and complex phenomenon worthy of serious scholarly attention. I do not undertake an art historical survey of contemporary street art practices.¹ Although I reference previous cultural debates from the 1980s pertaining to graffiti's foray into galleries, it is not intended to create an oppositional relationship between graffiti and street art. Rather, I use them in order to emphasize the shifting socio-cultural frames that inform its critical and

¹ For an art historical survey of the history and genealogy of graffiti and street art practices, see, Waclawek, Anna. *Graffiti and Street Art*. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. 2011); For an illustrated survey of street art from the United States, Canada, Europe, and Latin America, see Ganz, Nicholas and Tristan Manco. *Graffiti World: Street Art from Five Continents* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004). For a study of the rise and global impact of graffiti and urban art, including key figures and artists interviews, see, McCormick, Carlo, et al. *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art*. (ed.) Ethel Seno (New York: Taschen, 2010).

popular reception, helping brand it as one of the ‘defining art movements of the twenty first century.’²

Background

When I initially began my research on street art I struggled with the question of how to situate it within a curatorial discourse. Street art, as a ‘threshold phenomena’, collapses the ontological distinctions between what we consider ‘art’, vis-à-vis its location inside a gallery versus a form of ‘non-art’ in the urban environment.³ Transitory and ephemeral, street art proposes the city as a *new site for creative engagement*.⁴ Street art, here, is defined as a distinctive mode of unsanctioned artistic production taking place in public spaces. I maintain that unlike the standing of other forms of art, the cultural value and significance of street art practices are tied to its signifying relationship within the urban environment.⁵ Street art brings to the foreground a number of critical, logistical and ideological challenges for curators because the act of divorcing it from its original context positions it within a different ideological frame. For example, transposing street art

² Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 190.

³ Diederichsen, Diederich, “Street art as a Threshold Phenomena.” *Art in the Streets* (ed.) Jeffrey Deitch et al. (New York: Skira Rizzoli Publications. 2011), 281.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See, Riggle, Nicholas. “Street Art: The Transfiguration of the Commonplaces.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 68, no. 3 (2010): 243-257.

works on canvas transforms it into a material art object. Furthermore, the commissioning of works (whether intramural or extramural) situates it within a system of patronage and institutionally sanctioned regimes of visibility. Considering the philosophical implications of curating street art in-situ, requires a critical re-assessment of institutional practices and methods of dissemination and display. It becomes a means through which exhibitionary practices, as a mode of visual representation, can be reformulated to engage with the vitality and energy of the city and urban reality.

In the context of art criticism and theory, street art has emerged at a time when there is no acknowledged art historical identity within contemporary art and no consensus on the potential role for the avant-garde.⁶ Street art is rooted in the history of graffiti writing (understood here as a signature-based form of urban inscription); mural painting (from the Italian frescos to the Mexican muralists); and site-specific art practices that emerged in the late 1960s (that operated as a particular mode of 'institutional critique'). For my purposes here, I locate the street art movement as a continuation of contemporary art's explorations of creative practices outside of the

⁶ Irvine, Martin. "The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture." *The Handbook of Visual Culture* (ed.) Barry Sandywell and Ian Heywood (New York: Berg Publishers, 2012), 238.

traditional spaces of the gallery. One of the reasons why street art is so provocative is because realizes the aspirations of the avant-garde – to bridge the gap between art and the everyday – in a manner that few other forms of mainstream art have been able to achieve.⁷ Approaches related to site-specificity (which have a long-standing history within contemporary art discourse) are valuable for considering the philosophical implications of curating work outside the context of the gallery. But they are only useful to a point. Street art is not a discrete form of art practice: its positioning on public walls extends the logic of site-specificity by linking it within a complex chain of production and consumption within the *visual economy of the city*.⁸ Since it is impossible to bring the streets into the museum, the question becomes how do we re-map the edifice of the museum into the streets?

Rational & Purpose of the Thesis Research

To imagine a *street museum without walls* – a museum freed of the structural and cultural constraints of physical and ideological spaces – calls

⁷ Vaughan, Connell, “Institutional Change, The Concept of the Avant-Garde and the Example of Graffiti.” *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics* vol. 3 (2011): 281-293. <http://proceedings.eurosa.org/3/vaughan2011.pdf> (Accessed November 24, 2011).

⁸ Tripodi, Lorenzo. “Towards a Vertical Urbanism: Space of Exposure as a New Paradigm for Public Space.” *The Wall and the City* (ed.) Andrea Mubi Brighenti. (Trento, IT: Professional Dreamers, 2009), 55. <http://www.professionaldreamers.net/?p=9> (accessed 25 September, 2013).

for a new critical vocabulary for thinking about how we access art. This study intentionally evokes a conceptual and philosophical reformulation of the aesthetic, spatial and social edifices of the museum. More specifically, it is a mode for thinking about artistic practices that intervene into the spheres of the quotidian. For my purposes, the 'museum' is understood here as specialized site for visualizing a multiplicity of connections between objects, images, people, locations, and histories. I argue that street art calls for a corresponding system of presentation and representation which considers the transformation of art and public culture in the twenty-first century. This study examines how street art practices can be re-mapped within a curatorial discourse and extended through processes of photographic documentation and digital mediation. Because of its convergence with contemporary digital media culture, the street art movement has created its own *museum without walls*. It is a social space situated outside of the 'official' spaces of the museum enacted through the conspicuous consumption of images of street art online.

As a particular brand of urban intervention, street art calls for corresponding systems of assessment that considers the shifting cultural frames of artistic production and visual consumption. Artist Mel Bochner suggested that

works executed directly on walls “cannot be ‘held’; they can only be seen.”⁹

Urban art practices and photographic documentation have always been interconnected; from Brassai’s photographs graffiti in the streets of Paris in the 1930s, to Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant’s photographs of subway cars covered in brightly coloured graffiti in New York in the 1980s.

Comparable to performance and other forms of process oriented artistic practices, photography as a means of capturing the ephemeral transitory gestures of street artists, allows works to live on long after they cease to exist in their original contexts. The convergence with digital networked culture has multiplied the relationships between its site-specific engagements with public spaces to include the distributed networks of the Internet. As argued by critic and art historian Jorinde Seijdel, in cyberspace “we encounter all kinds of reflections and extensions of physical public

⁹ Bochner, Mel. “Why Would Anyone Want to Draw on the Wall?” *October* vol. 130 (2009): 138. - In this short essay, Bochner reflects on a series of personal encounters with three events in the late 1960s: an exhibition of Italian Frescoes, detached from Florentine buildings and brought into the gallery, at the Metropolitan Museum in 1968; the May ’68 graffiti slogans found on the streets of Paris during the student riots; and an exhibition of Andy Warhol’s “Cow Wallpaper” at the at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1966. He suggests that artists who abandoned the material supports and ideological frame of the canvas to create works directly on the wall were searching for a new site and scale for their work, “in short, the possibility of a new kind of experience.” He argues that wall works bridge the gap between lived time and pictorial time allowing works to achieve an existential unity between reality and appearance.

space.”¹⁰ The ubiquity of digital images of street art works online provide increased access to works independent of the institutional systems of the art world. At the same time, it extends the physical and symbolic topographies of urban spaces, and inscribes them within the matrix of visual culture. Digital mediation of street art practices online has recoded its spatial aesthetic operations through offering *multiple modalities of being in the city*.¹¹ Ultimately, opening up a space where relationships between art practices and the institution of the museum can take on new models of correspondences, which privilege subjective and inter-subjective experiences of art.

My study has far reaching implications beyond just street art. It is developed for curators, art historians, museum professionals, artists, and cultural workers whose practices are concerned with taking artistic activities outside of the gallery. My call for a *street museum without walls* opens up a space for thinking of exhibitions as being ‘situational’, which allow for new forms of

¹⁰ Seijdel, Jorinde. “The Exhibition as Emulator.” *Mediamatic Magazine* (2000) http://www.mediamatic.nl/magazine/10_1/seijdel_exhibition/sejdelem_2gb.html (accessed 15 February, 2013).

¹¹ See, Dickens, Luke, “Placing Post-graffiti: the Journey of the Peckham Rock.” *Cultural Geographies*, Vol. 15 No. 4 (2008): 471-496; Sheikh, Simon. “In the Place of the Public Sphere? Or, the World in Fragments.” *Republicart Web Journal, European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*. June 2006. http://www.republicart.net/disc/publicum/sheikh03_en.htm (accessed 23 September, 2013).

'place-responsive' and 'context-specific' projects to foster meaningful forms of audience engagement.¹² It situates the act of curating – defined here, as the socio-cultural gesture of producing, contextualizing, and making art and ideas public – in the 'expanded field' of visual and public culture. This expansion beyond the binaries of the streets and the gallery, serves to 'mirror the original opposition' and at the same time opening up a space for discursive engagements with particular places, without privileging the social over the visual.¹³ I offer a critical perspective for thinking about how the Internet (as a medium) has intensified and extended the spheres of cultural production beyond the field of the museum.¹⁴ It has been developed as a response to the prevalence of digital reproducibility, as the primary means in which contemporary artistic practices are made available to the larger public.

Theoretical Framework

This study has adopted an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of contemporary street art practices, which draws from the fields of visual culture, cultural studies, art history, philosophy, social geography, and new

¹² See, Doherty, Claire. "New Institutionalism and the Exhibition as Situation" *Situations UK* (2006): 5. <http://www.situations.org.uk/writing/> (accessed 26 August, 2013).

¹³ Krauss, Rosalind. "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." *October* vol. 8 (1979): 37.

¹⁴ See, Papastergiadis, Nikos. *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place, and the Everyday*. (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2010).

media. My critical re-appraisal of André Malraux's *museum without walls* as a strategic device in the curatorial realm synthesizes methodologies of *cultural analysis*, *post-critical museology*, and *multimediality* to consider how digital mediation reshapes public engagement with street art. My investigation frames the concept of the museum, real or *imagined*, as an adaptable fluid cultural construct.¹⁵ Using Malraux as a point of departure, my conceptual formulation of a *street museum without walls* is nascent theoretical framework for reassessing and extending the spatial and organizing structures of the museum, via processes of photographic reproducibility and digital mediation.

Malraux's proposition of the dematerialization of the museum is a provocative idea. It emphasizes how the act of looking, and processes of visual consumption, are defined and structured through the mediating device of the art museum. His theorization of bringing together works that could never be assembled within a single physical structure is a revelatory way for thinking about artistic processes that are not easily collectible. Malraux's adoption of photography within the discourse of the museum goes beyond simply a utopian belief in the democratic power of mechanical

¹⁵ Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 64.

reproducibility. He believed that the 'auratic' nature of art could be captured, via photography, and extended into the whole realm of human consciousness. Effectively revolutionizing relationship between the viewer and the work of art.¹⁶ Although Malraux's writing has fallen out of fashion in recent years, my interrogation of the possibilities around the adoption of his theory of art offers a new mode for thinking about street art in relation to the museum.

Updating Malraux's theory, I draw on Mieke Bal's approach to *cultural analysis*, an interdisciplinary methodology for the study of contemporary cultural phenomena, to transfer the discursive formations of the museum into the public spaces of the city.¹⁷ In her discussion of graffiti (*graffito*, or image-writing) she stresses the *exhibitionary* nature of forms of urban inscription.¹⁸ According to Bal, artists producing work and presenting it on city walls recodes the narrative of the urban landscape.¹⁹ These 'public displays of art' effectively become 'an exhibit', transforming urban spaces

¹⁶ Malraux, André, "Museum without Walls." *Voices of Silence* (trans.) Stuart Gilbert (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 16.

¹⁷ See, Bal, Mieke (ed.) *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Ibid.; See also, Neef, Sonja, "Killing Kool: The Graffiti Museum" *Art History* vol. 30, no. 3 (2007): 418-431. - Neef takes up Bal's approach to cultural analysis in her analysis of a performative techniques of urban inscription employed by graffiti writers.

¹⁹ Bal, Mieke (ed.) *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, 4.

*into a gallery.*²⁰ The act of making public (*the gesture of exposition*), according to Bal, is the key work of the museum a discursive exchange between subjects and works.²¹ Conceived along a metaphorical axis, whereby both intramural and extramural zones (museum/city) are regarded as being mutually interchangeable, allows the relationships between works and viewers become redistributed across both the physical and symbolic topographies of the city.²²

Based on a reflexive model of *post-critical museology*, a progressive interdisciplinary form of museological practice, my hypothesis of a *street museum without walls* re-imagines what an art museum in the twenty-first century *could be*.²³ I examine the transposition of street works onto the mass-media platforms of the web through the lenses of ‘distributed museum’ spaces, as discussed by Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa, and Victoria Walsh; and the notion of *multimediality*, as proposed by Vince Dziekan. I have synthesized these two conceptual frameworks in order to consider how the rise of digital culture has impacted the medium of the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See, Bal, Mieke. “The Discourse of the Museum” *Thinking About Exhibitions* (ed.) Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandra Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 200-218.

²² Neef, “Killing Kool: The Graffiti Museum,” 421-422.

²³ See, Dewdney, Andrew, David Dibosa, and Victoria Walsh. *Post-Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

museum (as an analogue system of representation). Dewdney, Dibosa, and Walsh, argue that the integration of digital technology within museological discourse allows the *social spaces* of the museum (and its systems of communication and knowledge) to be redistributed and extended beyond its physical structure.²⁴ Dziekan's notion of *multimediality* invites new curatorial reformulations of digitally informed exhibition models, which respond to the conditions of production and consumption of artistic practices via modes of technological mediation.²⁵ Moving beyond the models of online exhibitions or virtual museums, his model for a 'multimedial museum' integrates digital mediation with discursive spatial practices, to consider the complex interrelations between culture, technology and space.²⁶ Through my adoption of these critically informed approaches, I develop a conceptual schema for extending the topology of urban and museum spaces that emphasize the relational, semiotic, metaphysical, and inter-subjective engagements with urban art forms as they are registered and extended via photographic reproducibility and processes of digital mediation.

²⁴ Dewdney, et al. *Post-Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum*, 190.

²⁵ Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*, 8. - Dziekan theoretical approach is informed Bal's approach to cultural analysis, as a means of challenging the 'artificial boundaries' media based disciplines and the museum.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 9

Scope & Limitations

Malraux's theory offers a prescient conceptual schema for thinking about the convergence between 'old' and 'new' forms of cultural mediation (the museum and the Internet). My adaptation of significant revelations offered by Malraux as a springboard for considering how digital networked communications technologies have intensified and multiplied public encounters with street art practices. This study is not intended to provide close reading of Malraux's theory.²⁷ As a vestige of modernist thought, his ideas (while considerably nuanced) are not entirely unproblematic. Therefore, I am not offering a verbatim reading of his text. Instead, I engage judiciously with critiques of Malraux's theory in order to tease out key issues and ideas. I am not providing a new media analysis of the Internet and digital communication technologies. Instead, my analysis draws on Malraux's integration of photographic reproducibility as a mediator between the audience and the work of art. My analysis of the ubiquity of street art images online situates it as a representational system that intersects with the broader field of visual and public culture.²⁸ Written decades before the

²⁷ For an in-depth study of Malraux's theory of art see, Allan, Derek. *Art and the Human Adventure: André Malraux's Theory of Art*. (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2009).

²⁸ See, Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

invention of the Internet, Malraux's concept still resonates today because it calls for a reassessment of the traditional spaces for accessing art. By pushing his theory into this new domain, this study considers the praxis between contemporary street art practices and post-critical museology in order to examine the curatorial efficacy of this ostensibly anti-institutional art form.

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*A well-placed street piece will reveal the meaning of its material context,
making the invisible visible again, a city re-imagined and re-imagined.*

-Martin Irvine

"The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture" (2012)²⁹

Malraux's concept of a *museum without walls* has become somewhat of a catchphrase within the fields of art theory and criticism. The idea has been referenced in various ways, from photographic collections to international biennials. It captures a certain idealistic anti-establishment notion of culture freed of the institutional power and homogeneity of the museum.

But what does a 'museum without walls' *really* mean, and what form would such an institution take? While Malraux's concept has already been considered in the field of new media theory, as has his hypothesis on photographic reproducibility,³⁰ it has yet to be applied to the analysis of street art and issues of site-specificity. In the pages that follow, I will

²⁹ Irvine, Martin. "The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture," 238.

³⁰ See, Battro, Antonio M. "From Malraux's Imaginary Museum to the Virtual Museum." *Museums in a Digital Age* (ed.) Ross Parry (New York: Routledge, 2010), 136-148; Paul, Christiane. "Flexible Contexts, Democratic Filtering and Computer-Aided Curating: Models for Online Curatorial Practice." *Curating, Immateriality: the Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems* (ed.) Joasia Krysa (New York: Autonomedia Press, 2006), 85-105.

explicate my working concept of a *street museum without walls*, which theorizes a remapping of the spheres of the streets and the museum, to investigate the philosophical implications of curating street art in-situ. The act of curating street art seems antithetical. Ostensibly, it contradicts its deliberate positioning outside of the traditional spaces of the gallery. However, the analysis of street art, as an ostensibly anti-institutional art form that has achieved considerable mainstream success, makes it a provocative subject for critical investigation.

At first, to imagine the *streets as a museum* appears to be a prosaic and rather romantic notion. It evokes the idea of a modern day flâneur, reminiscent of Baudelaire and De Certeau, wandering around the city discovering 'splendor' in the everyday urban environment. Seemingly anything from architecture to trash can become part of such a 'museum'. But, what is really at stake here is not a utopian dream of transforming the everyday into 'art'. As practices taking place outside the traditional spaces of the gallery continues to remain common parlance within contemporary art discourse the 'exhibitionary complex' of the museum, as theorized by Tony Bennett, has shifted into the realm of the

commonplace.³¹ The transformation of everyday spaces into sites of exhibition (either through artistic interventions, pop-up galleries or commissioned temporary public art projects, etc.) has introduced a new language in contemporary curatorial practices.³² My investigation into the formation of a *street museum without walls* examines how the pre-existing conditions of display of site-specificity, and other forms of context-sensitive art, can be redeployed to curate street art practices *in-situ*.

Advancing the current literature on street art beyond the binary logic of inside/outside - street/gallery, art/crime, periphery/center, autonomy/commercialization, and so on - in order to propose a new conceptual model for reconsidering its position within the expanded field of public culture. Interrogating how contemporary artistic practices respond, produce and destabilize concepts of 'place', curator Claire Doherty asks: "do the curatorial systems, refined over the last twenty years, to support artistic engagement with particular places, and in particular public space, truly acknowledge the conflictual and changing nature of public space and

³¹ See, Smith, Terry. *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), 65; Doherty, Claire (ed.) *Situation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); Bennett, Tony. "The Exhibitionary Complex." *Thinking About Exhibitions* (ed.) Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandra Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 81-112.

³² Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 74.

place itself?"³³ Examining the discursive relationships (a form of knowledge production and a system of representation that visualizes interpretive relations and meanings) between street art and issues of 'place', I adopt theorist Nikos Papastergiadis's *topographical* approach to spatial aesthetics, to map the 'imaginary' and localizable sense of place as they are mediated, extended and registered through digital information technologies.³⁴

Street art's interventions onto the physical topographies of the city, as a nascent form of 'DIY urban design', re-imagines the meaning and material context of 'place'.³⁵ Its contingency on its critical positioning on city walls poses a distinctive set of logistical and ideological challenges for curators. Is there a different curatorial imperative for street art than other forms of site-specific practices? Due to its ephemeral nature, photographic documentation generally tends to be the most common means through which street works can be accessed.³⁶ Consequently, how does photographic documentation affect the reading of these works? How do

³³ Doherty, Claire (ed.) *Situation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 14.

³⁴ Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place, and the Everyday*, 9, 11-12, 117.

³⁵ Burnham, Scott. "The Call and Response of Street Art and the City." *City* vol. 14, no. 1-2 (2010): 137; Irvine, "The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture," 238.

³⁶ Masilamani, "Documenting Illegal Art: Collaborative Software, Online Environments and New York City's 1970s and 1980s Graffiti Art Movement." *Art Documentation* vol. 27, no. 2 (2008): 4.

these images, as they are documented and disseminated online, change our engagement with ideas of 'place'? And lastly, how does the ubiquity of these online images, to borrow from cultural theorist Stuart Hall, 'encode and decode' the physical and symbolic topographies of the city?³⁷ Through critical engagement with these questions, my hypothesis of *a street museum without walls* is a curatorial re-mediation of the spheres of the streets, the Internet and the museum. In what follows, I will situate Malraux's conception of a *museum without walls* within the field of contemporary criticism and how his idea serves as a point of convergence between old and new approaches to exhibitionary practices. Secondly, I will examine the shifting cultural frames of production and consumption and the importance of the discursive placing of street art, in order to consider how they mediate our engagement and interpretation of this art form. Thirdly, I will re-examine Malraux's theory as a means of creating an *interstitial space* between the seemingly autonomous zones of the museum and the streets. Fourthly, I will examine the relationship between site-specificity and material and virtual forms of engagement with space in order to synthesize my working concept of a *street museum without walls*. Finally, I will examine 'multimediality', as a

³⁷ See, Hall, Stuart. "Encoding, Decoding." *The Cultural Studies Reader* (ed.) Simon During (New York: Routledge, 2007), 477-488.

digitally informed mode of curatorial design for engendering meaningful forms of social engagement with street art practices.

Purporting a situational approach to the curation of contemporary street art practices *in-situ*, my theory of a *street museum without walls* reconfigures of the spatial, representational and ideological structures of the museum. Street art, as a particular brand of urban interventions, proposes a critical and material engagement with the aesthetics and visual language of the postmodern city.³⁸ Using the city as both a canvas and a *catalyst*, these forms of unsanctioned 'public art' recode the relationship between art and contemporary urbanism.³⁹ As Debord notes: "what alters the way we see the streets is more important than what alters the way we see painting."⁴⁰ Street art, as a distinctive mode of visual cultural production performed on urban walls, and subsequently made visible online, not only calls for a re-evaluation

³⁸ Irvine, "The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture," 245.

³⁹ See, Burnham, "The Call and Response of Street Art and the City," 137-153; McAuliffe, Cameron. "Graffiti or Street Art? Negotiating the Moral Geographies of the Creative City." *Journal of Urban Affairs* vol. 34, no. 2 (2012): 189-206; McCormick, et al. *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art* (ed.) Ethel Seno (New York: Taschen, 2010)

⁴⁰ Debord, Guy. "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency." *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents* (ed.) Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 49. - Report given at the inaugural meeting of the Situationists International (1957). This quote is tied to Debord's conception of 'psychogeography' - as a means of explaining how the geography of the urban environment affects the emotions and behavior of individuals.

of the traditional spaces for accessing art, and how the city is rendered and visualized within, what visual theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff refers to as, the 'expanded field of visual culture'.⁴¹ Artists producing works and presenting them on the public walls effectively the *city into a gallery* by collapsing the zones between art, creativity, and our everyday lived experiences.⁴² Street art recodes the spatial and visual narratives of the urban landscape through the gesture of exposition; transforming urban walls into the canvases, pedestrians into audiences, and rendering street works as 'masterpieces' on display throughout the city.⁴³ The convergence between urban art practices and digital media culture has multiplied the sites of encounter with these art forms. The conspicuous consumption of images of street art online has extended its visual and semiotic operations into the realms of visual and popular culture. Furthermore, as these images are disseminated and re-circulated online, the visual spatial operations of street art practices take on new dimensions offering multiple modalities of *being in the city*; enacting a

⁴¹ Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 31. -Mirzoeff emphasises the prominence of the 'visual' in the reproductive means of communication in late-capitalist culture. He describes a 'new visibility of culture', whereby the human experience is 'more visual and visualized than ever before'.

⁴² Bal, Mieke (ed.) "Introduction." *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, 4.

⁴³ Ibid.

form of visual semiotic exchange the *localizable* and 'imaginary' sense of 'place.'⁴⁴

Rethinking Malraux

André Malraux's (1901-1976) "Musée imaginaire" – otherwise known in its English translation as the *Imaginary Museum*, or the *Museum without Walls* – was an ongoing project for the French author and theorist. A cultural idea that he continued to revisit between the years of 1935 and 1951, the first iteration of his thesis appeared in his three-part volume "La Psychologie de l'art" (*The Psychology of Art*) in 1947-1950, and subsequently followed up by a full study in "Les Voix du silence" (*Voices of Silence*) in 1951.⁴⁵

Malraux's theory of a *museum without walls* is rooted in a series of debates into the nature of the museum, since its inception in the nineteenth-century, and its power to inaugurate 'masterpieces' within the narrative of art history.⁴⁶ Surveying the history of art, from classical antiquity to Manet and

⁴⁴ Sheikh, "In the Place of the Public Sphere? Or, the World in Fragments," 1.

⁴⁵ Krauss, Rosalind. "Ministry of Fate." *New History of French Literature* (ed.) Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1001. - During this period Malraux's involvement in the military took him away from his writing. Between the years of 1936 and 1937, Malraux fought during the Spanish Civil War. Upon his return to France, Malraux published a series of short texts of his nascent study in French art magazine *Verve* (1938). In 1942 he returned to the military to fight for the French Resistance. It was not until 1947, when Malraux published his three-part volume "*La Psychologie de l'Art*" that his theory of a *Musée Imaginaire* was first published.

⁴⁶ Malraux, André. "Museum Without Walls," 15-16.

Picasso, Malraux offers a critical reflection on how photographic reproducibility and access to colour plates of works from the 'global heritage' of art practices (including non-western works) have shaped what we understand as the modern tradition of art (a linear progression of styles and movements).⁴⁷ Malraux's integration of photography into his discourse on the museum posits that photographic reproducibility has the potential for recoding *a priori* theories of aesthetics, allowing works of art to be assessed based on style and affinity rather than art historical categories and classical canons of taste.⁴⁸

But Malraux was not trying to write a history of art.⁴⁹ Although he was principally known as a novelist, in the years following 1935 Malraux's writing moved to the philosophy of art.⁵⁰ His existentialist interrogation into the character of the museum in framing the reception of art signaled a radical departure from the previously upheld analytic and continental schools of

⁴⁷ Ibid. 104 - For a more contemporary art historical reading of Malraux's theory, see Barker, Emma (ed.) "Introduction" *Contemporary Cultures of Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 8-12.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 19

⁴⁹ Allan, Derek. *Art and the Human Adventure: André Malraux's Theory of Art* (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2009), 131-132.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 73 - Literary theorist Derek Allen notes that after the publication of "*La Condition Humaine*" (1933), Malraux moved away from acerbic tales of failed revolutions towards larger existentialist questions about the state of the human experience in the modern world. The author argues that Malraux's writing after 1934 switched from questions about "what is man" to the question of "what is art?" (See also, Allan, 47).

aesthetic thought.⁵¹ Malraux's theory is a synthesis of three sources: Heinrich Wölfflin's "Principals of Art History" (1917); Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler's "Rise of Cubism" (1918); and, Walter Benjamin "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"(1936).⁵² His adoption of key elements of Benjamin's analysis on mechanical reproducibility was particularly instrumental to the development of his concept of a *museum without walls*. Malraux's incorporation of Benjamin's thinking into his work recognized photography's capacity for restructuring and fundamentally changing the *purpose* of works of art, and in turn the museum itself.⁵³ For Benjamin, the advent of photographic reproducibility would allow art to be 'emancipated' from the elitist zones of the museum and dispersed into the social and political spheres.⁵⁴ Malraux recognized the potential of photographic reproducibility for recoding the aesthetic engagement with art through the abstraction of styles, rather than through the historical

⁵¹ Ibid, 16 - Art in Malraux's view, as noted by Allan, is "one of the ways in which the significance of man is affirmed against chaos." (See also, Allan, 73).

⁵² Krauss, "Ministry of Fate," 1001.

⁵³ Ibid. 1001-1002

⁵⁴ Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations* (trans.) Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Book, 1969), 224. – Although Malraux did not share Benjamin's politics, he understood photography as functioning as the 'printing press' of art history, offering 'a new step forward' in promoting a larger familiarity with art. (See also, Allan, 258.)

progression of the canon.⁵⁵ Malraux argued that photographic reproducibility has the power to *re-contextualize* works of art far more profoundly than the museum's practice of removing works from their original context.⁵⁶

Not surprisingly, Malraux's concept of a *museum without walls* has been taken up by varied theorists, including Rosalind Krauss, in "Postmodernism's Museum without Walls" (1986); Hal Foster, in "The Archive without Museums" (1996); and Douglas Crimp, in "On the Museum's Ruins"(1980). Respectively, Krauss, Foster and Crimp, had sought to revisit Malraux as part of a sustained interrogation surrounding the discursive and ideological operations of the museum, which gained prominence in the years following the 1960s. Rosalind Krauss extends Malraux's theory to conduct an architectural analysis of modernist museum spaces. Analysing the spatial arrangements employed by Mies van der Rohe, le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, Krauss reflects on the embodied experience of the museum visitor.⁵⁷ Through her critique of the paradigms on which art has historically been framed, valued and systematized, Krauss observes that the *musée*

⁵⁵ See, Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." 220; see also, Malraux, "Museum Without Walls," 46.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Krauss, Rosalind "Postmodernism's Museum without Walls." *Thinking About Exhibitions* (ed.) Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandra Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 342.

imaginaire is “another way of writing ‘modernism,’ that is, of transcoding the aesthetic notions upon which modern art was built” (or the idea of art as autonomous entity and the notion of *l’art pour l’art*).⁵⁸ Drawing parallels between Malraux, Krauss argues that the visitor, as the embodied receiver of the unfolding narratives and visual trajectory of the museum, becomes insinuated into this spatial dialectic of totalizing account of art.⁵⁹

In his exploration of an ‘archive without museums’, Hal Foster synthesizes Malraux, Benjamin and Foucault in order to consider the archival transformation of the museum vis-à-vis the electronic preconditions that inform the state of visual culture (and art history) at the end of the twenty-first century.⁶⁰ His critique of the primacy of the *visual* in visual culture, posits the ‘dialectic of seeing’ afforded by digital technologies has reshaped the institutional arrangements of the museum. Indeed, “If, according to Malraux, Foster asks, “the museum guarantees the status of art and photographic reproduction permits the affinities of style, what might a digital reordering

⁵⁸ Ibid. 344

⁵⁹ Ibid. 345

⁶⁰ Foster, Hal. “The Archive without Museums.” *October* vol. 77 (1996): 97. –In his essay, Foster refers to the ‘archive’, as proposed by Foucault, as a system that governs the structures of discourse. See also, Foster, Hal. “Archives of Modern Art.” *October* vol. 99 (2002): 81-95.

underwrite? *An archive without museums?*⁶¹ Foster argues that the convergence between the museum and digital technologies synthesizes cultural information into a 'virtual database', which dissolves the materiality of objects into a state of 'visual semiotic referentiality'.⁶² As posited by Foster, this new form of digital visual culture, independent of the walls of the museum, acts as a surrogate for inscribing cultural value that is subsequently projected onto the digital image performing a form of 'imaginary mimesis'.⁶³

In contrast to the thinking of Foster, Douglas Crimp directly critiques Malraux's adoption of photography as an extension of the museum. If, the museum is built on the sustained model of assembling and ordering artefacts and works of art into a homogenous system of representation (for example modernist narratives of art history), then, the spatial juxtaposition of fragments (the presentation of objects divorced from their original context as a static collection) reveals how museums function as a socially constructed space, which mediates subjective and inter-subjective experiences of

⁶¹ Ibid. 109

⁶² Ibid. 112

⁶³ Ibid. 116-17

works.⁶⁴ Crimp notes that, “any work of art that can be photographed can take its place in Malraux’s *super-museum*,” and argues that photography, as an organizing device that allows objects to enter the narrative of art history, reduces style into a state of ‘imagined cohesion.’⁶⁵ Here Crimp’s critique seeks to deconstruct this process of mediation, as a means of tracing the cultural transformation of the museum in the postmodern age.⁶⁶

These related, referential but distinct analyses of Malraux demonstrate a heightened sense of awareness of the discursive, visual and spatial operations of the museum. Although the critical approaches adopted by Krauss, Foster and Crimp do vary, they are the product of a particular moment within contemporary art criticism that was aiming to map the structural transformations of the museum since the emergence of postmodernism.⁶⁷ For Krauss and Crimp, they observed postmodernism as a break with the ‘aesthetic field of modernism’, while Foster conceived it as

⁶⁴ Crimp, Douglas. “On the Museum’s Ruins.” *October* vol. 13 (1980): 50.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 50, 52-53

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 43

⁶⁷ As members of the leftist contemporary art journal *October*, which has been attributed with introducing French continental philosophy to English speaking audiences in the late 1970s, their adoption of post-structuralist thought has come to define much of the discourse taking place from the 1970s onward.

a tension between ‘new and old modes’ of discourse.⁶⁸ Reflecting on Malraux’s adoption of Benjamin’s hypothesis on photographic reproducibility, Foster argues that the concept of a *museum without walls* is a ‘discursive act’ built on the cultural currency of ‘exhibition value’, which refers specifically to the ‘exchange-value’ enacted between the institution of art and its ability to transform art and its socio-cultural contexts.⁶⁹ As proposed by Foster, the notion of exhibition as exchange-value highlights the changing conditions that frame the exhibitionary practices of the art museum formulated by the canons and narratives of art history.⁷⁰

As the contemporary conditions of display, as both a mode of *presentation* and *representation*, move away from the traditional spaces associated with the museum, the field of curatorial practices has sought to adapt along side these shifting cultural frames.⁷¹ If, as argued by philosopher Arthur Danto that contemporary art has come to signify the end of a particular logic,

⁶⁸ Foster, Hal (ed.) “Postmodernism: A Preface.” *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), vii, ix. – Foster’s view of postmodernism, discussed here, posits a far more engaging approach to postmodernist critique. Rather than situating postmodernism in opposition to modernism, Foster more aptly conceives it as a means of deconstructing traditional paradigms.

⁶⁹ Foster, Hal. “Archives of Modern Art.” *October* vol. 99 (2002): 94. – Returning again to his investigation on the archival transformation of the museum, Foster notes, “for Foucault as for Malraux the very basis of this *imaginary museum* of modern art is discursive: it is all but created by ideas - the ideas of Style, Art, and Museum.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 95

⁷¹ Barker, *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, 13.

namely modernism, then, the introduction of postmodernism within museological discourses (as a means of shifting away from traditional codes, categories, and historical frames of reference) has brought about a new culture of display within the institutional operations of the art world.⁷² This convergence between old and new modes of representation is specifically what is at stake here in my re-visioning of Malraux's theory of a *museum without walls*. Indeed, constituting a judicious adaption of Malraux's writing, this study synthesizes approaches related to visual culture, questions of 'space' (both material and 'imaginary'), and the museum in order to posit conceptual model for examining the curatorial efficacy of street art. As a significant form of visual cultural production, street art is performed simultaneously *inside, outside, and across multiple spaces* in the public sphere. Not simply graffiti, and not quite gallery art, described by author Joe Austin, "street art is a new kind of visual cultural production that exceeds

⁷² Danto, Arthur. "Introduction: Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary." *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 10. – Danto's hypothesis on 'after the end of art' does not suggest the "death" of art parse, but the end of the grand narratives of art history. He argues that contemporary art has come to define an art produced within a certain structure of production never seen before in this history of art. More than simply a period or the art of the present moment, contemporary art is "what happens after there are no more periods in the master narrative of art". For a description of Danto's institutional theory of art, see Danto, Arthur. "The Art World." *Journal of Philosophy* vol. 61, no. 19 (1964): 571-584.

both categories.”⁷³ Photographic representations of street art – disseminated and circulated online – re-maps its social and spatial operations across multiple positions and sites within the public sphere. This multi-platform exchange between virtual and material modes of engagements with street art works serves to expand the regimes of visibility and the cultural operations of street art practices beyond the paradigms of the streets and the gallery to the mass-mediated platforms of the web. Therefore, considering street art in relation to the museum calls for new corresponding systems of assessment; one which takes into account the cultural impact of this art form and how it is registered within the changing landscape of visual and public culture.

Street Art: Shifting Cultural Frames

The street art movement despite its claims at resisting the trappings of the art market has found itself contending with a global, and truly *globalized*, art world. The entrance of the street art movement on the international stage in the mid 2000s, has achieved unprecedented critical and commercial interest, unseen since the likes of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring in

⁷³ Austin, Joe, “More to See than a Canvas in a White Cube: For an Art in the Streets.” *City* vol. 14, no. 1-2 (2010): 33.

the New York galleries in the 1980s.⁷⁴ Street art works have become valuable commodities, selling for record-breaking prices at auction houses and commercial galleries. Institutions like Sotheby's, Christie's and Phillips de Pury and Company regularly feature lots of contemporary street art in their auctions.⁷⁵ By 2008, works by notorious UK street artist Banksy have sold for prices in excess of \$1.9 million. High-profile museums like the Tate Modern and the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles have mounted large-scale blockbuster exhibitions dedicated to street art marking a new chapter in street art's institutional acceptance and long overdue recognition by the mainstream art world.⁷⁶ The Tate Modern, in 2008, commissioned seven internationally recognized street artists to produce large-scale works on the building's façade facing the Thames River. Showcasing the diversity of styles and street art practices taking place around the world, this exhibition marked the first major international exhibition of street art in the twenty-first century.⁷⁷ Three years later, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles organized "Art in the Streets", the first major American survey of

⁷⁴ Peiter, Sebastian (ed.) *Guerilla Arts* (London: Urban Canyons Ltd. 2009), 4.

⁷⁵ See, Nguyen, Patrick, and Stuart McKenzie (ed.) *Beyond the Street: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010) - Christie's: 68-69, Phillips de Pury and Company: 170-173, Sotheby's: 240-242.

⁷⁶ *Street Art*, Curator: Cedar Lewisohn. Tate Modern, London, UK: 23 May - 25 August, 2008; *Art in the Streets*, Curator: Jeffrey Deitch. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California: 17 April - 8 August, 2011.

⁷⁷ See, Lewisohn, Cedar. *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (London: Tate, 2008).

graffiti and street art hosted by a public art museum, in 2011.⁷⁸ The exhibition featured: works on canvas, installations, immersive environments, and commissions of graffiti and street art work, both inside and outside of the gallery. The exhibition attracted over 201,352 visitors between the months of April and August, making it the most highly attended exhibition in the museum's history.⁷⁹ Publishers specializing in glossy illustrated coffee-table books have released a number of titles devoted to street art and graffiti; they can be seen on floor displays at big-box bookstores next to titles on canonical artists, fashion houses, and modern design. In 2011, for example, the publisher Thames and Hudson released the first art historical survey text on graffiti and street art as part of their "World of Art" series.⁸⁰ There are countless websites, blogs, Tumblr, Flickr and social media sites devoted to showcasing images of street art and graffiti and works produced across disparate urban centers are made readily available via the networked communication channels of the Internet with just the tap of a keypad. In short, the proliferation of visual material in the digital realm represents a type of inadvertent triumph of the beliefs of both Benjamin and Malraux in the democratizing power of the mechanically reproduced image.

⁷⁸ Deitch, Jeffrey, et al. *Art in the Streets* (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2011)

⁷⁹ "201,352!" *The Curve - MOCA Blog*, 10 August, 2011

<http://sites.moca.org/thecurve/2011/08/10/201352/> (accessed 23 March, 2013).

⁸⁰ Waclawek, Anna. *Graffiti and Street Art* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. 2011).

This said, however, as a cultural phenomenon born in the afterglow of postmodernity, street art occupies a paradoxical relationship to the mechanisms of late-capitalist culture, which further complicates the discourse surrounding this genre of art. I will, in turn, return to exploring some of the complexities and nuances surrounding the street art movement that inform its critical reception. For now, it bears to be said that the world picture at the turn of the twenty-first century that frames the cultural reception of street art practices has undergone a number of seismic shifts since the emergence of the graffiti art movement in New York in the 1970s. Whereas, graffiti art was marketed to the art world and the media in the 1980s based on romantic narratives that celebrated graffiti writers as “heroic young men creating art by beating the system”.⁸¹ At the time of this writing, it can be said that a new generation of street artists have come to their practice through far less *salable* avenues, (all the while aware of the institutional character of art).⁸² Generally speaking, these artists have been initiated to the rituals and the language of the art world, having come to their

⁸¹ Powers, Lynn A. "Whatever Happened to the Graffiti Art Movement?" *Journal of Popular Culture* vol. 29, no. 4 (1996): 139-140; Galleries sought to co-opt the alternative aesthetic and the subcultural caché of graffiti by promoting works based on the impoverished backgrounds of the artists. See also, Lachmann, Richard. "Graffiti as Career and Ideology." *American Journal of Sociology* (1988): 246-247.

⁸² Vaughan, "Institutional Change, The Concept of the Avant-Garde and the Example of Graffiti," 285.

street practices through professional arts programs.⁸³ For example, American street artist Shepard Fairey, who in 2009 gained international recognition for his “Hope” poster of Barack Obama, began experimenting with his signature style of constructivist inspired stickers of Andre the Giant while a student at the Rhode Island School of Design in the early 1990s.⁸⁴ Therefore, unlike the graffiti art boom of the 1980s, the social and cultural conditions that inform how this genre of art is produced and consumed has changed significantly.⁸⁵ Caught between its subcultural roots, the mechanisms of the art world and globalized capitalism, the cultural impact of street art embodies an art form caught ‘in limbo’ (as suggested by curator and designer Robert Klanten) continuously negotiating between its mainstream acceptance and the desire to maintain its autonomy.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid. - My emphasis here is to stress those romantic notions that position street art as a form of ‘outsider art’, existing outside of the mechanisms of the art world, are no longer applicable. I would even go as far to claim that it is this internalization of the logic of the art world that has allowed street artist to achieve such widespread critical and commercial success.

⁸⁴ Neelon, Caleb, and Michael Wilson. “Artist Biographies: Shepard Fairey.” *Art in the Streets*. Deitch, Jeffrey, et al. (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2011), 306.

⁸⁵ See, Lewisohn, Cedar. *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (London: Tate, 2008); Nguyen, Patrick, and Stuart McKenzie (ed.) *Beyond the Street: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010); Powers, Stephen. *The Art of Getting Over: Graffiti at the Millennium* (New York: Macmillan, 1999).

⁸⁶ Klanten, Robert. “In Limbo.” *Beyond the Street: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art* (ed.) Patrick Nguyen and Stuart McKenzie (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010), 5.

The street art movement encompasses a diversity of styles and approaches, ranging from painting, stencils, collage, installation, to performance.⁸⁷ While it is possible to produce street art works on canvas, and then have them displayed in a white cube gallery, something inevitably gets lost in this process of transposition. Street art defines itself as an art form developed in urban public spaces. By removing it from its intended context, that is the *streets*, it loses its aesthetic efficacy. For something to be called 'street art' the work must use 'the streets' as an artistic resource - either through the work's material engagement with the urban environment, or its intentional use in the creation of the work.⁸⁸ As an art form founded in its socio-cultural positioning in the everyday, street artist's aesthetic engagement with urban spaces is crucial to distinguishing it from other forms of galleried art practices.⁸⁹ Street artists working in the urban landscape manifests an embodied logic conceptually informed by its positioning in the social realms of the city.⁹⁰ Isolating works from its social context simultaneously recodes

⁸⁷ See, Ganz, Nicholas and Tristan Manco. *Graffiti World: Street Art from Five Continents* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004).

⁸⁸ Riggle, Nicholas. "Street Art: The Transfiguration of the Commonplaces." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 68, no. 3 (2010): 245.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 244

⁹⁰ Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics* (trans.) Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods, and Mathieu Copeland (France: Les presses du reel, 2002), 14. - Bourriaud's concept of relational art, describes practices that are theoretically informed through human interactions rather than independent and private space. I adopt it liberally here, as a way of describing

its material engagement with the cityscape and its aesthetic operations, transforming it into a form of pastiche, an empty signifier that imitates styles without creating any new meaning.⁹¹

However, as many street artists cross the frontiers from the streets, the gallery, and the networked communication platforms of Internet, their work takes on a new dimension in response to its context. The intentional use of the urban environment is integral to defining the aesthetic efficacy and significance surrounding contemporary street art practices. As the cultural frames that inform the contexts of display shift and extend beyond the zones of the city, the artistic and discursive functions of street art practices become remapped. Commenting on the placement of street art in a gallery context, Brooklyn based street artist Swoon (who has exhibited her work in a number of high profile galleries and public art project) notes: “an artist’s street practice transforms materially, spatially and visually when performed indoors.”⁹² This is not to suggest that their work becomes ‘diluted’ or ‘tamed’ when brought inside the gallery. Rather, it is to say that it creates a

street art’s conceptual and aesthetic contingency on its positioning within public and social spaces.

⁹¹ Jameson, Frederick. *Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 17.

⁹² Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 174.

new environment that lies between the ideological spaces of the streets and the gallery. This is also true of images of street art online. Divorced from the original context of its production, street works shift the social operations of the city to the networked communication platforms of the Internet. Street works, as they appear on the web, create *relational correspondences* between the physical site of the piece and the visual economy of signs that code urban spaces.⁹³ Beyond simply a *simulacrum* of the original, online images of street works perform a *symbolic exchange* between the localizable and the 'imaginary' spaces of the city, effectively creating an *interstitial space*. The role that the Internet has played in the development of contemporary street art practices cannot be under emphasized. Processes of digital mediation have inscribed another layer onto the cultural operations of contemporary street art practices. The intersection between digital communication technologies and street art represents phenomenon of convergence, performed between media screens and artistic practices, public and private spaces and the ideologies of place and culture.⁹⁴

⁹³ Baudrillard, Jean. "Kool Killer, or the Insurrection of Signs." *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (trans.) Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 78.

⁹⁴ Banet-Weiser, Sarah. "Convergence on the Street: Rethinking the Authentic/Commercial Binary." *Cultural Studies* vol. 45, no. 4 (2011): 643.

The Crucial 'Where' of Street Art

Street art reveals that no space is neutral by challenging the contested spaces of the public realm and the intramural operations of the gallery.⁹⁵ It invites a re-assessment of the thresholds between art and ideologies of 'place'. Any critical inquiry of street art requires to take into account, what geographer Tim Cresswell refers to as, the "crucial 'where' of graffiti" – an a social geography approach to mapping the complex interrelationship between sociocultural expectations of 'place'.⁹⁶ Examining the cultural repositioning of graffiti from the streets to New York's Soho galleries in the late 1970s, Cresswell examined how the ideological underpinnings of 'place' codified and restructured its cultural value and the critical reception.⁹⁷ He notes that, at the same time as the anti-graffiti campaigns raged on in streets of New York City, graffiti was being 'transformed' into to 'art' by the gallery system, which sought to co-opt and profit off of its subcultural currency.⁹⁸ Highlighting these contradictions, Cresswell explains how these oppositional responses to graffiti during this period reveal the 'power of

⁹⁵ Diederichsen, "Street art as a Threshold Phenomena," 281.

⁹⁶ See, Cresswell, Tim. "The Crucial 'Where' of Graffiti." *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 40.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 37

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 51-52; see also, Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 58.

place' by constructing and affirming ideologies of 'normalcy' and 'deviance'.⁹⁹

Taking graffiti off the streets and placing it within the realm of 'official' culture (the gallery) displaces its status from a form of civil disobedience into a sanctioned art form.¹⁰⁰ Described by Cresswell, this ideological repositioning is embodied in the "Post-Graffiti" exhibition organized by the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in 1983.¹⁰¹ And as suggested by the exhibition's title, there is a discursive shift from a form of hip-hop culture performed in the streets to a legitimate art form when street art is relocated to inside the gallery.¹⁰² "Post-Graffiti" attempted to legitimize graffiti in the eyes of the mainstream public. "[T]oday" wrote Sidney Janis in the exhibition catalogue. "[the graffiti artist's] painting, no longer transitory or ephemeral, joins the tradition of contemporary art and is recognized as an existing valid

⁹⁹ Ibid. 37

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 50

¹⁰¹ Deitch, Jeffrey et al. *Art in the Streets* (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2011), 18 - As one of the most well known and frequently cited early exhibitions of graffiti in New York during the 1980s, "Post-Graffiti" has been both acclaimed and hotly criticized as a critical turning point within the history of graffiti and the street art movement. For a contemporaneous cultural critique, see, Danto, Arthur. "Post-Graffiti Art: Crash, Daze." *The Nation* (12 January 1985): 24-27.

¹⁰² Cresswell, "The Crucial 'Where' of Graffiti", 51-52.

movement."¹⁰³ Bringing graffiti from the margins to the mainstream, this exhibition attempted to capture the 'spontaneous creations' of graffiti writers, while submitting it as the next logical progression in art history.¹⁰⁴

When artists such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat took their works from the streets into the gallery in the early 1980s, the art world and mainstream media celebrated them for successfully making the transition from producing illegal graffiti to 'high art'.¹⁰⁵ Haring and Basquiat (both of whom participated in the "Post-Graffiti" exhibition) were considered as two of the most distinguished graffiti artists in their time.¹⁰⁶ And although neither of them fit neatly within the hip-hop graffiti writing subculture, they were marketed to the art world at-large based on their artistic activities on the streets.¹⁰⁷ Before Basquiat began producing his neo-expressionist works on canvas, he was introduced to art world via his tag SAMO (that stood for

¹⁰³ Sidney Janis, "Post -Graffiti" (1983), quoted by Powers, "Whatever Happened to the Graffiti Art Movement?" 140.

¹⁰⁴ Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 29-30 - Scholars have adopted the term 'post-graffiti' as a mode of tracing the genealogy from 'graffiti' to 'street art.' The prefix 'post' does not suggest the 'death of 'authentic' graffiti.' Instead it has been adopted to suggest an expansion and aesthetic evolution in the social operations and visual language of graffiti. See also, Dickens, Luke. "Finders Keepers: Performing the Street, the Gallery and Spaces In-between." *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* vol. 4, no.1 (2008): 5-6.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 62

¹⁰⁶ Cresswell, "The Crucial 'Where' of Graffiti", 36; see also, Lewisohn, Cedar. *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (London: Tate, 2008), 93.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 60

‘Same Old Shit’), which appeared across New York’s gallery district between the years of 1978 and 1980.¹⁰⁸ His cryptic messages, like “SAMO as a neo art form”, written in black wide-tipped marker did not employ the same stylistic conventions associated with ‘wildstyle’ graffiti writing’s brightly coloured overlapping letters framed by hard-edged lines.¹⁰⁹ Basquiat exploited the aesthetics of graffiti and street painting, as a means of branding himself as a neo-bohemian ‘outsider artist.’¹¹⁰

Keith Haring, like Basquiat, gained recognition for his illegal drawing in subway stations between 1981 and 1985.¹¹¹ His serialized chalk drawings produced on covered advertising posters, made his distinctive brand of street style instantly recognizable within the city.¹¹² Haring’s fusion of tactics of urban inscription with his fine arts training blurred the lines between graffiti and pop art.¹¹³ Though developing his own distinctive visual language of simple cartoon-like renderings of people, televisions, spaceships, dogs, etc., Haring adopted the conventions of the graffiti subculture and transformed

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 62 - Basquiat’s street works were not produced in the outer boroughs. His deliberate choice of ‘tagging’ locations within the city’s gallery districts was a strategy for marketing himself to the art world at large.

¹⁰⁹ Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 94.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 62-63.

¹¹² Deitch et al, *Art in the Streets*, 100.

¹¹³ Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 63.

the signature-based 'tag' into an icon (exemplified by his 'radiant baby' imagery).¹¹⁴ Although Haring was not strictly a graffiti artist, he understood the currency behind hybridizing styles in order to form a new dialogue with the art world.¹¹⁵ Haring and Basquiat's artistic careers and their contributions to expanding the visual vocabulary of graffiti cannot be ignored. However each, through their respective forays into galleries, represents a significant example of the cultural logic embodied in the inside/outside dialectic.

Since 2004, infamous UK street artist Banksy has propelled himself to the stage center of the international street art movement. Described as "the Banksy effect" by Marc and Sara Schiller, co-founders of the Wooster Collective, they argue that Banksy, as an entry point for audiences into the urban art movement, has helped create a market that did not previously exist.¹¹⁶ His practice extends beyond the binary logic of the streets/gallery to encompass: illegal street works; museum and public interventions; gallery installations; commercial canvases and prints; and related merchandise (t-

¹¹⁴ Ibid. – For this reason, Haring has been attributed as being a key figure for influencing street art's break from signature based graffiti writing.

¹¹⁵ Deitch et al, *Art in the Streets*, 11.

¹¹⁶ Schiller, Marc. "The Banksy Effect." *The Wooster Collective*, 13 February, 2007 <http://www.woostercollective.com/post/the-banksy-effect> (accessed 7 March, 2013). - For some, Banksy's position at the center of the international street art scene remains contentious. However the omnipresence of his work cannot be ignored.

shirts, books, posters, etc.) The constant stream of media converge surrounding him notorious 'art pranks' has intensified the reach of his work across multiple cultural fields beyond the spaces of the streets and the gallery, into the wider fields of popular and visual culture.¹¹⁷ Cultural geographer Analyzing Banksy's "Peckham Rock", a museological intervention at the British Museum in 2005, cultural geographer Luke Dickens extends Cresswell's inside/outside paradigm further to include the mass-media.¹¹⁸ A chiseled piece of concrete inscribed with a crude drawing of a Neanderthal pushing a shopping cart and illegally mounted in the British Museum, "Peckham Rock", became a huge media spectacle. Mapping the 'journey' of the rock across the territories of the streets, the museum, and the media, Dickens analyses how contemporary street art practices operate across multiple fields of social encounters.¹¹⁹ Banksy's situationist approach to street art reveals a keen understanding of 'the society as spectacle' making him one of the most internationally recognized contemporary street artists.¹²⁰ Despite Banksy's contentious positioning at the forefront of the street art movement, he is an important example for considering how contemporary street art practices have extended the inside/outside

¹¹⁷ See, Peiter, Sabastian (ed.) *Guerrilla Art*. (London: Urban Canyons Ltd. 2009.)

¹¹⁸ Dickens, "Placing Post-Graffiti: the Journey of the Peckham Rock," 477.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 487.

¹²⁰ Deitch et al. *Art in the Streets*, 14.

paradigm beyond the binary logic of the streets and the gallery, to include the media, the web, and the virtual and material spaces of the city.

By considering how the discursive placing of street art mediates the experience of the work, Dickens highlights how the shifting cultural frames in which these forms of urban art practices recode the conditions of visibility of street art practices - the socio-cultural structures that govern the spaces and circumstances of its reception.¹²¹ This question of the crucial 'where' of street art highlights the importance of 'place' in codifying our experience of the work. Therefore, street art practices requires flexible and corresponding systems of display. This includes considering: street art's position within the matrix of contemporary cultural production and visual culture; its material and aesthetic engagement with urban spaces; how these forms of site-specific practices are registered within the public sphere; and, the impact that globalization and the increasing prevalence of the Internet have played in the ways that the city is imagined, affected and represented through street works.

¹²¹ Dickens, "Placing Post-Graffiti: the Journey of the Peckham Rock," 487.

The Transfiguration of the Museum without Walls

To conceive of a *street museum without walls* calls for a critical re-assessment the spatial and organizing functions of the museum and how the preexisting curatorial operations of site-specificity can be translated to the streets. It does not call for the destruction of the institutional apparatus of the museum, *per say*. Rather, it engages with longstanding discourses surrounding the nature of the museum and institutional critique. As the conditions of visibility surrounding street art practices change, so must ideological apparatuses of display. By pushing Malraux's theory into this new domain, questions of visibility and display take on a new critical dimension. This *transfiguration*, to borrow from philosopher Arthur Danto, recodes the discrete spheres of the museum and the quotidian.¹²² It not only questions the ontology of the museum, as a specialized container for the display and aesthetic appreciation of art, but also brings to bear how the questions of visibility mediate the position of street art within the praxis of art history and visual culture.

¹²² See, Danto, Arthur. "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol.33, no. 2 (1974): 139-148. My use of the term 'transfiguration' stems from Danto's institutional definition art in relation to his mediation on Andy Warhol's Brillo Box.

Grounded in a mediation of how art has historically been seen, Malraux's concept the *museum without walls* considers not only how the edifice of the museum shapes our intellectual and aesthetic engagement with works of art, but the central role that the museum has historically played in constructing and shaping the grand-narrative of art history.¹²³ Malraux's text reflects on the nature of the museum and the potential that photographic reproducibility would have for inscribing new forms within the narrative of art history. A champion of photography, Malraux imagined a time when the abundance of reproducible images would inevitably transform the nature of the museum, and subsequently the field of art history itself.¹²⁴ Malraux has famously been quoted as saying that the history of art is "the history of what is photographable."¹²⁵ He believed that reproducibility would revolutionize the relationship between the viewer and the work of art, in some cases, exposing viewers to works that they would otherwise not have the opportunity to experience. Malraux theorized about how our ability to

¹²³ Malraux, "Museum Without Walls," 44.

¹²⁴ Allan, Derek, "André Malraux, the Art Museum, and the Digital Musée Imaginaire." Paper presented at the symposium *Imaging Identity*, at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, Australia, 15-17 July, 2010).

<http://home.netspeed.com.au/derek.allan/musee%20imaginaire.htm> (accessed 15 February, 2013) - Reflecting on art history books, as a means through which students learn the history of art, Malraux observes that decontextualized representations of works of art vis-à-vis photographic reproduction, ultimately rendering the history of cultural objects as 'art history'.

¹²⁵ Malraux, "Museum Without Walls", 30.

access a multiplicity works of art scattered across continents and museum collections, which could never be assembled within a single physical structure, effectively creates a *museum without walls*.¹²⁶

Malraux's writing received considerable criticism from a number of his contemporaries, most notably Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Bourdieu, and E. H. Gombrich.¹²⁷ These scholars, particularly Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, critiqued his writing for propagating conservative and elitist notion about the role of art.¹²⁸ Accused as being a 'populist' and a 'theocrat'; his formalist approach and his thesis of a universal conception of art still remains heavily contested.¹²⁹ Because Malraux's theory of art ran contrary to the French and continental school of philosophy that emerged in the post-war years, it quickly fell out of fashion.¹³⁰ Art historian Emma Barker argues that Malraux's theory is "a form of cultural imperialism, imposing a modern western conception of 'art' as well as modernist aesthetics on objects from different cultures and

¹²⁶ Ibid. 16

¹²⁷ Allan, Derek. *Art and the Human Adventure: André Malraux's Theory of Art*, 17.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 20-21 – It also bears to be noted that because Malraux was known primarily as a novelist a number of his critics attacked his lack of academic credentials.

¹²⁹ Krauss, Rosalind. "Ministry of Fate," 1000.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

periods.”¹³¹ However, Malraux’s ‘existentialist interrogation into the nature of art’, and his ‘quasi-religious belief in the redemptive power of art’ are a testimony of the cultural turbulence of post-war France.¹³² Despite his critics, Malraux predicted a series of seismic shifts that would take place after the modernist period, namely, the expansion of the canon of art history, how we access works of art, and globalization.

Fast-forward almost fifty years later and into the era of virtual representation, Malraux’s conception of a *museum without walls* still resonates. His theory enables a *massive expansion* of the discursive fields of art and the nature of the museum. Malraux observed that alongside the museum “a new field of art experience, vaster than any so far known (and standing in the same relation to the art museum), is now, thanks to [photographic] reproduction, being opened up.”¹³³ This ‘metamorphosis’ of the museum, as predicted by Malraux, has had far reaching implications within museological discourses

¹³¹ Barker, *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, 10.

¹³² See, Krauss, “Ministry of Fate”, 1000-1006; Allan, *Art and the Human Adventure: André Malraux's Theory of Art*, 47-77; McClellan, Andrew. *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 40-41. - It can be read as a response to the cultural devastation following the Second World War. His desire to preserve, and make accessible, the universal history of art was a response to the loss and displacement of art historical masterpieces experienced throughout Europe in the post-war years.

¹³³ Malraux, “Museum Without Walls,” 46.

for rethinking the traditional paradigms of display.¹³⁴ His theories have been posthumously taken up as shorthand for exhibition practices taking place outside the museum, which seek to deconstruct its hegemonic functions.¹³⁵ These forms of ‘institutional critique’ continue to be an ongoing interest for scholars, theorists, critics, curators, and artists alike. In her discussion of how contemporary art biennials have changed the landscape of curating and exhibition production, critic and curator, Sara Arrhenius, describes the biennial as “a new form of institution, a *museum without walls* [...] played out in an increasingly globalized art scene.”¹³⁶ Within the field of new media studies, Malraux’s theory has been influential in building the discourse surrounding the curatorial possibilities of the Internet. Christiane Paul, curator and digital art theorist, adopted it as part of her analysis of online curatorial practice and net art: “net art seems to call for a *museum without walls*, a parallel, distributed, living information space that is open to interferences by artists, audiences, and curators - a space for exchange, collaborative creation and presentation that is transparent and flexible.”¹³⁷ In both cases,

¹³⁴ See, Barker, *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, 12.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 8

¹³⁶ Arrhenius, Sara. "Independent Curating within Institutions Without Walls." *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating* (ed.) Steven Rand and Heather Kouris (New York: apex art, 2007), 100.

¹³⁷ Paul, "Flexible Contexts, Democratic Filtering and Computer-Aided Curating: Models for Online Curatorial Practice," 85.

Arrhenius and Paul are using Malraux as a means of describing spaces that extend the operations of the museum beyond its physical structure: a space that resides outside of the institutional walls but still runs parallel to it.¹³⁸

Malraux's theory has provided useful theoretical tools for the development of 'virtual museums' spaces. In the late 1990s museological practices began exploring digitization as a means of making their collections accessible to the public online.¹³⁹ As noted by theorist Antonio M. Battro, "we are witnessing a new transformation in the meaning of a work of art and the birth of the 'virtual museum', a new kind of museum which is the product of the prodigious evolution of the *imaginary museum*."¹⁴⁰ Tracing the adoption of digital technology within museological practices, Battro argues that in the twenty-first century digital reproducibility has replaced Malraux's photographs and colour plates.¹⁴¹ The central premise of the 'virtual museum' is a collection of digital images of objects and artworks presented in an online visual database. More elaborate iterations of virtual museums

¹³⁸ This can be attributed to the fact that practices now associated with 'institutional critique', as suggested by artist and critic Andrea Fraser, have become institutionalized. See, Fraser, Andrea. "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique." *Artforum* vol.44, no. 1 (2005): 100.

¹³⁹ Graham, Beryl and Sarah Cook. *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 176.

¹⁴⁰ Battro, "From Malraux's Imaginary Museum to the Virtual Museum," 137.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 141-142.

allow viewers to experience interactive interpretive media content, guided tours of galleries and collections, or augmented reality enhanced virtual spaces designed to replicate the physical ritual of visiting the museum.¹⁴²

This argumentation of the digitally mediated, or virtual spaces (depending on the complexity of the website coding), is more than a reflection (or *simulacra*) of the embodied museum experience. They have served to extend the museum beyond its physical architecture. The convergence between digital technologies and museological practices, as argued by digital media theorist Vince Dziekan, allows the processes of exhibition making and its spatial practices to be emancipated from fixed rigid boundaries, towards more open ended models of curatorial design.¹⁴³

But the ‘virtual museums’ of the late 1990s do not account for the politics of ownership (or some might argue, the lack thereof) of street art practices. By its very nature of being performed in the public sphere, street art contravenes the notion of art as object.¹⁴⁴ Inescapably, issues of

¹⁴² Ibid. 144

¹⁴³ Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*, 7-8.

¹⁴⁴ Ironically, there have been a number of instances in the UK, where property owners have chiseled of Banksy’s works off the exteriors of buildings to sell them in auction; see, Ryzik, Melena. “Another Banksy Mural to Go From Wall to Auction.” *New York Times*, 13 August, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/14/arts/design/another-banksy-mural-to-go-from-wall-to-auction.html?_r=3& (accessed 21 September, 2013).

ephemerality pose a significant challenge for curators and institutions for the collection and preservations of street art works.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, my interest in revisiting Malraux's theory goes beyond the formation of virtual museum spaces. My investigation examines how the seemingly discreet spheres of the museum and the street can be redeployed online to create a form of *interstitial space*; one that takes into account how these social spheres are registered through the operations of the museum.¹⁴⁶ However, the question remains, how do we translate the exhibitionary character of the museum to the public spheres of the city?

Sites of Public Engagement

The positioning of street art practices within a museological discourse places the apparatus of the museum, real or 'imagined', as a *site of public engagement*. Street artists, by way of producing works in public spaces, shift the exhibitionary operations of the gallery into the realm of the city. The convergence between street art, photographic reproducibility and digital technology has extended the sites of engagement with this art form beyond the spheres of the streets and the gallery, to the mass media platforms of

¹⁴⁵ See, Masilamani, "Documenting Illegal Art: Collaborative Software, Online Environments and New York City's 1970s and 1980s Graffiti Art Movement," 4-14.

¹⁴⁶ Dewdney, Andrew, et al. "The Distributed Museum," 190.

the web. The ubiquity of street art images online not only shapes our interactions with these forms of urban art practices, it has helped propel the street art movement to the forefront of contemporary culture. The transformation of street art via the mass media into a contemporary form of 'populist art', as described by art historian Julian Stallabrass, has served to intensify the hype and following around the street art movement.¹⁴⁷ Although graffiti received considerable media attention during the peak of its popularity, via the music industry (music videos and album covers) and films like "Beat Street" (1984) and "Wild Style" (1983) street art has accomplished something drastically different than its predecessor.¹⁴⁸ Street art, through its convergence with the information economy of the Internet and social media platforms, has intensified its 'cult value,' allowing it to successfully reach a whole new generation of cultural consumers.¹⁴⁹

Street artists have cunningly adopted the gatekeeping role of the mass media in order to increase the state of visibility surrounding their works, while maintaining a certain amount of agency over their self-representation. After

¹⁴⁷ Stallabrass, Julian. "Elite Art in an Age of Populism." *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present* (ed.) Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 46.

¹⁴⁸ Powers, Lynn A. "Whatever Happened to the Graffiti Art Movement?" 139.

¹⁴⁹ Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 224-225, 231.

the graffiti art bubble burst in the late 1980s and the art world ended its flirtation with the graffiti scene, gallerists stopped showing graffiti works in their galleries and sold the remainder of their inventories for a fraction of the price.¹⁵⁰ There were only a small handful of notable exceptions within the scene that continued to pursue their artistic careers.¹⁵¹ As noted by author Robert Drew, "if graffiti art's rise was meteoric, its decline was equally sudden."¹⁵² The reasons for graffiti's fall from grace during this period are far too complex to adequately do it justice here. Tied to various socio-cultural factors, graffiti art's popularity was short lived, in part, because of the clash of cultures between the graffiti writing subcultural operations and the mechanisms of the art world.¹⁵³ However, in the 1990s graffiti continued to find an audience in underground publications and magazines. The *Art Crimes* website (artcrimes.org) - an online gallery of graffiti works, artist interviews and resources for practitioners within the scene - launched in

¹⁵⁰ Drew, Robert S. "Graffiti as Public and Private Art." *On The Margins of Art Worlds* (ed.) Larry Gross (Boulder, Co: Westview, 1995), 231.

¹⁵¹ Lachmann, "Graffiti as Career and Ideology," 248.- Lachman notes that after the market bubble collapsed in New York, many artists did not continue to pursue gallery careers. While some writers opted to enroll in art school become graphic designers. The artists that did continue to show in galleries adopted a more pop-influenced approach to graffiti.

¹⁵² Drew, "Graffiti as Public and Private Art," 231.

¹⁵³ For studies that examine the clash of cultures between the graffiti and the art world during this period see: Drew, "Graffiti as Public and Private Art," 231-248; Powers, "Whatever Happened to the Graffiti Art Movement?" 137-142; Susan Stewart, "Ceci Tuera Cela: Graffiti as Crime and Art," *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 210-231.

1994, is one of the earliest web platforms dedicated to promoting graffiti.¹⁵⁴

Operating for over twenty years, it set the precedent for the development of online social platforms for street art and graffiti. By the early 2000s, graffiti fanzine *12oz Prophet* (founded in 1993) was re-launched as a website.¹⁵⁵

These websites have allowed street artists to form ‘global urban networks of knowledge and practice,’ which I argue, has been an instrumental factor in the development and evolution of the street art movement because it cultivated a community of practice that allowed artists to learn and build off of previous techniques.¹⁵⁶ By the time the media began reporting on Banksy’s interventions at high profile museums like the Tate, the British Museum, the Louvre, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2004, the street art movement had exploded onto computer screens across the world. Now we can see street art world taking place across the globe with just the click of a button.

¹⁵⁴ “About us: What we're doing and why.” *Art Crimes*.

<http://www.graffiti.org/index/story.html> (accessed 27 September, 2013); *Art Crimes* (graffiti.org) was founded by Susan Farrell in 1994, while a graduate student at Georgia Tech. The site was launched as part of her M.A. thesis in Information Design and Technology – See also, Farrell, Susan. “Art Crimes: Building a Digital Museum.” *CultureWork: A Periodic Broadside for Arts and Culture Workers* vol. 2, no. 1 (1998) <http://pages.uoregon.edu/culturwk/culturework4.html> (accessed 15 March, 2014)

¹⁵⁵ Nguyen, and Stuart (ed.) *Beyond the Street: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art*, 44-45. - Founded by Allen Benedikt, *12oz Prophet* (12ozprophet.com) has been involved in the graffiti and street art scene since the mid 1980s. Benedikt wanted to create a online community dedicated to street art.

¹⁵⁶ Irvine, Martin. “The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture,” 238.

This heightened sense of visibility offered online is significant, because it has exponentially increased the audience for street art independent of the institutional apparatuses of the art world. The conspicuous consumption of digital images of street art online has helped initiate viewers into its aesthetic codes and language. Polemics surrounding ‘authenticity’ and ‘originality’ are irrelevant with street art. Unlike other forms of art whose significance is contingent on its status as an ‘original’ art object, street art relies on diffusion, repetition and serialized imagery.¹⁵⁷ Similar to graffiti writers who would continue to reproduce the same ‘tag’ as a way of making themselves visible and building their ‘street cred’, street artists intentionally diffuse the same piece across multiple sites.¹⁵⁸ UK street artist Ben Eine’s practice, which involves the creation of large colourful text-based graphic stencil works, relies heavily on serialization and repetition.¹⁵⁹ Although his work persistently responds and changes based on the space it was created, Eine, like other street artists is keenly aware of the importance of developing

¹⁵⁷ Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 133.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 32 - This reliance on being able to identify visual tropes and individual styles as a means of attributing works is a fascinating aspect of the street art scene. It brings to mind traditional art historical methodologies of connoisseurship, reminiscent of Bernard Berenson’s “Rudiments of Connoisseurship” (1894), as a way of distinguishing works by different artists.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 78

distinctive personalized styles in order to brand themselves.¹⁶⁰ Photographic reproducibility has not diminished the visual impact of street art practices. In fact, it has done quite the opposite. The ubiquity of digital images of street art works online has been instrumental in constructing the emerging canon of the global street art movement. As images of street art works are disseminated online, abstracted from their material supports, they become reduced to aesthetic form and style.¹⁶¹ This allows audiences, as Malraux states, to “[become] attuned to different types of art.”¹⁶²

As the state of visibility surrounding this particular genre of art shift ever more to the virtual realm, the social spheres that constitute how these forms are produced and consumed also change. What were once the main activities of the museum - to preserve, collect, and exhibit works of art - has now shifted online. Websites like *Art Crimes*, *12oz Prophet*, *the Wooster Collective*, *Street Art Utopia*, *Streetsy*, and *Street Art News*, among many, with their online databases dedicated to presenting street art and graffiti works, they

¹⁶⁰ Banet-Weiser, “Convergence on the Street: Rethinking the Authentic/Commercial Binary,” 644. - This in part has mainly to do with the fact that many street artists prefer to remain anonymous when creating illegal work, in order to not get prosecuted by local authorities. However Banet-Weiser situates this phenomenon within increasing normativity of brand culture.

¹⁶¹ Malraux, “Museum without Walls,” 17.

¹⁶² Ibid.

have taken up the *archival* functions of the museum. Due to the inevitably short lifespan of most street pieces, these works online are able to live on long after they have been removed or painted over, presumably because of the stability of digital virtual archives. These websites not only help to preserve works that might no longer exist in their original context, they have also been instrumental in shaping our '*cultural memory*' in the present¹⁶³ - where multiple actors are actively involved in shaping the cultural narrative of the street art movement.

The ubiquity of digital networked culture has allowed many street artists to accomplish something drastically different than the previous art movements before it. Using the mass media as a *medium*, street artists have cunningly adopted online and social media platforms as a tool for documenting and disseminating their works.¹⁶⁴ For instance, many street artists will post images of newly executed works on their social media sites, like Facebook or Twitter. The sense of immediacy afforded by these online platforms is significant because they allow street works to be made readily available to a mass public in near real-time. As UK graffiti artist Adam Neate explains, "you

¹⁶³ See, Bal, *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*.

¹⁶⁴ Neelon, Caleb, "Ten Years of Art Crimes: The Effects and Educational Functions of the Internet in Graffiti", *Art Crimes* (1996)
http://www.graffiti.org/faq/ten_years_of_art_crimes.html (accessed 18 February, 2013).

can paint a wall in Australia, and in a matter of hours it's on all the forums and blogs - if you're Banksy, it gets on the news.”¹⁶⁵ The *simultaneity* of digital media flows affect how street art is produced and consumed online. As people share, recirculate, and reproduce content online, the traditional paradigms of spectatorship become multiplied. The active participation and exchanges between artists and audiences in broadcasting digital content redistributes the relationships between sender and receiver, to include a multiplicity of agents who collaboratively contribute to shaping street art’s cultural currency. It recodes the structures of information and communication between the creators and receivers of the message, to include collective process of production, circulation, distribution, consumption, and reproduction.¹⁶⁶ However, does the meaning of the work remain the same as it is circulated and reproduced online.

¹⁶⁵ Fisher, Alice. “How the Tate got streetwise.” *The Observer*, Sunday May 11, 2008 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/may/11/art.exhibition> (accessed March 17, 2013).

¹⁶⁶ Hall, Stuart. “Encoding, Decoding,” 478.

II

Imaging and Imagining the City: Spaces, Places, and Non-Sites

Through the creation of online social networks dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of street art practices, *the sites of public engagement* have shifted the social spheres and mediating apparatuses of the museum online, providing audiences access to the diversity of street art styles taking place across the globe. Street artists, as argued by visual theorist Martin Irvine “continually code-switch back and forth between the city as a material structure and the ‘city of bits’ [...] With proliferating websites and popular media coverage, most street artists are not only aware of being seen on a global stage, speaking locally and globally, but they actively contribute to the *global Web museum without walls*.”¹⁶⁷ This redistribution of the site of engagement with street art practices not only calls for a reassessment of the traditional spaces for accessing art, but also brings to bear the continual change within the global-local matrix.¹⁶⁸ Digital technology, through separating the photograph from its material supports, has taken the field of

¹⁶⁷ Irvine, Martin. “The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture,” 245.

¹⁶⁸ Lee, Young Chul. “Curating in a Global Age” *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating* (ed.) Steven Rand and Heather Kouris (New York: apex art, 2007), 108-118.

cultural production and projected it onto a global stage.¹⁶⁹ If the apparatus of the museum abstracts works of art and frames them within a homogenous system of representation (the exhibition, the history of art, style, etc.), then, digital representations of street art online produce a discursive inversion between the localizable and 'imagined' sense of place.¹⁷⁰ Urban spaces become re-mapped across semiotic and referential fields of inter-subjective lived experiences. This does not suggest the estrangement of 'aura' of original.¹⁷¹ Digitally mediated representations of street art draw on a shared understanding of the contemporary urban experience, which has emerged as a direct by-product of globalization.¹⁷² These online strategies re-codify the relationships between artists, the public, and institutions, to collectively produce new representations and modes of *being in the city*.¹⁷³

Urban spaces - streets, buildings, city walls and alleyways - are connecting nodes where social and spatial relations are enacted within the symbolic economy of the city. Street artists' discursive use of public walls interrogates the ideologies of space by fostering a critical exchange between the material

¹⁶⁹ Battro, "From Malraux's Imaginary Museum to Virtual Museum," 136.

¹⁷⁰ Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins," 50.

¹⁷¹ Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 221.

¹⁷² Irvine, Martin. "The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture," 245.

¹⁷³ Dickens, "Placing Post-Graffiti: the Journey of the Peckham Rock", 488.

built environment of the city and the matrix of visual culture.¹⁷⁴ These practices that intervene into the realm of the everyday - or tactics, as proposed by Michel De Certeau transforms 'places' (fixed temporal locations), into 'spaces' (socially inscribed sites produced through human interactions).¹⁷⁵ Analyses of Malraux in the context of the distributed communication platforms of the web are significant to developing this concept of a *street museum without walls*. They allow the social spheres of the museum and the city to be placed along a metaphorical axis, where intramural and extramural zones are regarded as being mutually interchangeable.¹⁷⁶ Images of street art works online create relational correspondences between the physical spaces they inhabit and the symbolic economy of the city. These images, which serve to document works *in-situ*, position them within a localizable material context while also abstracting them, enacting a form of semiotic and discursive engagement with *space*.

¹⁷⁴ Waclawek. *Graffiti and Street Art*, 12.

¹⁷⁵ De Certeau. Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (trans.) Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 117-118.

¹⁷⁶ Neef, "Killing Kool: The Graffiti Museum," 421.

Photographic representations take the site-specific operations of street art practices and create *non-sites*, a space of metaphorical significance.¹⁷⁷ This is not to be confused with Augé's conception of 'non-places', liminal transitory spaces that are perceived to possess no cultural value, or with Baudrillard's 'non-signs', as a form of empty signifiers.¹⁷⁸ Instead they are abstract representations of actual sites, as suggested by American artist Robert Smithson.¹⁷⁹ As with Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (circa 1970), street art is not a discrete self-contained work. Its aesthetic and spatial engagement with city walls links it within a chain of signifiers, which extends beyond its physical location.¹⁸⁰ 'Virtual' spaces become overlapped with physical spaces, and distinctions between 'sites' and 'places' become dematerialized.¹⁸¹ The convergence between street art and digitally-mediated information networks, embodies a form of 'metaphysics of presence', through its visual translation of material spaces to virtual spaces,

¹⁷⁷ Smithson, Robert. "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites." *Selected Writings by Robert Smithson*, Website: Estate of Robert Smithson, courtesy of the James Cohan Gallery, New York. n.d. <http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm> (accessed 14 February, 2014).

¹⁷⁸ See, Neef, "Killing Kool: The Graffiti Museum," 419-421.

¹⁷⁹ Smithson, Robert. "Statement." *Situation* (ed.) Claire Doherty (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 35-36. – extract from interview with Dennis Wheeler (Vancouver, 1969)

¹⁸⁰ See, Owens, Craig. "Earthworks." *Situation* (ed.) Claire Doherty (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 37. – Owens analysis of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* argues that it is unintelligible at close range; it is only apprehensible via allegory of photographic, cinematic, and textual modes of representation.

¹⁸¹ Rinehart, Richard. "Site, Non-Site, and Website" *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* vol. 19, Issue 2 (2013): 9. <http://www.leoalmanac.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/LEAVol19No2-Lodi.pdf> (accessed 15 February, 2014).

which privilege the role of perception in understanding and engaging with the world.¹⁸²

Malraux' envisioning of the potentially endless discursive fields are particularly significant for considering how digital mediation privileges the role of perception.¹⁸³ This extension of the 'metaphysical presence' on the art object was something that virtual museum spaces tried to accomplish—through their use of augmented reality and interactive interpretive media content.¹⁸⁴ The overlay of 'objective' and 'subjective' realities is a basic principal of most museological and curatorial undertakings – to contextualize, relay meaning, and insights to the viewer—fostering open-ended inter-subjective engagements with art works. Removing the work of art from its material supports (via processes of reproduction) allows works to express an essence that is untenable through its positioning as an art object, as Malraux suggests, "we might almost call them not 'works' but 'moments'

¹⁸² Gaskins. Nettrice R. "Urban Metaphysics: Creating Game Layers on Top of the World" *Mediascapes: UCLA's Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, Winter 2012. http://www.tft.ucla.edu/mediascape/Winter2012_UrbanMetaphysics.html (accessed 15 February, 2014) - Gaskins adapts Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to the analysis of street art as a culturally situated production process, in order to discuss what she calls "urban metaphysics", an artistic cultural production translated from material spaces to virtual.

¹⁸³ Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*, 64.

¹⁸⁴ Battro, "From Malraux's Imaginary Museum to the Virtual Museum," 144.

of art.”¹⁸⁵ Therefore, digital mediation and photographic representations of street art *in-situ*, not only document the work, but capture a particular ‘moment’ when art practices intervene into the everyday fields of urban life.

The flow of digital content across multiple media platforms and audiences, combined with the prevalence of mobile technologies and the increasing trend of geo-tagging photographs (as a mode of way-finding), digital photographic representations of street art multiply the social and spatial operations of the city.¹⁸⁶ These social spaces, to borrow from French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, are mapped across multiple sites of engagement – the material (*l’espace perçu*), the imaginary (*l’espace conçu*), and the lived (*l’espace vécu*).¹⁸⁷ These multiple modalities of being in the city - embodied, imaginary, or lived- create relational correspondences between the street art works in-situ and visual culture online. These online tactics accomplish Malraux’s vision of assembling works that could never be assembled within a single physical structure.¹⁸⁸ Street art online allows for a

¹⁸⁵ Malraux, “Museum without Walls,” 46.

¹⁸⁶ Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 3.

¹⁸⁷ See, Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production Space* (trans.) Donald Nicholson-Smith. (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 38-39. – Lefebvre introduces his conceptual triad of ‘spatial practices’, ‘representations of space’ and ‘spaces of representation’.

¹⁸⁸ Malraux, “Museum without Walls”, 16.

multiplicity of virtual encounters between the works, subjects and sites, emphasising the inter-subjective experience of street art.

When Malraux coined his theory of an *imaginary museum*, he was engaging in a form of metaphysical interrogation about the relationship between art and society. He envisioned a time when photographic images would allow people to create their own *musée imaginaire* – a personal collection of works mined from the whole world’s history of art. Reproducibility, as noted by Malraux, “has multiplied the number of accepted masterpieces, promoted other works to their due rank and launched some minor styles-in some cases, one might say invented them.”¹⁸⁹ Although Malraux was speaking specifically about the inclusion of non-western artifacts, and other objects that were historically not regarded as ‘art’, parallels can be drawn between assertions that painted graffiti as being ‘low’, ‘primitive’, or criminal.¹⁹⁰ If, as Malraux argued, that the placement of a work of art in the context of a museum guarantees its status as ‘art’, then the proliferation of visual databases online dedicated to street art have become equally, if not more, significant than its position within the gallery. The ubiquity of street art practices online has allowed it to infiltrate our collective imaginations as a

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 44

¹⁹⁰ Neef, “Killing Kool: The Graffiti Museum,” 412.

truly *contemporaneous* form of art, to borrow from art historian Terry Smith, one that is taking place in city centers around the world and being made available to audiences in near real-time on our computer screens and mobile devices.¹⁹¹

III

Summation: Street Museum Without Walls as a Digital Convergence Phenomenon

This concept of a *street museum without walls* is a curatorial mediation that aims to synthesize the social spheres of the museum, the city, and the web in order to examine the philosophical implications of curating street art. It considers the impact of globalization and the intensification of visual culture online on contemporary cultural production and emergent forms of artistic practices. While new media approaches to Malraux's theory have been commonplace for some time now, my interest in revisiting it goes beyond simply a desire to *transpose* the apparatus of the museum online. Rather, it acknowledges the critical role that the Internet has played in the evolution and public reception of the street art movement and how it might be re-deployed for serious scholarly investigation into the limits of museal

¹⁹¹ Smith, Terry. *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 7.

representation. As argued, to curate street art is to *curate the streets*. Since it is impossible to bring the city into the museum, the question becomes how to apply the curatorial operations of the museum outside into the streets?

My hypothesis of a *street museum without walls* adopts previous theorization about the relationships between physical and material senses of 'place' and socially mediated constructions of 'spaces', to consider how the social, spatial and aesthetic operations of street art are registered online. Building off of De Certeau's conception of 'spatial practices', where he maps the relationships between fixed temporally located senses of 'place' and how they are mediated through social interaction, considers how the relations between subjects and 'spaces' inscribe meaning onto the physical environment of the city.¹⁹² Lefebvre's conceptual triad of the 'social production of space', extends the physical sites of street art works to across multiple spheres of social interaction – *material, imaginary, and lived*.¹⁹³ Smithson's provisional theory of 'non-sites', abstract representations of localizable places, engenders a discursive relationship between photographic representations of street art practices (as a mode of *referential*

¹⁹² See, De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117-118.

¹⁹³ See, Lefebvre, *The Production Space*, 38-39.

mimesis) to occupy a position of metaphorical significance.¹⁹⁴ Adapting on these differing theorizations, my analysis acknowledges the shifting cultural frames that inform the positioning of the street art movement within the matrix of contemporary cultural production. The intersection of street art with digital information technologies has extended its social, spatial and aesthetic operations and multiplied them within the public realm.

This pursuit of a *street museum without walls* acknowledges that what constitutes the public realm in the twenty-first century has expanded considerably beyond the physical zones and territories of the streets to the distributed networks of the Internet. This ‘socio-structural transformation of the public sphere’, to borrow from German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas, recoded through the ubiquity of online digital communication technologies has multiplied the schema of the public sphere beyond the private realm and the domains of public authority.¹⁹⁵ The multiplicity of social actors participating in the consumption of cultural

¹⁹⁴ See, Smithson, Robert. “A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites.” *Selected Writings by Robert Smithson*, Website: Estate of Robert Smithson, courtesy of the James Cohan Gallery, New York. n.d. <http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm> (accessed 14 February, 2014).

¹⁹⁵ Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (trans.) Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 33.

phenomena online reallocates the mediating function of the institutions associated with 'official' culture (the museum), into the realm of the mass media.¹⁹⁶ I hold that the street art movement, through its convergence with contemporary digital media culture, has created its own *museum without walls*, a social space enacted through collections of online images positioned outside of the 'official' spaces of the gallery.

Contrary to Crimp's intimation that "any work of art that can be photographed can take its place in Malraux's *super-museum*" images of street art online are not in themselves enough to constitute a *museum without walls*.¹⁹⁷ According to Malraux, photographic images are the 'instruments' that enable the 'metamorphosis of the museum.'¹⁹⁸ The convergence between digital communications technology and the spheres of public culture have restructured the boundaries between artistic practices, media screens, images, and the ideologies of 'place'.¹⁹⁹ *My street museum without walls* situates the concept of the museum as an 'adaptable cultural

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 177-178

¹⁹⁷ Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins," 50.

¹⁹⁸ Allan, "André Malraux, the Art Museum, and the Digital Musée Imaginaire." - In fact, Malraux is quick to point out that a reproduction can never substitute the original (see, Malraux, "Museum without Walls", 21-24).

¹⁹⁹ Banet-Weiser, "Convergence on the Street: Rethinking the Authentic/Commercial Binary," 643.

construct.²⁰⁰ My positioning street art within a museological discourse rehearses a philosophically informed methodology for reconciling the differently constituted but interrelated spaces of the streets, the museum and the Internet to consider limits and boundaries of museal representation.

IV

Curatorial (Re)Mediations: A Case for a Multimedial Urban Museum

How might the integration digital mediation allow for the presentation of street art works *in-situ*? While websites dedicated to street art continue to play a significant role presenting works to a wider audience, not all of them are successful in rendering a succinct picture of the activities taking place at the ground level. As someone who has committed a significant amount of time to researching street art online, I have found many of these websites to be cumbersome and arduous to navigate. One link takes you to another image, another site, and so on. The endless streams of digital content lack sufficient informational content: artist attributions are frequently missing (unless posted or submitted by the artist); specific locations of works are not properly identified; and, there is little to no interpretive information about the

²⁰⁰ Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*, 64.

material or artistic processes being employed. For instance, posts on Streetsy, might only include the name of the artist and a general location, like: “Birdo in Toronto” or “Ben Eine is in [NYC] for a new show - I like this new font he’s doing.”²⁰¹ Although the utopian dreams of the ‘democratic and participatory potential’ of online platforms still continue to hold weight in the discourses surrounding the Internet and digital media technologies.²⁰² The absence of contextual and critical mediation between images and viewers ostensibly disquiets the Internet’s capacity to productively engender meaningful insights for apprising audiences about the cultural and artistic significance of street art practices. These websites present street works as easily consumable visual commodities, to be re-blogged, re-shared, re-tweeted, and so on, rather than as connecting nodes between audiences and the spatial aesthetic operations of this artistic phenomena.

The Street Museum of Art (SMoA) is a thought-provoking example for considering the application of Vince Dziekan’s concept of *multimediality*, a critically informed approach to digitally informed exhibition production. SMoA (streetmuseumofart.org) is an online ‘museum’ that stages public art projects

²⁰¹ *Streetsy Street Art blog*, <http://www.streetsy.com> (accessed 18 February, 2014).

²⁰² See, Paul, "Flexible Contexts, Democratic Filtering and Computer-Aided Curating: Models for Online Curatorial Practice," 87.

using ‘found’ street art works in various cities. It allows the act of curating street art to move beyond fixed rigid boundaries of gallery spaces to consider the act of display as a discursive exchange between works and audiences.²⁰³ Launched in 2012, SMOA was developed as a response to the Museum of Contemporary Art’s 2011 blockbuster exhibition “Art in the Streets,” which commissioned artists to create street art inside the museum.²⁰⁴ As noted by SMOA’s founder and director (who prefers to remain anonymous) in an interview, “instead of modifying or replicating this inherently public art medium, we decided to re-evaluate the current model for contemporary art museums by adopting the guerrilla tactics and radical energy of the street artists.”²⁰⁵ SMOA developed a conceptual schema for taking the edifice ‘museum’ outside into the city. Instead of displacing works into a gallery setting, SMOA re-appropriates museological strategies by repositioning the visual referent of the museum (the white interpretive

²⁰³ See, Bal, Mieke. “The Discourse of the Museum,” 207; Bal, *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, 8; Neef, Sonja. “Killing Kool: The Graffiti Museum,” 42.

²⁰⁴ McKenzie, Jessica. “Going Guerilla With the Founder of Williamsburg’s Street Museum of Art,” *L Magazine*, 13 November, 2012. <http://www.thelmagazine.com/TheMeasure/archives/2012/11/13/going-guerilla-with-the-founder-of-williamsburgs-street-museum-of-art> (accessed 3 March, 2014).

²⁰⁵ Ibid. - Unlike other public art projects, SMOA’s exhibitions are curated illegally. The founder and director remarks on the importance of working anonymously because their individual identities are “not important”, noting that their projects are “entirely reliant on the reaction and participation of the public — SMOA can be anyone, or everyone.” What is perhaps most striking about this statement is the direct inversion of the notion of the curator as ‘author’ or producer’. The museum’s curators have sought to reclaim public spaces by adopting the same unsanctioned tactics as street artists themselves.

didactic label) outdoors into the urban landscape as a means of transforming the urban environments into a public open-air museum.

SMoa's innovative model for presenting curated street art projects because it progresses beyond the models of online exhibitions (typically associated with net art) or virtual museums (online visual collections/databases of images), to considering the complex interrelations between culture, technology and space.²⁰⁶ Geo-tagging street art works SMOA encourages visitors/users to physically go out to discover the works, channeling Debord's concept of *derivés*, for creating situational encounters by exploring the urban landscape in order to re-write the narrative of the city.²⁰⁷ Mapping the locations of featured works on their website, visitors are encouraged to use the map as an informal museum guide.²⁰⁸ This *multi-modal* approach to curating street art *in-situ*, decentralizes the idea of the exhibition outside of the traditional parameters of the gallery, in order to create a discursive framework that extends and expands the spatial practices of the museum in

²⁰⁶ Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*, 9.

²⁰⁷ Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency," 46.

²⁰⁸ "In Plain Sight." *Street Museum of Art* <http://streetmuseumofart.org/exhibition-5/> (accessed 19 February, 2013). – locations are mapped via an embedded Google Maps application.

order to shape the viewers experience and guide their understanding through ‘open-ended affective insights’.²⁰⁹ SMOA’s unique approach to *curatorial design*, exhibition-based spatial practices,²¹⁰ hybridizes the interventionist tactics of street art with museological practices in order to create discursive engagements with urban spaces. As claimed on SMOA’s homepage: “the city’s streets have become gallery walls for this urban museum... admission is always free and the hours are limitless.”²¹¹ Existing independent of a physical institutional structure reconfigures the idea of the ‘museum’ beyond simply being a physical container for aesthetic contemplation.²¹² Extending the parameters of the exhibition into the public spaces of the city ‘decode and recode’ the institutional conventions of the museum.²¹³

Since its inception, SMOA has continued to organize a steady stream of exhibitions, such as: “In Plain Sight,” in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (Fall 2012); “Beyond Banksy: Not Another Gift Shop,” in Shoreditch, London (Winter

²⁰⁹ Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 35.

²¹⁰ Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*, 12.

²¹¹ “About.” Street Museum of Art <http://streetmuseumofart.org/about/> (accessed 8 February, 2014).

²¹² Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*, 29.

²¹³ Kwon, Miwon. “One Place After Another: Notes on Site-Specificity.” *October* vol. 80 (1997): 88.

2012/2013); “Breaking out of The Box,” in Chelsea, New York (Summer 2013); and “Dans La Rue: Montréal,” in Montréal, Quebec (Fall 2013).²¹⁴

Temporality plays a significant role in differentiating SMOA’s endeavors from other forms of public art projects. Instead of commissioning public murals, which denote a sense of permanence, their public art projects embody the same sense of ephemerality as street art works themselves. The duration of the ‘exhibitions’ is entirely dependent on the lifespan of the didactic labels, which are exposed to external environmental conditions, mediation from public authorities and property owners (and one would expect disgruntled taggers).²¹⁵ Staging temporal urban site-specific exhibitions, which oscillate between site-specificity and forms of digital mediation, reformulates how the aesthetic experiences of street art operate across multiple social, technological, and physical topographies.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ *Street Museum of Art*: “In Plain Sight,” <http://streetmuseumofart.org/exhibition-5/>; “Beyond Banksy: Not Another Gift Shop,” <http://streetmuseumofart.org/beyond-banksy/>; “Breaking Out Of The Box,” <http://streetmuseumofart.org/breaking-out-of-the-box/>; “Dans La Rue: Montréal,” <http://streetmuseumofart.org/dans-la-rue-montreal/> (accessed 8 February, 2014).

²¹⁵ “About.” *Street Museum of Art* <http://streetmuseumofart.org/about/> (accessed 8 February, 2014). -“Much like the essential nature of street art, The Street Museum of Art is ephemeral; the duration of the exhibitions is entirely reliant on external forces and the reaction of the public.”

²¹⁶ Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*, 12.

SMoA's self-proclaimed approach to 'guerrilla curating', unauthorized public exhibitions, intervene into the public spaces of the city by challenging the ideological structures that mediate public culture.²¹⁷ If previous models of online exhibitions position the role of the 'curator' as an archivist or content manager (collecting and organizing digital content onto static websites), then, SMoA, imagines the curator as an interventionist, by re-appropriating museological strategies and positioning within the realm of the commonplace. But, what are the implications that emerge from this iteration of a multimedial museum? For Malraux, the concept of the museum was not a denial of the vitality of everyday life.²¹⁸ Through his adoption of photography, as suggested by theorist Kevin Hetherington, the *museum without walls* engendered a form of contact "with a richer, more temporally situated form of experience" of art.²¹⁹ Hetherington argues that Malraux's re-visioning of the museum was a response to the experience of modernity espoused by daily life on the streets of Paris (articulated by Baudelaire, and later the impressionists, surrealists, existentialists, situationists etc.)²²⁰ The

²¹⁷ McKenzie, Jessica. "Going Guerilla With the Founder of Williamsburg's Street Museum of Art," *L Magazine*, 13 November, 2012
<http://www.themagazine.com/TheMeasure/archives/2012/11/13/going-guerilla-with-the-founder-of-williamsburgs-street-museum-of-art> (accessed 3 March, 2014).

²¹⁸ Hetherington, Kevin. "Museum." *Theory, Culture & Society* vol. 23, no. 2-3 (2006): 597.

²¹⁹ Ibid. 598

²²⁰ Ibid. 597

social construct of the museum was, thus, a mode of mediating the uncertainties and fragmentation of everyday modern life.²²¹ The sense of reality fabricated by the museum, through its ordering of cultural products, is not a 'true' reflection of 'reality', but rather, an experimentally rearrange *representation of reality*.²²²

The transformation of public culture via digital networked information technologies restructures how we physically and intellectually engage with artistic practices.²²³ SMOA, through their adoption of interventionist curatorial approaches, simultaneously extends the fields of the museum (as a mediating device) and the spatial aesthetic operations of street art practices beyond the fixed rigid boundaries of the streets/museum into the virtual realm. *Multimediality*, through the integration of digital mediation with discursive spatial practices, becomes a significant tool for redistributing the 'interactions, interpretations, and viewing scenarios' of street art across material and virtual spaces.²²⁴ Curators who seek to engage with street art practices – either as public art projects or through digitally mediated online

²²¹ Allan, *Art and the Human Adventure: André Malraux's Theory of Art*, 82-83.

²²² Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*, 9.

²²³ *Ibid.* 33

²²⁴ *Ibid.* 57

approaches – must reimagine and experiment with the methodologies of producing exhibitions. As an expression of the potentially endless possibilities of the museum, Malraux’s call for a *museum without walls* allows the vitality of street art’s spatial aesthetic operations to occupy multiple positionalities in the matrix of contemporary cultural production.²²⁵ My speculative formulation of a *street museum without walls*, as a call for emancipating street art from the inside/outside paradigm, allows urban art practices to be re-mapped across multiple sites of public engagement.

CONCLUSION

Positioning street art in the context of the museum highlights the reciprocal relationships between artistic practices and curatorial thought.

Contemporary curatorial practices and discourses, in the words of curator Paul O’Neil, demonstrate “how curating has changed art and how art has changed curating.”²²⁶ My study identifies street art as a catalyst for rethinking the spatial arrangements of exhibition forms. As argued by Henri Lefevre,

²²⁵ Ibid. 64

²²⁶ O’Neill, Paul. *The Culture Of Curating And The Curating Of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 6.

“the future of art is not artistic, but urban.”²²⁷ My theory of a *street museum without walls* proposes a conceptual reformulation of the aesthetic, spatial and social edifices of the museum. It derives from a number of critical discussions on: the changing role of the museum in the twenty-first century; the pervasiveness of the street art movement within contemporary culture; how digital reproducibility (and the internet as a medium) has allowed street art to exist on multiple terrains of public interaction; and how concepts of ‘site’ and ‘place’ are mediated, extended and registered online.

Furthermore, it recognizes that there is a different curatorial imperative for street art than other artistic practices. As a relatively recent field of academic study, the analysis of street art tends to remain tied to the romantic and narrow model of graffiti that continues to remain engrained in both popular and academic discourse.²²⁸ Brought from the margins to the mainstream, street art has now become a widely accepted form of contemporary artistic production. Expanding the current literature that locates this phenomenon as

²²⁷ Lefevre, Henri. *Writing on Cities* (ed.) Elenore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Malden, MA: Balckwell Publishing, 1996), 173 - Translation of his essay “Droit à la ville” (1967).

²²⁸ See, MacDonald, Nancy. *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity, and Identity in London and New York*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Lachmann, Richard. "Graffiti as Career and Ideology." *the American Journal of Sociology* (1988): 229-250; Campos, Ricardo. "Graffiti Writer as Superhero." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* vol. 16, no. 2 (2013): 155-170; Nandrea, Lorri, "Graffiti Taught Me Everything I Know about Space": Urban Fronts and Borders." *Antipode* vol. 31, no. 1 (1999): 110-116.

existing external to the political economy of the art world, I argue that the study of street art requires a new critical vocabulary that takes into account its relationship to institutional and market forces. The idea of exhibiting street art signals a radical departure from the traditional operations of the museum. As suggested by aesthetic philosopher Connell Vaughan, street art embodies the aspirations of the avant-garde by “showing us, both the degree to which the art world can incorporate change, and, by demonstrating the nature of aesthetic and embodied engagement permitted in the contemporary conception of art.”²²⁹ In short, incorporating street art into the praxis of the museum ‘proposes a new, more sophisticated, institutional model.’²³⁰

This study updates and re-interprets Malraux’s *museum without walls* to engage with questions surrounding the transformation of art and public culture via digital technology. In other words, it considers how the spheres of the museum and the city are reconfigured through digital reproducibility creating an interstitial space. A space located between the ideological zones of the streets and the gallery. The ubiquity of digital representations of street

²²⁹ Vaughan, Connell. “The Sublime, The Event And Graffiti.” *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 7, no. 2 (2010): 56.

²³⁰ Ibid.

art online allows audiences to access the multiplicity of aesthetic practices taking place on the ground level, independent of the 'official' spaces of the gallery. Due to the transient and ephemeral nature of street art, digital reproducibility is the primary means through which works are disseminated. Photographic reproducibility and process of digital mediation extend the cultural logic of the postmodern museum beyond its physical walls, re-mapping the differently constituted but interrelated spaces of the streets, the museum and the Internet.²³¹

Integrating processes of digital mediation within museological discourse has significant implications for restructuring the relationships between artworks and viewers.²³² Not only does it allow cultural products that cannot easily be relocated into a gallery context to be visualized to audiences through the ideological lens of the museum. It simultaneously opens up a space for conceiving of the exhibition as a 'medium', a form of *mass-media interface* between images, objects, and viewers.²³³ Reflecting back on his project of a

²³¹ Dziekan, Vince. "Beyond the Museum Walls: Situating Art in Virtual Space (Polemic Overlay and Three Movements)." *Fibreculture Journal*, issue 7 (2005): 5. http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue7/issue7_ver2_Beyond%20the%20Museum%20Walls.pdf (accessed 19 April, 2014)

²³² Dziekan, *Virtuality and the Art of the Exhibition: Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum*, 27.

²³³ Sejjdel, "The Exhibition as Emulator."

museum without walls in 1973 (three years before his death in 1976) Malraux remarked: “il devient clair que le Musée Imaginaire ne se réduira pas à la parenté de ses formes. [...] Il ne se réfère pas aux mêmes oeuvres, ni aux mêmes sentiments, ne naît pas du même dessein.” - (*It becomes clear that the imaginary museum will not be reduced to the relationships of its forms [...] It does not refer to the same materials, or the same feelings, nor are they used for the same purposes.*)²³⁴ Taken here, his statement is quite telling because it intimates not only the transfiguration of the museum, but of the works themselves. For Malraux, photographic reproducibility transfers the auratic effect of the work of art through the signifying utterance of its form.²³⁵ If, as argued by Benjamin, that the significance of a work of art is tied to the field of perception, then, digital reproducibility, as a mode of rewriting the exhibitionary field of the museum, allows street art works to manifest new aesthetic operations within the ‘virtual sphere.’²³⁶ Malraux recognized the central and *invisible* role that the museum has played in shaping the reception of artistic practices: “so vital is the part played by the art museum... that we forget [it] has imposed on the spectator a wholly new

²³⁴ “Lettre d’André Malraux à Roger Caillois.” *André Malraux* (ed.) Jean-Louis Prat and Nicole Worms de Romilly (France: Fondation Maeght, 1973), 22. – Correspondence with French sociologist Roger Caillois in 1973, coinciding with retrospective on Malraux’s career at the Fondation Maeght in Saint-Paul-de-Vence. The English translation is my own.

²³⁵ Krauss, “Ministry of Fate,” 1002.

²³⁶ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 223-224.

attitude towards the work of art.”²³⁷ ‘Virtual’ encounters with street art works online transfers their aesthetic spatial operations into a ‘phenomenal structure,’ which privileges the gaze in shaping cultural value and meaning.²³⁸

Although Malraux does not explicitly discuss the role of the curator, the iconic photograph of Malraux in his study contemplating images of his “Imaginary Museum of World Sculpture” (1953) illustrates him at the center of his ‘museum.’ This image, which has become emblematic of his theory, suggests locating the creative act in assembling, grouping, and displaying works of art. It can be seen as echoing, what curator Maria Lind refers to as ‘the curatorial,’ an authorial approach to visualizing relationships between, objects, images, and contexts.²³⁹ Of course Malraux could not have predicted the development of digital culture and the impact of the Internet age on the fields of visual representation. Nor could he the rise of social media platforms that allow users to ‘curate’ their own content and create

²³⁷ Malraux, “Museum Without Walls”, 13-14.

²³⁸ Bratu Hansen, Miriam. “Benjamin’s Aura.” *Critical Inquiry* vol. 34 (2008): 342.

²³⁹ See, Lind, Maria. “The Curatorial.” *Artforum* 68, no. 2 (2009): 65-103.

<http://doublesession.net/indexhibitv070e/files/lindthecuratorial.pdf> (accessed 14 April, 2014).

their own *digital musée imaginaire* – a personal collection of online images.²⁴⁰

These visual strategies of Internet spectatorship articulate and produce multiple subjective and cultural narratives.²⁴¹ The ubiquity of digital images of street art online has positioned audiences and artists as active participants in documenting, aggregating and disseminating streets works in near real-time. Photographic representations of street art are living documents, evidence of the visual transformation of the city through art. The simultaneity of media flows online has changed the contours of how we perceive and apprehend the transience gestures of street art artists. The conspicuous consumption of street art images online has intensified its reach beyond the material spaces of the city. As a result, the convergence of street art with twenty-first century digital media culture has done something that ‘real’ museums could never do: keep works embedded in their material contexts, while also allowing them to occupy multiple positions in the public sphere.

This simultaneous opening up and dematerialization of the museum, evoked by my *street museum without walls*, interrogates the production and presentation of art in public spaces. As the number of contemporary art

²⁴⁰ Allan, “André Malraux, the Art Museum, and the Digital Musée Imaginaire.”

²⁴¹ White, Michele. *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 115.

practices taking place outside of the walls of the museum continues to multiply, the role of the curator continues moves away from being the caretaker of static collections, to a dynamic agent who invites audiences to critically engage with works as part of their daily lives. Extending the spatial practices and *enunciative* acts of the museum into the spheres of the quotidian, redistributes and de-territorializes the ideological spaces of the museum and the city. Analogous to the street artist who inserts their work into the realm of the commonplace, curators who engage with contemporary street art practices shift the 'exhibitionary complex' of the museum outside of its traditional boundaries: a museum imagined and re-imagined.

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