Virtual Street Art

Graduation Thesis for the Media Design: Networked media department

Özalp Furkan Eröz

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The goal of my final master project at the Piet Zwart Academy is to research how contemporary street art uses and shapes the tools of the digital age. For this I have studied the history of graffiti, Internet hypes, memes, viruses and hacker cultures. I will guide you through the shadowy areas where many of today's important cutting-edge developers reside. I will show how the immense popularity of memes and the artistic political actions of street artists can complement each other. In the end, this thesis can be seen as a manifesto in support of a surprising new strategy for street art within our society's hybrid public space.

It is difficult to define the street-art movement. As the name implies, it uses the city as a medium, using a wide variety of strategies. The most popular street art is predominantly 2d, or pictorial, work. Street art is often understood to be strange, colourful, free-hand words written on walls, or stencilled images. However the scene also includes artists making 3d, interactive, performative, sound, conceptual and new-media works. Originating in the early eighties, street art has since been continuously and fundamentally reshaped by its energetic creators.

In the scene we know nowadays, artists may employ a wide range of materials, shapes and contents. And yet there remains one common aspect to all these artists: they all share a cult-like devotion to the creative act. By making the very construction of the work a challenge to authority and to institutional structures, the artists create value in themselves and in their work.

CHAPTER 1: HOW IS STREET ART PERFORMATIVE?

The way street artists are affected by their surroundings is important, because their use of the city as a canvas is a reaction to these surroundings. A city manifests itself in protocols linked through complex cultural economic values and ideologies. These protocols evolve from a local to a global scale as the economy changes. In the process of globalization, individual cities gradually assume more standardized protocols, increasingly alienating themselves from their own inhabitants.

I believe the city is part of a closed operating system. Centralised economic powers, such as corporations and governments, decide the city's mode of operation. Individual users are unable to change its protocols, and are only allowed to use specific tools. The daily routine of the users is repetitive and planned, so their possibilities for development are restricted. In this closed system, art is used for propaganda on multiple levels, from the individual to the global scale, and has been shaped to fulfil this function.

Street art questions the role of art, but also how the city is being used, and who owns it. It offers people a chance to shape their city with something of their own personal characteristics, which gives the act of creating street art a political value. Though the actual consequences are limited, the results can stimulate and inspire others to engage and position themselves in the same challenging role.

Urban artworks attract attention because of their element of creative criticism and how the expression of this criticism affects the authority of the city's administrative structure. A system is less acceptable when it contains glitches and bugs – and street artists create such glitches, as well as drawing attention to existing ones. The usual reaction of the city's administrative structure is quite repressive, so that an artist getting caught must deal with severe consequences. By questioning the interface of society, these artists question its underlying ideology, even as they as a group refuse to construct their own ideology.

Skateboarding

The first skateboards were invented in the late 1950s by surfers wishing to surf in the city. They sawed the steel constructions carrying the wheels and steering mechanisms of roller skates into two parts, which they attached to a wooden board strong enough to carry a person. This rolling mini-surfboard started a craze that would become known as skateboarding. (Wikiepedia,2011)

After creating their own tool, they went on to improve their skills by developing different stunts using architecture such as drainage pipes and parks. In the mid-1970s there was a drought in Southern California. Because of the drought, the government imposed water restrictions on swimming-pool owners. This environment became the birthplace of modern-day skating. (Ian Borden, 1999 p. 35-54)

One of the first skateboarding groups were the Z-boys from Venice Beach in West Los Angeles. They started staking out their own territory in which to skateboard. After a while they began appearing in the hills, where they improved their skills. Because they were moving fast, did not fit in the existing traffic rules and made noise, they started getting into trouble with the police. Forced to find new grounds, they discovered the empty pools in their territory, and cleaned the pools in order to skateboard in them. (Z-boy.com, 2011)

This illegal act caused a massive boost in the popularity of skateboarding, which was now fuelled by cutting-edge technology and amateur magazines. The impact was so great that every Western city now has at least one skatepark, an expanded version of the Californian dry pools, and skateboarding remains to this day an important part of street culture.

A political act

The amazing thing about skateboarding is that it has its own modes of behaviour in the city.

> *The skater's engagement with the city is, in particular, a run across its various terrains, with momentary stopovers and encounters with all kinds of objects and spaces: ledges, walls, hydrants, rails, steps, benches, planters, bins, kerbs, and so on. In the words of stacy Peralta.* (Ian Borden, 1999 p. 35-54)

From top of the skateboard, the city looks like a playground with all of its public furniture, historical places, parks, modern buildings. The public bench turns in to a structure to jump over, the handrails become a place to grind. This act denies the main function of the city. All the architectural structures turn into a place to perform skateboarding. Thus the act of skateboarding becomes political."

Skateboarding and street artists

Street artists work in a similar way, using the city as a playground, and discovering a wide variety of new functions within the cityscape. They also find their inspiration and motivation in the various forms, colours and textures of the walls and other architectural compositions. Being a part of the daily visual world of thousands of people, the city walls offer new possibilities and larger audiences than the traditional canvases and art galleries.

These two inspiration points and concepts originate in (and create) "errors" in the city. From there they mutate to become a part of urban reality.

Another amazing thing about these urban cultures, is the way they function as tribal groups, adapting and improving themselves within an open sharing system, while moving together like "squad teams" to capture a

space in the city. The group dynamics, in which multiple individuals can have the opportunity to step up and lead, were a source of inspiration for me. Wishing to understand the historical perspective, I looked into the origin of the street-art movements and discovered they could all be traced back to a single person.

Taki and Invader

Taki was the first graffiti artist to achieve mass-media coverage. Thanks to this one guy, "tagging" became a big a part of graffiti art. Tagging is a kind of calligraphic technique which combines fast writing with experimental text positioning. (Julio 204, the original tagger, who was Taki's inspiration, stopped after he got busted.)

The first news item on Taki was published on July 2, 1997 in the *New York Times*. He was living at 83rd street in Washington Heights, northern Manhattan. The location was cosmopolitan as well as dangerous. At the time he was working as a delivery boy. Using his Greek nickname and his street number as a "tag", he tagged "Taki 83" at several well-known prime locations. When Taki, or Dimitri, started tagging, he realized how election posters and stickers were always placed at very well-known locations everywhere in the city. He soon became influenced by these political posters and stickers, and started using a similar strategy of tagging everywhere in the city. His work demonstrated how political advertising is widely regarded as legitimate, while individual efforts in this field are perceived as illegal. (Taki183.net, 2011)

Tags are very important for individual expression. They serve to create individual areas within cities. Because tags are small and easily made, it's not hard for the tagger to remain concealed while creating them. Because a tagger only needs a pen to write, he enjoys maximum mobility. This enables and stimulates a lot of people to start this practise. Also, following the development of individual artists becomes very easy, and sometimes very interesting. You can see where individual artists roam and how often they use certain routes. You can see meetings of different tags on the same spots with different timings. But you can also define a tagger's character by the creativity or recklessness he displays.

Taki and the followers of tagging were not political-minded to begin with, nor did they intend to become involved in this kind of political discussion. They were simply tagging their names and their addresses on the walls as a way of expressing and identifying themselves. But if we see how tagging very rapidly spread around the globe, we can consider it as a welcome concept for expression. Taki used tags to introduce himself to the people of New York. The French urban artist Invader travels around the world, sticking mosaic pixelated "Space Invaders" game figures as tags on the walls. He states that he is "invading the space", using the term "space" to define the three-dimensional public space. And his work already points to the development of another public space: virtual reality. (Taki183.net, 2011), (www.space-invaders.com, 2011)

CHAPTER 2: INTERNET

Theoretically, the Internet is the only place where someone can be truly anonymous. A person's location, identity, etc, are all irrelevant. The Internet is a structure created by social networks, blogs, websites, and other complex information systems. Everybody who is connected to the Internet has an IP address. These IP addresses are given by Internet providers, and each IP represents one person. With this IP address people are able to surf the Internet and choose various information systems.

The Internet has become a place where everybody can comment on any article, image, video or profile. With these comments, people are able to see each other's opinions worldwide. These platforms bring people together and create a platform for discussing various problems.

The so-called "social platforms" occupy the positions formerly held by centralized information systems such as television and newspapers. The reliability of information is measured by the degree of participation. An individual report can be impossible to track down, or it may lack scientific backing. Nevertheless, the participation of other people and the presence of comments can serve to define the trustworthiness of the information. In this way the Internet itself tends to filter out corrupt information.

The Internet is the place where people are busy creating their own decentralized information systems. Yet at the same time, centralized information systems are resisting this change, with local censorship structures being used to bend these information systems to the wishes of those who control them.

Censorship

China is well-known for its elaborate censorship system, and we can clearly see the influence of the dominant ideology and power structure mirrored in the virtual world as well. In 2011, the Internet and social media were praised for their communication possibilities which played a crucial role in the revolutions in Egypt and other Arab countries. It should be noted, though, that when the dictators shut down the entire Internet infrastructure in their countries, the revolutionary potential of Facebook, Twitter and blogs were instantly rendered meaningless. And so, looking back, the role of these social media should not be overestimated. (www.bbc.co.uk, 2011)

One may question the wishes of the majority of the population as they collectively shape such an entity as the Internet. Because if this majority is merely following the ruling ideology which is suppressing them, what they wish for may very well not be in their own interests.

Centralised networks and public spaces

As Alexander R. Galloway explains in his *Protocol*

> *A centralized network consists of a single central power point (a host), from which are attached radial nodes. The central point is connected to all of the satellite nodes, which are themselves connected only to the central host. A decentralized network, on the other hand, has multiple central hosts, each with its own set of satellite nodes. A satellite node may have connectivity with one or more hosts, but not with other nodes. Communication generally travels uni-directionally within both centralized and decentralized networks: from the central trunks to the radial leaves.*

> *The distributed network is an entirely different matter. Distributed networks are native to Deleuze's control societies . Each point in a distributed network is neither a central hub nor a satellite node, there are neither trunks nor leaves. The network contains nothing but "intelligent end-point systems that are self-deterministic, allowing each end-point system to communicate with any host it chooses." Like the rhizome, each node in a distributed network may establish direct communication with another node, without having to appeal to a hierarchical intermediary. Yet in order to initiate communication, the two nodes must speak the same language. This is why protocol is important. Shared protocols are what defines the landscape of the network who is connected to whom.*   *(Alexander R. Galloway, 2004 p. 11 -12)*

The danger of using a network lies in giving full control of a social structure to a single control point. If the control unit turns off a network, any part of the network (or sub-network) can either detach itself from the rest of the network, or it can die. As Paul Garrin writes:

> *With the stroke of a delete key, whole countries can be blacked out from the rest of the net. With the "."
> [root file] centralized, this is easily done. . . . Control the "." and you control access.*
>   (Alexander R. Galloway, 2004 p. 10)

One way of avoiding these problems has been described as "vacuoles" by Deleuze. The vacuoles are individual networks or units that can go on "living" whether or not they are connected to the network. Such structures are defined by two essential characteristics: they can't be monitored by the main control system, and they can block routes to other networks.

G. Deleuze in *Postscript on the Societies of Control* offers the following hypothesis:

> *"The key thing may be to create vacuoles of non-communication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control."*   (Deleuze Gilles, 1997 p. 175)

The people working to elude the control of centralised authority on the Internet are called "hackers". In the next paragraph we will take a look at their under-the-radar culture.

Hackers culture

To understand these cultures it is good to read the Hackers Cultures lecture note (webzone.k3.mah.se, 2000). This lecture is a collection of hacker terminologies. I will quickly summarize it here.

The lecture includes some explanations and distinctions about the ethics and lifestyles of hackers. The lecture begins with the dictionary definition of a hacker: someone who makes furniture using an axe. This is an excellent characterization, since hackers often use tools that forcefully attack the structure of their target. After this first introduction in the strategies of hackers, the text beings to explain their ethics, how they use open-source software packages, and how they acknowledge the importance of decentralization.

The lecture also explains the differences between a hacker and a cracker. Crackers are those who do not fit within the ethical framework of the hackers. These are the people who give "the scene" its bad name by engaging in criminal, useless and unfocused acts of destruction. The text also includes the manifesto *The Mentor* (webzone.k3.mah.se, 2000). This manifesto inspired me with its utopian idea of growing up inside a world without rules. A child growing up with an Internet connection isn't faced with rules, because the parents can't control the acts of a child on the Internet, even by using parental-control tools and software. A child can grow up inside the Internet making his or her own decisions.

The text also provides information about the first network hackers (phone phreaks) who used analog networking with the "blue box" tool. There are many similarities between this old-school hacking on one hand and graffiti, street art and activism on the other.

Hackers

Hardcore hackers are people who use different protocols to achieve various goals inside the structure of the web. Their acts within the Internet are not, as popular wisdom would have us believe, a mere denial of the system. Their acts don't include metaphors. Their acts literally change the structure of the global network. In order to reach that goal they attack specific targets.

Hardware giants like Sony (PlayStation 3) and Apple (iPhone) use their highly developed centralised networks to sell applications and games to users. To maximize profits, they make it impossible for others to create individual applications and games using their proprietary hardware. The hackers respond to this corporate greed by releasing software to crack the operating systems and make it possible to install unauthorised applications and games. These attacks are obviously expected and countered through various security systems.

Companies release never-ending updates to their operating systems in order to block the cracks. Internet serv-

ers install security systems. Banks use cell phones to send passwords to their customers. The WikiLeaks group is releasing important hidden documents that can potentially create international chaos. This way, the collective and individual actions of hackers are shaping the Internet.

I would like to give an example of this, from a Japanese anime series called *Laseion* (Video senshi Laserion ,1984). At the beginning of the first episode, there are two teenage characters living in different parts of the world. They have just been separated from each other, and they face a problem. Because they are living in different locations they can't continue playing their robot-designing game. So they hack the military network to create a connection with each other. While they are playing the game, the army is designing a tank at a military base, and somehow the plan of the robot gets switched with the plan of the tank, so that the two friends are accidentally creating the robot inside the military base.

CHAPTER 3: LINK WITH STREET ART

There are some similarities between street art and the way hackers live and act inside the system. The hackers release cracks to hack into certain hardware. After they release the cracks, they are not responsible for the users who wish to use the cracks, but the real action takes place after the users begin using the crack. The street artists also perform on the streets at night, leaving the artwork on the streets. The real action takes place in the morning. The artwork starts promoting itself. The audience, and thus the perceived aesthetics of the dominant culture, are influenced by these artworks. This audience consists of two groups.

Directly influenced audience

The directly influenced audience consists of the local people who are able to see the real artwork. The reactions of the local people are very direct and complex. There can be an audience watching and enjoying the performance of the street artist, but there can also be an audience that doesn't like street art, and they can respond by starting a fight or calling the police. The police may also be regarded as a direct audience. Some of them will react in a friendly manner, others will be more aggressive, in which case the street artists spend the night at the police office. The important thing about this audience is that they are the ones who see the actual work. They are experiencing the performance of the street artist by seeing, absorbing, verbally responding, and sometimes even joining in the performance. They become the real factor for promoting the artwork inside the community.

Indirectly influenced audience

The indirectly influenced audience are the people who are brought in contact with the artwork through media. Mass-media can reach many people at the same time, but a single person (for example, someone from the direct audience) saying something about the work to a friend later on is also a "medium". This audience always gets a filtered version of the reality, which can in some cases help a work to succeed, but it can also diminish the effect the work has in reality.

Through the use of the Internet and social media, street artists have started promoting themselves using street-art blog magazines, portfolio websites and social networks. They have shaped their corner of the Internet to become their own controlled media, a place where the message they want to share doesn't get tainted by the opinions of other, external, media. To find out more about the ways in which street artists use new media, I interviewed Boya, an graffiti artist from Suadiye, Istanbul. He is using "Boya!" as a slogan and as a nick name. "Boya" means "paint it" in Turkish. He is using it to give an order to hisaudience. Before we started the interview he wanted to explain himself.

Interview with Boya

B- Because we are discussing street art and graffiti, I will first tell you my point of view. In Istanbul, where I come from, there is no street-art scene, just people illegally painting on the walls. Besides that, nobody is sticking posters on the walls or placing sculptures in the street. Old-school graffiti has been evolving over the years, but the act is still the same. I cannot call myself a street artist, me and my friends around me describe ourselves as "graffitici" ("graffiteers")

Ö- How is the Internet affecting street artists, how is it affecting you? Also, how does it affect your movements around the city, the way you select a place to paint?

B- Thanks to the Internet, I can see a range of examples and the diversity of the artworks developed in the public space. In the past, we got only in touch with the direct audience, but now we are reaching people who are not present in the artworks, in our environment. There are differences in commenting on a picture on a website, and reacting after experiencing a real artwork. Even if artists don't see each other, they communicate through their artworks. They get feedback from the people who have been exposed to the artwork, and from other artists, by responses and interventions in the work. The artwork generates respect for the artists. On the Internet there is a risk of misinterpretation of the works. Now I can relate to a wider audience because of the Internet. Even if they only do a few artworks on the street, the new generation of artists can have a lot of reactions which can satisfy their need for attention. When people exchange a lot of pictures on the Internet, these will only be appreciated for a short time. When street-art images are shared in that kind of context they will also share that kind of attention span, and people will lose interest in them after a few seconds. No, I don't feel the Internet is affecting my action radius or movements when I'm out in the city.

Ö- How is the Internet affecting the new generation of street artists?

B- The new generation is making strange stencils because of the Internet. They resemble each other in shape and *style and became popular in their territories. In short, the Internet made stencilling popular. Triggered by the admiration for street artists they see online, they are now also making stencils, which can only be used once, and together they form a crowd of one-time performing street artists. And for the others, those who try to make old-school street art, the Internet is a database of styles and techniques.*

Ö- Which street-art magazines and networks do you follow on the Internet?

B- Ekosystem11, Wooster12, grafftube13, deviantart14 and I get some information through Facebook connections.

Ö- How do you exhibit your work on the Internet? What kind of social networking platforms do you prefer?

B- I have a blog where I publish my artworks. There I use the same nickname I use on the streets, and try to remain anonymous. Using this nickname I also share my self-made music through Facebook. I also use it to communicate with other people.

Ö- What kind of reactions do you get, on the Internet and in the real world?

B- If I don't see anyone on the streets while I'm working, I won't get any response. I used to go back to the same place to investigate reactions. For instance, finding a work painted over shows a problematic reaction. The artworks I have made that have not been painted over for the last 3 years, I regard as accepted by the community. The act itself remains illegal, and can be enough for people to make the choice of not accepting it. This gives the opportunity to destroy or cover up the artwork. Also the act can be stopped by police or by bystanders. But bystanders can also show curiosity. The artworks made in public spaces can

provoke other artists to draw near them. Waking up to see a big graffiti on the wall of your house will have a different emotional response than seeing it on your computer monitor.

Ö- Can you say something about the audiences, on the Internet and in the real world? Are there certain points where they meet?

B- The people following us over the Internet can be people that like to consume. A reason for this may be that they don't have a very strong relationship with the life on the street. On the other hand, people can react in the same way as they would have done on the street.

Ö- What do you think about fake street-art images over the Internet?

B- The networks I follow do not show fake images and honestly they don't interest me that much.

Ö- Can you say something about fake street-art images as a medium for artists and activists?

B- It won't seem different to people who only see street art on the Internet. To them, a picture of a cute cat can provoke the same reaction as a cool street artwork. For real and fake street artworks, these reactions would the same. A real street-art image can look like a sketch for a fake image. I can't say whether someone making a fake image instead of a real one is a bad thing.

Ö- Can you explain the differences between viewing anonymous Internet memes and viewing anonymous online street-art images?

B- Seeing an image on a computer screen can saturate a person for some time. As a guy drawing on the streets, I don't spend time looking for the new street art online. The sheer number of funny, scary, pornographic, or dramatic pictures online all reduce the value and impact of any particular image. The amount of interest is scattered because all these images together become a kind of visual abuse. In the end all the images will have the same effect.

Picture (1) On the request of Boya (the internet meme)
(cuphalffull.deviantart.com, 2011)

Internet memes and street art

A meme is generally defined as an idea or a belief that can stay alive among cultures and across generations, as a "contagious carrier of information". (Wikiepedia,2011)

Internet memes are "cultural units" such as images, videos or even texts that are able to "promote" themselves to spread across the web through emails, social networks, blogs and websites. The context of the memes is highly variable. The most popular Internet memes are cat pictures. Because people love cats, the pictures spread very fast. On the other hand, another famous Internet meme is the Little Fatty. It is a photoshopped image of a Chinese boy, superimposed on various other images, anything from president Bush to movie posters. Such memes are individual publications which can spread very fast and survive for long periods of time.

The important point here is the creativity of Internet memes. They behave like psychological viruses created in order to spread themselves around the Internet. Memes are not made by hackers, but by Internet users who thus shape the content of the Internet. There are specialised meme-related blogs containing information (such as dates and popularity statistics) on thousands of memes. Such a blog reads as a time-lapse caricature archive of our times. It is very interesting to see the individual Internet memes through time, and how people react to, and make fun of, different subjects. The memes seem like a timeline of people's ironic thoughts.

Actually, the image need not be photoshopped or adjusted. Changing the context of the image can be enough to give it meme status. Any image, video or text can turn into an Internet meme, and gain huge popularity. The way the meme works can define the way the image is perceived.

Street art as a meme

The most famous street-art Internet meme is Edgar Mueller's 3d trompe-l'oeil paintings on sidewalks. This kind of success can be problematic for street artists, because it may be different from the way they would prefer to appear in the media. For example, although the most famous street artist, Banksy, has a mysterious and spectacular image, some of his artworks have become Internet memes, such as the stencil of a girl with a red balloon, painted on a wall in the Palestinian city of Gaza. The image itself may be political in nature, but because of the way it spreads across the Internet, it soon transcends its original location, title and purpose, and the image becomes a generic stencil of a girl with a balloon flying on the wall.

There is a huge difference between Internet memes and actual street art. Memes are sketches by everyday people about their everyday life. The memes show their sense of humour, moods and political views. These people enjoy their "entries" and the quotes and reactions they get through the Internet. They usually use forums to communicate with each other and do not meet in person. The websites become a "collective" with nicknames and anonymous entries. Their audience consists solely of Internet users.

Street art uses the streets as a media in which to perform. The artists can get together to go out. They enjoy drinking a beer outside and having a talk while performing. They also have a shared artistic vision. They can get reactions from each other while performing and they usually learn skills from each other. Their audience is a local one, and only really able to respond to the artworks if they happen to be artists themselves.

The function

My main point of focus with this project is to expand the main function of street art on the Internet using the hybridisation of the modern-day public space. The main function of street art is to enable individuals and artists to enjoy expressing themselves within the environment of the streets. Street art provides the adrenalin and the ability to show an individual's thoughts by playing them out in the environment of the streets. I don't wish to define street art as graffiti or stencil: the technique can be anything. Some people will write poems on any surface they see, some will build polystyrene puppets or statues, some will just bend metal structures. The technique they use is up to their own skill, excitement and motivation. An important part of this excitement may be that they can become their own hero, merely by changing the environment they see, into the one they imagine. It is also a way of showing off to the general population. An individual might consider the population as wax to be moulded into a new shape, and his own flexibility with street art can define a new identity. This new identity may function as a secondary character – like a superhero's sidekick.

The Internet is like a mirror for street artists. They can see what they are making, and modify it simply by interacting with the two-dimensional image on the screen. They can create an image in order to draw attention. It could be like an individual newspaper. They might receive comments from other people. They can change what they want to see, and what they want to be. Comments provide the motivation, just like applause does for an artist on stage. But they also provide an artist with the feedback he would miss if he or she would simply place a work on the streets.

The Internet provides an opportunity to show the work to a larger audience. Any individual who wishes to be a street artist, can use this audience. Anyone can simply take a photo of a wall and photoshop it to create a preview of an artwork. The artwork may not be real, but in the end the individual expresses his thoughts and feelings in reality. The individual can be a hero without having to go outside and possibly get in trouble.

The question before us now is the difference between the real and the fake artwork. The real artwork attracts the attention of the local audience and the local police. If the artwork is real, the individual is possibly taking a legal risk, depending on the artwork and the performance, but if the artwork is not real, there is little risk in posting it on the internet, unless the thought expressed happens to be a crime (depending on the artist's country of residence). The individual can create the same image in the minds of the audience and receive feedback.

The function of a fake artwork lies beyond the image, in the minds of the audience. If the image of a fake artwork and a real artwork are the same, they can produce the same effect. But individual street artists might wish to produce a different kind of effect. They may hope to gain fame with their skills. They may wish to spread a world view or an idea. They may hope to bring some kind of change in the structure of their target. For all these goals, it is necessary to create a chain reaction among the population. All these goals can also be achieved with a fake street-art image. The real action takes place after the idea has been released. It is like a text in a newspaper: it would be hard to get something published which attacked an idea accepted by everyone. The function begins to work inside the community after the text has been published. In this, fake street art and traditional street art have the same point of focus. The reaction they are reaching for appears after the function has been released, through the minds of the population, like a mathematical formula.

By providing people with the confidence to undertake creative acts but with little risk involved, fake street art can allow real street art to break free of its boundaries, and give less skilled people the opportunity to join a movement. It can redefine the boundaries and possibilities of this performative art form, by placing the act of the actual painting in a different process, with increased possibilities for discussion and a global collective effort.

Picture (2) Virtual Milwaukee River Mural
(www. woostercollective.com, 2009)

CHAPTER 4: CLEAN RIVER IS A FUN RIVER

"Clean River is a Fun River" is an anonymous urban artwork published on the most famous source of street-art archive, the Wooster Collective website (www.woostercollective.com, 2009). The artwork looks very real on the website (see picture 2), but since the image is processed very well, it doesn't have the usual blurry look of graffiti. So if it is not a graffiti, it must be a stencil or a brush painting. It's too big to be a stencil, so it can only be a painting, painted with a brush – except that the image itself is also too sharp to be a brush painting. To find out, I needed to contact the people who published the image. I browsed the Internet searching the artwork until I found the story behind the image.

> *Milwaukee River Keepers: A clean river is a fun river.*
>
> *A great use of space and very well targeted. It is one of these things where the exposure is quite low relatively to the TV advertising or billboard plastering but it really brings the idea home. I mean this ad placement will really convert well and may even be publicised in the media. Real viral potential here, this post proves the point.*
>
> *It's a great copy also, catchy and simple. I am not a big fan or long URLs or any URLs where one is not there to click on it. I mean how much traffic will Milwaukee River Keepers get if I did not link their name in this post. When was the last time you whipped out a pen and paper while driving just to write down something you just went past? Not in the low attention span Internet era.*
> *This is just a small point and really does not detract from a great ad concept and execution, good work STIR Milwaukee.*
> *Advertising Agency: STIR Milwaukee, USA*
> *Creative Director: Steve Koeneke*
> *Art Directors: Sarah McAfee, Brian Steinseifer*
> *Copywriters: Scott Shalles, Jim Jodie*
> *Photographer: Scott Ritenour*   (www.stillad.com, 2008)

I sent an email to STIR Media who produced the artwork, in order to learn whether or not the artwork was a real one. They told me that it was a fake artwork made with Adobe's Photoshop software, despite the audience being led to believe that it is a real artwork. The interesting point for me here was the strong, aggressive activist performance. They also told me that they were allowed to paint a real version. I think it is amazing, because here a virtual street-art image was becoming a real one. It's a great success story for all the people who are releasing fake street-art images on the Internet.

So I did an interview with Sarah McAfee, the art director for the ad.

Interview with Sarah McAfee (artdirector of Stir Media)

Ö- How did you start working with Milwaukee River Keepers?

S- Stir Advertising chose to partner with the non-profit organization, Milwaukee Riverkeeper, and create a free ad for them as part of a competition put on by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel newspaper.

Ö- How did you start the Milwaukee River project?

S- A creative team at the agency was assembled to learn about the organization and create a newspaper print ad. We got a guided tour of the river and met with key people at Milwaukee Riverkeeper to understand their mission.

Ö- What was the idea behind creating a fake mural?

S- The idea came about while boating on the river. One of the organization's goals is to make the waterways swimmable again. We thought of using a natural water outflow as a slide with messaging. The deadline for the competition was far too short to pull off actually painting the mural, so we took the photo and retouched the graphics. However, the hope was always to paint it in real life.

Ö- Which platforms did you use to publish the photoshopped mural? When?

S- Stir entered the ad in advertising competitions like The One Show and online forums like adsoftheworld. com.18 This would have been for 2008 publications.

Ö- How were the responses from the online audience and the local audience?

S- The online audience was very accepting of the ad and it also garnered attention in the local Milwaukee advertising community.

Ö- Did you get any reactions from street artists before and after you painted the mural?

S- The mural was just painted a few weeks ago. Feedback has been good. I can't say we've spoken to any street artists about the project before or after.

Ö- Did you meet with any particular obstacles before and after you painted the mural?

S- The logistics of suspending an artist above the river proved very difficult and expensive. We relied entirely on donations to complete this project, so it took 3 years to coordinate and execute. Also, the creative team that worked on the original ad is no longer together, so Steve Koeneke (owner of Thirsty Boy and former owner of Stir) and myself saw the mural to completion from our new agency.

Ö- How did you get permission to paint the real mural? When?

S- The property belongs to the father of one of the Riverkeeper board members. He was happy to loan us the space. Permission was granted 3 years ago.

Ö- How were the reactions after you painted the real mural?

S- Reactions have been very positive.

Ö- Can you say something about fake street-art images as a medium for artists and activists?

S- The Photoshopped idea worked well as an ad concept, however I think it will have a much bigger impact actually existing on the river for walkers and boaters to see.

Ö- Were you afraid of mixing your project with Internet memes?

S- No. We just wanted to promote the cause and the agency.

The weird thing about this project is that they couldn't paint the real mural before the competition, so they just photoshopped the idea as a sketch and published it. The project itself became more valuable because of the fact that it became real after 4 years. The image spread like an Internet meme and became a famous image on the Internet. The idea of the sketch combining the water slide and the drainage pipe also carries a strong idea of activism, and has not lost its purpose. I think it's a great success story of a virtual street-art image on the Internet.

Picture (3) Milwaukee River Mural
(facebook.com, 2011)

Picture (4) Milwaukee River Mural
(facebook.com, 2011)

Picture (5) Milwaukee River Mural
(facebook.com, 2011)

Picture (6) Milwaukee River Mural
(facebook.com, 2011)

Picture (7) Milwaukee River Mural
(facebook.com, 2011)

Picture (8) Milwaukee River Mural
(facebook.com, 2011)

Picture (9) Milwaukee River Mural
(facebook.com, 2011)

Picture (10) Burger boy
(www. woostercollective.com, 2011)

Burger King Boy

After I found out about the Milwaukee River project, I started thinking about publishing a fake street-art image on the Internet. The idea had to be very direct and shocking, like an Internet meme. While I was skateboarding around Rotterdam I started to think about placing an image of a starving child inside the trash bins of a Burger King restaurant.

I took 3 photos from different angles with the camera of my cell phone, then placed an image of a child inside the trash bin using Photoshop. The resulting image looked like the image of a child, printed on a sticker, had been pasted inside the actual trash bin. Before sending the image I changed the Meta-data remove any evidence of Photoshop manipulation. I sent the image to Wooster collective, posing as a citizen who happened to be passing by and admiringly took a photo. I had no expectations, but after 2 or 3 hours they released the image on the Wooster collective blog (www.woostercollective.com, 2011). I was really surprised, because my friends in Turkey have been sending them some very good artworks but none of them were ever published. But a meme-like image was released very quickly. After a while I contacted the Wooster collective, curious to hear their reactions to the virtual street-art image. But I couldn't get any response from them.

Virtual street art

I see fake street art as halfway between Internet memes and street art. People wanting to produce fake street art should first perform real street art a couple of times, to see how the artists work and what materials they use. They should learn the "troubleshooting" of street art, because the fake images on the Internet are clearly very different from the street art on the streets. A graffiti painting may appear very vivid and sharp on a photo, but on the street it will be a little bit blurry and less saturated.

The person who wants to fake street art needs to learn the limitations and "defects" of street art in order to make a credible fake. The faker should send his photoshopped images to street-art Internet magazines. Since the website admins come from within the street-art community, they can tell a real artwork from a fake. So the faker can't just send a first-step sketch, he will have to create a convincing image. The faker also needs to change the metadata of the image. Metadata is additional information stored within the digital image file: modification dates, lens type, camera model, etc. So it is important to change the metadata.

The last step is to send the image to the blogs. The biggest difference between a fake street-art image and an Internet meme is that the fake street-art image attempts to look real, and to attract a more focused public attention. It also needs to maintain a narrative of outlaw bravery behind the fake image. So the faker needs to create not only a conceptual background, but also an understandable working process and a coherent story.

Actually, fooling the renowned street-art blogs, and presenting them as "establishment" (much like the establishment they themselves are rebelling against), should have some effect. Because the fakes are much like the hackers' Trojan horse strategy, so after a while the blogs will have to admit to having published fake stuff, thereby losing some of their prestige and authority to the fake movement. This two-player situation can create an open and accessible new discussion, and new ways of working within street art.

Picture (11) Fukushima Wheatpaste
(Rotterdam,virtual streetart image)

Picture (12) Fukushima Wheatpaste
(Rotterdam,virtual streetart image)

Picture (13) Restafval Boy
(Rotterdam,virtual streetart image)

Picture (14) Restafval Boy
(Rotterdam,virtual streetart image)

Picture (15) Burger Toilet
(Rotterdam,virtual streetart image)

Picture (16) Burger Toilet
(Rotterdam,virtual streetart image)

Picture (17) Media Markt Lockers
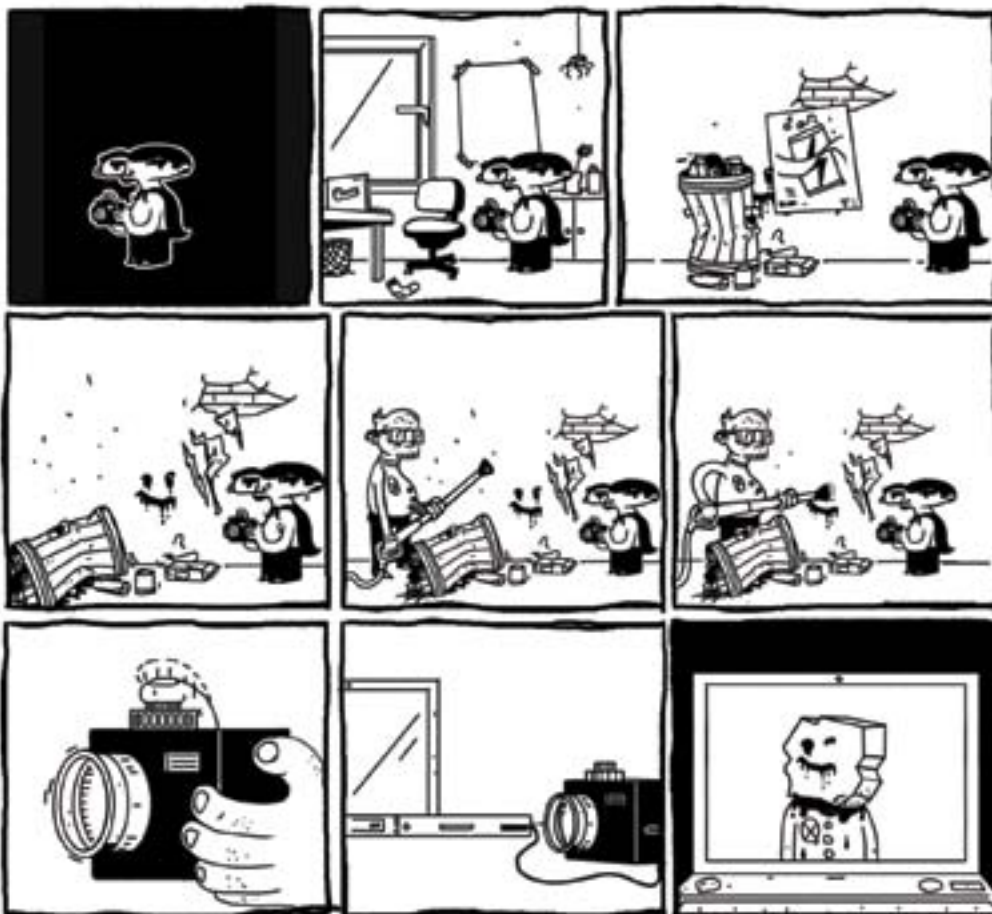(Rotterdam,virtual streetart image)

Picture (18) Virtual Streetart Collage
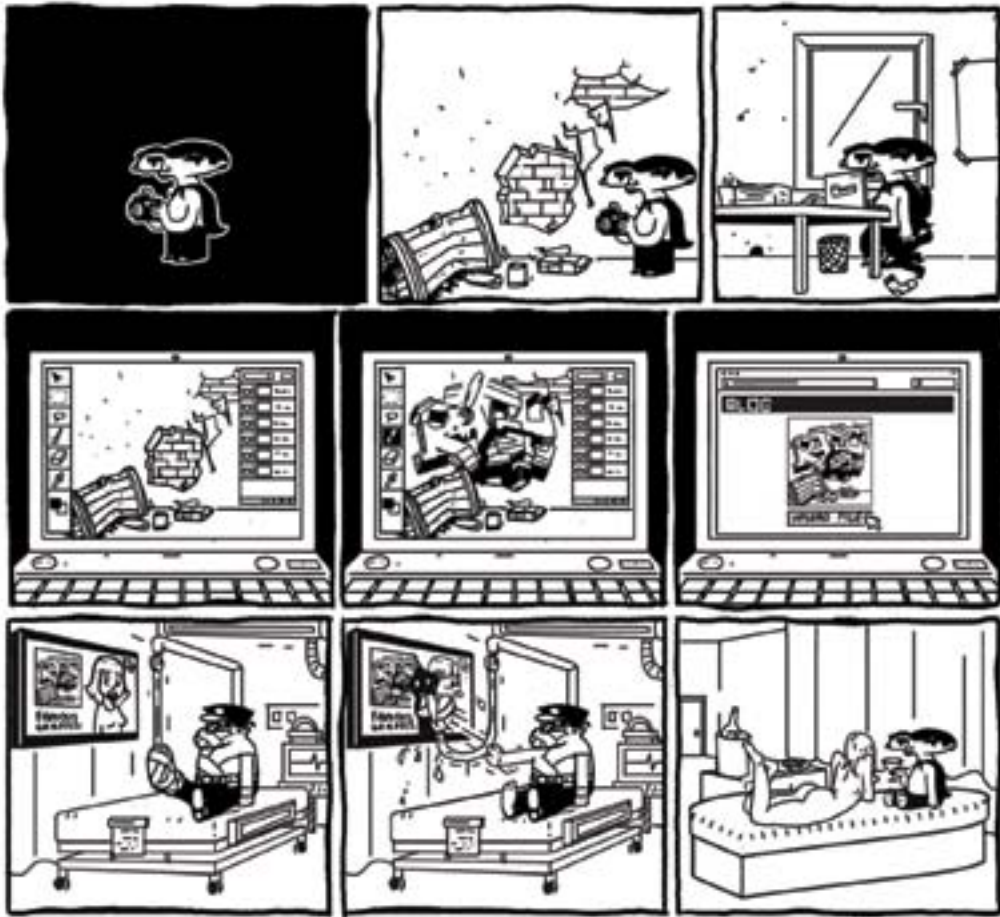(Famous street art images at different locations)

23

Picture (19) Virtual Streetart Comic

Picture (20) Virtual Streetart Comic

Picture (21) Virtual Streetart Comic

Manifesto

With this approach, I am calling into question the nature of street art and its role in our networked society. I believe the Internet audience is playing the lead role here, and yet the input of this audience is being mostly ignored by the street artists. People use the Internet as a library, and their reactions to what they find online are playing an important role in shaping modern society. If the Internet goes on developing in its current direction, it will become the dominant media.

The Internet allows people to be anonymous, and also to be an individual media channel. I believe Internet users should use the Internet for publishing their own ideas and thoughts about politics and daily-life experiences, to expose the problems of centralised systems such as the dominant media, the corporations and governments. By combining Internet memes and street art, this can be done in a very accessible and exciting way, with many possibilities and surprising outcomes. Personally, I can say that I consider virtual street art to be a very impressive means of protest and expression, and I believe that it will definitely play an important role in the future.

References

BBC News, 2011. *Internet Role in Egypt's Protests*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12400319. [Accessed 30 May 2011]

Borden, Iain. 1999. *Speaking the City: Skateboarding Subculture and Recompositions of the Urban Realm*, in Ray Hutchison (ed.) *Constructions of Urban Space (Research in Urban Sociology, Volume 5)*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Borden, Iain. 1999. *A Performative Critique of the City the Urban Practice of Skateboarding 1958-1998.* Everything Magazine Mar. 1999: 38-43. Web. 30 May 2011.

Boya, 2008. *Boya*. http://boyaboyuna.blogspot.com/. [Accessed 21 May 11].

Cheng Jia-Lu, 2008. *On Control Societies, A Deleuzian Postscript*. London.

Cohen Jem, 1996. [VHS] *Lost Book Found*, USA: Poopface Productions.

Deleuze Gilles, 1997. *Negotiations* 1972-1990. Edition. Columbia University Press.

Galloway, Alexander R., 2004. *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*. United States of America: The MIT press.

Hakim Bey, 1991. *Poetic Terrorism*, http://sniggle.net/Manifesti/poeticTerrorism.php [Accessed 21 May 2011]

IMDB, 2011. *Video Senshi Laserion (TV Series 1984),* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0159928/. [Accessed 21 May 2011].

Löwgren Jonas, 2000. *Hacker culture(s)*, http://webzone.k3.mah.se/k3jolo/HackerCultures/index.htm. [Accessed 21 May 2011].

Stencilrevolution.com, 2011. *Stencilrevolution.com*, http://www.stencilrevolution.com/. [Accessed 21 May 2011].

Stillad, 2011. *Stillad*, http://www.stillad.com/milwaukee-river-keepers-a-clean-river-is-a-fun-river-187.htm. [Accessed 21 May 2011].

Space-Invaders, 2008. *Faq*, http://www.space-invaders.com/faq_uk.html. [Accessed 30 May 2011].

Taki183, 2009. *Biography*, http://taki183.net/#biography. [Accessed 21 May 2011].

The Z-BOY, 2011. *The Z-BOY Story*, http://z-boy.com/. [Accessed 26 January 2011]

Thirstyboy Agency, 2011. *Milwaukee Riverkeeper Mural*. http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150175911517731.321222.48969167730 [Accessed on 24 May 2011]

Wardrip Noah - Fruin and Montfort Nick. 2003. *The NewMediaReader*. United States of America: The MIT press.

Wikipedia(2011), "*Internet Meme*", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_meme [Accessed 31 May 2011]

Wikipedia(2011), "*Skateboarding*", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skateboarding [Accessed 31 May 2011]

Wikipedia(2011), "*Z-Boys*", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Z-Boys [Accessed 31 May 2011]

Wooster Collective, 2009. *A Clean River Is A Fun River*. http://www.woostercollective.com/2009/01/a_clean_river_is_a_fun_river.html. [Accessed 21 May 2011].

Wooster Collective, 2011. *Seen On The Streets Of Rotterdam*. http://www.woostercollective.com/2011/02/seen_on_the_streets_of_rotterdam_netherl.html. [Accessed 21 May 2011].

Wooster Collective, 2011. *Wooster Collective*. http://www.woostercollective.com/. [Accessed 21 May 2011].