



## *Visibility Strategies: On the Imprudence of the Art on Walls*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the common imagery of the inscriptions found on the walls of some Latin American and European cities. We aim to understand the graffiti and other mural artistic manifestations as an insurgence of the words. In order to reflect critically on these manifestations, we examine how the visual language of graffiti relates to visual art and literature. To this end, we follow Aby Warburg's Atlas Mnemosyne method to address narrative representations as contemporary generational trends. With the help of the theoretical approach of Walter Benjamin's studies of art and politics, we intend to reflect on the aestheticization of revolt through the appropriation of public spaces. The central point of the paper is to think about walls as places for experimenting with marginal forms of co-creation that question the strategies of visibility of the urban semiological regime. As a conclusion, we interrogate the aesthetics of the revolt using the notions of territory and contemporary culture. The walls have not only become a space for political struggle, but also supports for creative urban practices where art meets the everyday life.

**KEY WORDS:** Walls; Art; Graffiti; Aesthetics; Revolt



Temps est un mot.  
(Ben Vautier)

In Roman culture, city walls and portals were considered sacred spaces. Some cities were protected by their portals; others were widely renowned for their traditions concerning the building of their portals. Such arches evoked the triumph of past generations, and became sacred landmarks of past conquests and glories. According to Debray, architectural transformations occurring in cities contributed to an ambivalent cultural production of the meanings associated with city portals and walls.



Fig. 1. Study for a stained glass depicting Terminus.  
Hans Holbein (the Younger), 1525, Kunstmuseum, Bâle, Martin P. Bühler

These spaces, at the same time, have also become both sublime and cursed (like the waters and banks of rivers). They assume the dual task of approximating and distancing. Debray returns to Feuerbach to address the self-limitation of the Roman gods of boundaries. Terminus (the guardian of the entrance to the world) carries within himself the virtue of nothingness, related to beginnings and to the firm courage associated with the fullness of successful accomplishments.

The god of limitation stands guard at the entrance to the world. Self-limitation is the condition of entry. Whatever becomes real, becomes so only as something determined. The incarnation of the species with all its plenitude into one individuality would be an absolute miracle, a violent suspension of all the laws and principles of reality; it would, indeed, be the end of the world. (Feuerbach qtd. in Debray 6)

Janus is another expression of this ambiguity, the two-faced god of passages. Janus is composed of two principles: oblivion and memory. The face turned to the back



expresses the ties with tradition and the past, and the other, facing forward, is related to oblivion and the future. Benjamin (*Passagens* 50) takes up Maxime Du Camp's words to address a certain pessimism regarding contemporary progressive forces: "History, like Janus, has two faces: whether it looks at the past, or at the present, it sees the same things."



Fig. 2. Janus, Unknown author, XVI, Germany. Source: Leemage, Paris.

In this passage, Janus represents the experience of the threshold, through which time reveals the transitions marking the place where the cognition of the instant occurs. That is the reason why Janus' image represents the joining of time and space, and the apprehension of this experience depends entirely on the visibility strategy of looking either at the past or at the future. This boundary experience unveils the movement of a gesture that engenders from this in-between place a rite of passage.

Both Terminus and Janus point to a continuous feeling of (im)permanence. These gods bring together in themselves the absolute miracle of beginnings and the arbitrary suppression of endings. These images allow us to reflect on how modern societies constituted the dual nature of the places of transition and passage. Walls, portals and thresholds are allegories of these temporal processes of transition that reveal the experience of the interregnum, that is, the moment of suspension between the past and the present, the relationship between the inside and the outside. In this sense, in choosing walls to observe the experience of becoming, we are, in a way, observing the sensible and aesthetic dimension of time, understood as the articulation of memory in order to produce a historical narrative (Prost 23).

Undertaking the study of walls, portals and boundaries is, therefore, to reflect on this heritage, that is, a historical legacy of Western civilization, which is continuously experiencing the impermanence of things in time. Walls point to the experience of a transformative moment, alluding to the invisibility of waiting or of hope. If time is a word, as for Vautier, we aim to present here a reading of historical interpretations, since



the words written on walls outline the experience of an event as milestones for the periodization of time.

As Kosellek (106) suggests, the meaning of the words occur in time and space. For this reason, concepts and their meanings are in constant movement: "The fact that a word has remained in constant use is not in itself sufficient indication of stability in its substantial meaning". Words on walls, like images, have both a synchronic and a diachronic nature. Writing about the city, in a certain sense, is reflecting in line with Bachelard's poetics of space (198), a way of stretching the words to encompass the sense of the world's vastness. This evokes Aragon (117), who assigns to the peasant of Paris the task of "writing with his eyes" because there are words that are mirrors, and such words foster our taste for the ephemeral. Parietal words dispel the text's illusion of eternity. In this case, the texts written on the city walls call upon the eyes of those in the city to take part in a narrative, to think about the integration between the actions of walking and of reading. The intermittent nature of these actions gives us a precious indication of the persistence of the graffiti narrative.

Following this line of thought, we aim to examine the "participatory belonging," in the words of Prost (45), taking into account the "idea of action" inherent in these words inscribed on city walls. These words reconstitute the experience of a group breaking its silence to express itself in the public space. As a graphic gesture of symbolic reconfiguration of reality, the words on the walls become tools for characterizing the insurgences and resentments of certain social groups. Beyond the politicization of the text, they are semantic bodies in action, disturbing the silenced words of the city and consolidating alternative frameworks for different time horizons. Novarina allows us to reappraise the ephemeral experience provided by the parietal word, as its impermanence would be what realizes the survival potential of gestures, even if that survival is intermittent in nature, such as the light of fireflies, and has an extremely precarious mnemonic status. Didi-Huberman's image of Lucciola (*Sobrevivência* 34) represents the fleeting flashes of light of these aphoristic graffiti. In our reading, Lucciola's disappearance also offers an image of the graffiti's fragility. Graffiti expresses the revolutionary energy proper to the excluded, providing us with the possibility of shaping pessimism within the context of historical catastrophes, as taught by Benjamin (*Obras* 33).

It all depends on the words we speak, the way they flow through us. We are in the words. The words are, at the same time, the forest where we are lost, our wandering, and the way we get out of it. Our words are our perdition and our guides. (Novarina 221)

This paper examines how walls are part of a visibility strategy that allows both street artists and citizens to attribute meaning to a certain historical event in a performative expression of revolt. We aim to address three aspects of this insurgence of the word. First, we will investigate the double bind of boundary spaces in the construction of the meaning of both texts and images. Next, we intend to approach these street words as the inception of a graphic performance of social issues. Finally, we will examine the reconfiguration of words into images of history.



In this sense, the written words are disseminated with the support of the temporal phenomenon of fashion, becoming thus an image of collective, transcultural and transhistorical concerns. Considering that the written word configures the images of our time, we aim to investigate here to what extent the crises disrupting contemporary democratic spaces induce artistic collectives, artists and street artists to engage in co-creative and co-participatory approaches aimed at attempting to share an expression of a community experience.

### DOUBLE BIND [FOR A PARIETAL LITERATURE]

Certains mots manquent d'être vus.  
(Antoine Mouton)

For Calvino (25), gravity holds the secret of lightness, and not even the word *stone* would have the power to make a verse heavy. This evokes the verses of Drummond (96), telling us that even with his fatigued retinas he could never forget the stones in the middle of the road: "in the middle of the road there was a stone." We dare to say that even in the face of failure or despair, the weight of the words would not be associated with its material support, but with connections capable of unveiling a historical drama. It is the empirical character of the sensible, therefore, that responds to the tragic aspect of the general degradation of the consciences.

In this sense, the words inscribed on the walls are an allegory of the ossifying of our own perception of images. In other words, when we see something and are invited to experience the reality of the world, the feeling of weight inherent in the process does not come from the written words themselves, but from the impossibility of deriving a language from it. Life's weight would be in all forms of oppression that prevent the enjoyment of a narrative, be it in the form of a text, a manifesto or a report. Gravity would thus be found in mutism, in silence, in fear or in the opacity of emptiness. If silence is the fuel of fear, as suggested by this sentence written on a Lisbon wall, weight would be a function of the fear of expressing oneself.



Fig. 3. Silence is the Fuel of Fear. Personal Collection, Lisbon, 2015.



Lines, phrases and verses appear on the streets in the form of fragments and, as a model of restless aphorism, they promote an instant reflection that makes us pause, for a few minutes, and experience another way of reading. Graffiti would thus be a way of thinking outlined by the freedom to quote without quotes, as Benjamin would say (*Passagens* 487). Graffiti are fragments that reveal, in the manner of the romantic thought, the continuous movement of words and thoughts in the world.

But what kind of oppression could be fought with words in movement? Benjamin (*Conceito* 107) says that for Novalis poetry wants to extend itself to the world in the form of prose. It acquires a prosaic semblance as it moves toward the world. Poetry, therefore, renounces its own demands, adapting itself to the forms of the world. It is for this reason that the reflection medium of poetic forms appears in the prose. In prose, all connected rhythms interpenetrate each other, conforming to the context of the different ages. The notion of reading the book of the world has a close connection with writing because it dialogues with history and with the updating of a critical action in the face of poetic construction.

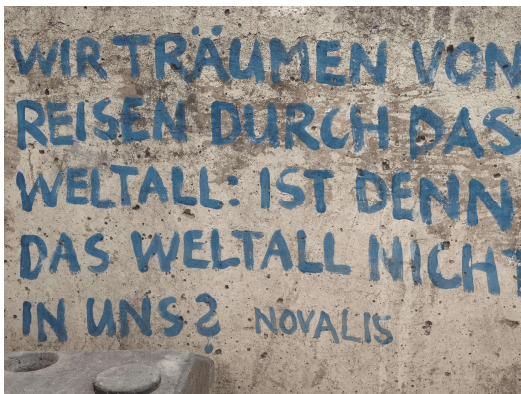


Fig. 4. We dream of traveling through space, but isn't space within us? Novalis. Personal Collection, Berlin, 2015.

This expansion of poetry into the prose of the world, and in particular, into the city walls reveals how much the prosaic is expressed in a new form of poetry. The question inscribed on a wall of the Rue de l'École de Médecine, in Paris (2016), alludes to the poet as a person capable of rediscovering the awe in everyday life, despite the ossifying of the world. Where are the poets who give (new) meanings not only to the perception of the strange, but also to the ghostly image that drives us to find the voices of the past on the walls?

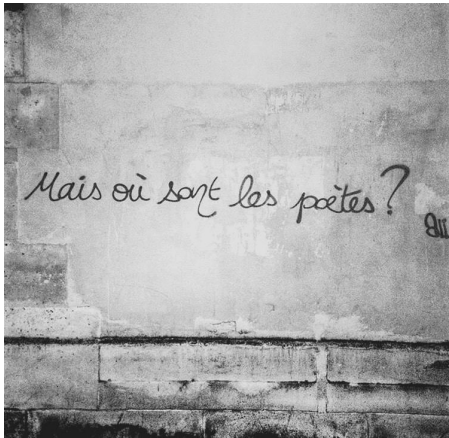


Fig. 5. But where are the poets? Personal Collection, Paris, 2016.

Calvino explains to us that whenever human beings seem condemned to bear the weight of the world, the poetic text confronts writing with the knowable reality. Literature's existential function, in this sense, is searching for lightness as a reaction to the weight of living. And the words on the walls would thus be the gravity of lightness. When the walls have their say, so to speak, we have before us a model of parietal literature. It is a model of the text in which thoughts are realized as drawings. Looking at the walls, we are invited to perceive a threshold, a passage that opens to a region beyond the inherent opacity of its surface.



Fig. 6. Look at the Walls. Personal Collection, Paris, 2015.

The imperative sentence inscribed on a wall in Paris offers an opportunity to reflect on what Bachelard (11) said about the poetic image: it emerges from the freedom of the word. The poetic expression is the result of freedom, and therefore is a psychic recognition of the sensible interiority of the viewer-reader. The unpredictability of the word imbues the reader with a sense of *topophilia*, that is, invites the reader to find in space the imagery and the language of poetry. When the poetic word invites us to enter



the opaque threshold of reality, we discover the true value of the word's space in the world. Two different kinds of spaces pertain to this boundary experience: the space of intimacy and the world space (Bachelard 207). It is precisely in this dual movement of opening and closing the rhythmic enjoyment of the word that we find the essence of the poet. Accessing the essence of the text enhances the "sense of the senses" (Didi-Huberman, *O que vemos* 236).

The dialogue between the inside and the outside occurring in the threshold is manifested in the mastery that the word holds over both space and time. When the wall asks us "where is the poet?" we can infer that it is a question about nature and not exactly about space. Where would the poet be? Would he be in the opaque reality of the gray city walls? Or elsewhere? Would the poet be in the vast contemplative space, where the feeling of existence is greatly enlarged?

The word as the street artist's praxis is transfigured into drawing. It is a graphic experience that translates thought into action, an imprudence of a method not subordinated to the conventional processes of artistic discourses. The immediate experience elicited by the text drawn on the walls introduces language into a place where it should not be placed. We thus enter an expanded sphere of literature. The visual potential of the text enables a shift of language toward a space in which it could not be conceived. We are talking here about an artistic practice of exception in which the act of writing and the praxis of drawing become similar. This leads us back to the words of Klee: "Since the dawn of civilization, drawing and writing ... were the same thing." (Klee qtd. in Lopes 77)

The words on a wall in Covilhã, Portugal, express the dual movement of these textual constructions. The question addressed to the passers-by—"what do you feel?"—reveals a fracture in them and challenges us with the strangeness of our own psychic reality. This opening of the language to the expression of an inquietude roused by the question suggests the extent to which the text is capable of mirroring the experience of the senses. Properly speaking, what we see on the wall is the manifestation of a distance, a ghost that should remain distant and that, nonetheless, is revealed to our eyes through the form and intensity of a text.



Fig. 7. What do you feel? Personal Collection, Covilhã, 2017.





As Didi-Huberman (*O que vemos* 230) suggests, this would be an aesthetic operation in which the repressed is made explicit by the action of viewing. Parietal texts become an endless threshold for viewing, thus allowing a rite of passage to take place. And through this rite, another visibility strategy is constructed. The phrases stenciled in the city of Lisbon (Fig. 8)—“Hello. Today I write on the walls. For you”—exemplify how the parietal word eclipses the complexity of language through the action of viewing.

The inescapable modality of the visible is the word door [...] the nature of the obstacle and of the visual opening. Would the door be our last dialectical image for leaving open the fable of viewing? [...] For this door remains before us so that we do not cross its threshold, or rather so that the decision to do so is always granted. And in that difference, all our viewing is maintained—in suspension—between the desire to cross, to reach the target, the endless mourning [the struggle], as if endlessly anticipated, of never having been able to reach the target. We remain on the edge, as before those tombs where, in every corner of their labyrinths, we find doors, even though they only raise before us the concrete, limestone obstacle of their dreamed immortality [...] In this situation, we are at the same time forced to go through a passage that the maze chose for us and disoriented in front of each door, in front of each orientation sign. We are in fact between *a in front of* and *an inside*. And this uncomfortable posture defines our entire experience, when what we see and what looks at us opens up in us [...] The motif of the door is, of course, immemorial: traditional, archaic, religious. Perfectly ambivalent (as a place to go beyond and as a place to not be able to cross) [...] there are always judges or guardians standing before them; they always become narrow in the rites of passage; the gods themselves call themselves doors to be entered in the most intimate enjoyment. The fact is that the door is a figure of opening – but of conditional opening, threatened or threatening, capable of giving everything or taking everything back. In short, it is commanded by a mysterious law. His own beat is a double bind figure [a double bind of the inside and the outside]. (Didi-Huberman, *O que vemos* 234)

Words, texts and images are allegorical representations of doors. Each viewer or reader is invited to pass through the threshold, building a double bind in the aesthetic dimension of the experience. This strategy is founded on a double bind that, according to Girard (27), weaves a complex relationship based on a triangular desire. Behind the desire, we discover the presences of author and reader, and also of a mediator: the imagination. Between the two lucid consciousnesses, the mediator's influence manifests itself. The imagination assumes the seminal function of articulating the distance and the approximation in the relationship between these two subjects.

The impulse towards the text reflects a desire that has its foundations in the mediator's intervention. The imagination has the role of eliciting an emotional experience. In this context, the reaction is characterized by the process of resentment (a reacting sentiment). There is a double emotional experience involved, that is, the emotions of both author and reader are experienced, thus transfiguring resentment into the potency of the aesthetic experience. The parietal word enters the sphere of double bind because it causes a kind of psychic self-poisoning in order to impose resentment as a point of view even on those not dominated by it (Girard 35).

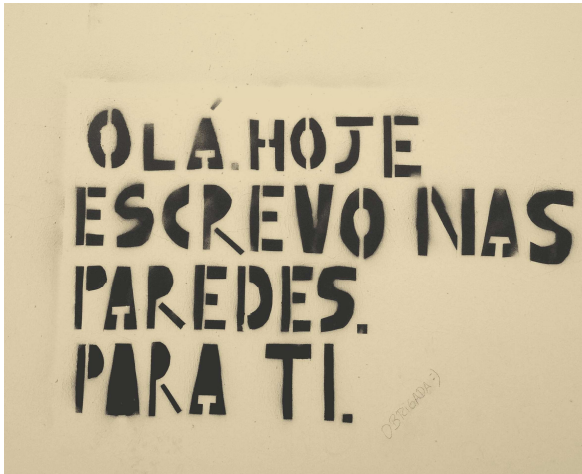


Fig. 8. Hello. Today I write on the walls. For You. Personal Collection, Lisbon, 2015.

Didi-Huberman (*O que vemos* 234) tells us about the open threshold of all forms of visibility, a door that opens like a fissure in a wall. A dual distance is revealed in emotional experiences, that is, when something affects us emotionally, we are able to perceive the space-time of the emotional experience itself. This articulation between the distant and the near reveals the movements of visual phenomena. Our eyes can thus perceive the dual movement of distancing and approximation. In this sense, the triangular structure suggested by the double bind opens the gaps in the walls through which the parietal words, in the city space, send back to each viewer-reader their own gaze.

#### WHITE WALL, MUTE PEOPLE [FRACTURING THE WORD-GESTURE]

Défense d’Afficher n’était pas encore un poème  
mais une loi d’un autre siècle.  
(Julien Besançon)

For romantic poets, the artists, poets and philosophers have the task of restoring the primordial language. This primordial language is connected to the sensible dimension of the spaces of the world. Coccia (24) reminds us that the sensible is the being of all forms. The sensible exists in the outside of the mirror. In the manner of Aragon (22), the sensible being of words exists in the same place where images are born because images are the fracture in the construction of meaning. The act of fracturing, as we said earlier, is the act of passing across the threshold at which we acquire the knowledge of all things, and among them, of resentment. Mirrors and walls are thus like thresholds: they have the function of eliciting a certain pathos, that is, eliciting an affection in every sensorial faculty. The silenced word of cities finds in the wall the mirror to introduce itself in the space of imagination, and from this place it produces in the senses the effect



of the word. The words inscribed on the walls are transfigured into images of reality because the triangular structure of the double bind produces a corporeal imagination that engenders a mirroring effect.

Going back to Schlegel (15), we can infer that the crossing of language into the world of things results in a game of correlations. The imagination aroused by graffiti, therefore, is a sensible experience in miniature resulting from the word's effect on reality. The famous aphorism "the walls have ears and the ears have walls," inscribed on the walls of Sciences Po in May 1968, is transfigured by an invitation to cross the threshold. Like a ghostly image from the past, the phrase was written again in the vicinity of the college. However, the poetic apparatus of this thought drawn on the wall makes it a part of the gestures of words realized in time and space. Hence, a poetic game begins, in which the opacity of the wall provides, once again, a gap through which we can move towards the transfiguration of meanings.

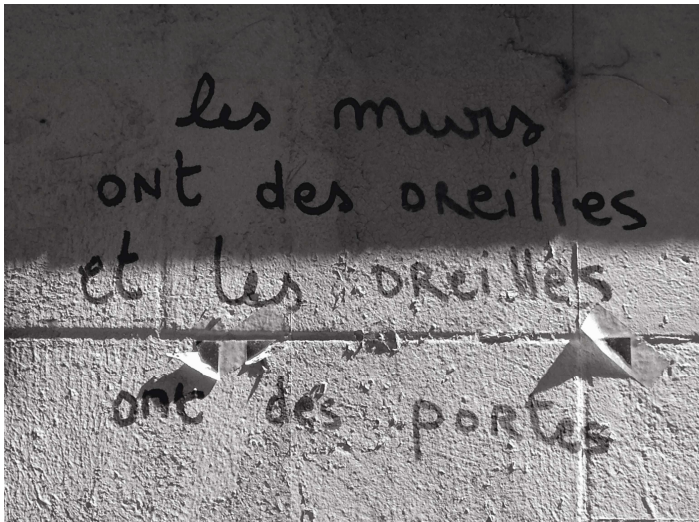


Fig. 9. The walls have ears and the ears have doors. Personal Collection, Paris, 2015

Warburg (*Histórias* 84) reflected on this while established knowledge was being confronted with a legion of ghostly images revealing similarities between the past and the present. These images inscribed on walls also manifest themselves as ghosts. They present themselves as fragments capable of mobilizing the changing configurations of our thinking in order to build a relationship between image and word. If in front of images we are faced with the experience of time, in front of words we can capture life in motion. Wall surfaces become the Atlas of our game of correlations. Warburg (*Atlas* 8) says: "knowledge is fighting with a legion of ghosts and looking at the living as if they were ghosts." These figures of the past in the present are signs of the future, revealing the sensible power of the imagination's mediation. Coccia (72) warns us that the sensible is the stream; that is, everything that is susceptible of being experienced sensibly is capable of flowing, because where there is a becoming there is also an image. Sensible life is only possible in spaces where other voices, faces and apparitions are



raised. The fracture on the wall is the gesture of the word in motion, and therefore, it is irruptive.

Benjamin (*Passagens* 341) refers to the streets as the abode of collective dreams. The experience of this inquietude is manifested in the ban on discourse proclaimed by some signs posted on walls: "Do not post signs." If the collective is eternally restless, so is the political operator that animates insurgences and revolutions. The graffiti and drawings on walls are transfigured into dialectical images capable of revealing the forms sensible life takes in our contemporary culture.



Fig. 10. White Wall, Mute People. Personal Collection, Paris, 2015

The aphorism "white wall, mute people" shows how the gesture of the word can fracture our present, acting as a device of thought-action. The asepsis of city walls reveals a population under the control of a socio-political order capable of muting the word of history. The insurgence of the words inscribed on walls is linked to the experience of shared convictions stirring the citizens to cross the walls, which reminds us of the fantastic tales in which bodies can pass through walls. It is the image of outrage, a sensible experience capable of mobilizing the collective imagination.

Everyone has known in their dreams the horror of doors that do not close. More precisely, doors that appear to be closed, but are not. I got to know this phenomenon intensely in a dream in which, being in the company of a friend, I saw a ghost in the ground floor window of a house that was on our right. And as we walked, it accompanied us, passing through all the houses in its way. He crossed all walls and divisions, always staying with us. I was seeing it all, even though I was blind. The walk we take through the passages is also, in the end, a ghostly path in which the doors give way and the walls open. (Benjamin, *Passagens* 442)

This allegory refers to the dialectical process of awakening; walls become the symbolic support for the uprising that begins in the sensible. According to Mondzain (30), walls create not only the graphic inscriptions but also the viewer looking at the threshold that will be used as a means of establishing relations. Walls allow the word-



gesture to stir the action of writing, as well as the actions of the body and the voice. Because there is no insurrection without the gesture that gives meaning to words.



Fig. 11. White Wall, Mute People. Personal Collection, Bologna, 2015.

Butler (35) suggests that at the moment when an unauthorized freedom is claimed – for example, by inscribing on city walls – there is an attempt to revolt against an authority in power. In this case, what we have before us is an appeal to the civic right to express oneself through insurgent texts on the walls of urban centers. The image of a muted people is an expression of a demand of the popular will.



Fig. 12. White Wall, Mute People. Personal Collection, Florence, 2015.

As Butler points out, we must ask ourselves what image of the people we refer to when we think of the different supports that help convey the image of revolts, insurgences or uprisings.



Fig. 13 - White Walls, Mute City. Personal Collection, Belo Horizonte, 2015.

The phrase “white wall, mute people” denounces an intolerable condition that arouses indignation, which is shared by several other cities such as Bologna (Italy) and Belo Horizonte (Brazil). Here the graphic action becomes the critical operator of a transposition project. In other words, graffiti suggests a crossing of the threshold after which we go beyond the horizon of indifference in the face of social injustices. According to Hessel (21), we live in a time of historically unprecedented hyperconnectivity, but we are gradually losing the capacity to be outraged. Resistance to indifference would be a way to act creatively and devise a new principle of hope. For every illicit word on the streets, there would be a voice that would not silence its indignation.



Fig. 14- Scream. Personal Collection, Berlin, 2015.



The desire to have a voice is based on the principle of equality of conditions, established by democratic societies. The word-gesture problematizes actions in the face of the urgency of our contemporary problems. If we are poorer in communicable experiences, as Benjamin believed, these graffiti reveal the disenchantment with our future, and the opacity of the walls must be traversed while the collective imagination is reawakened in the city space. Addressing a stranger is a way to initiate an approach. For this reason, the walls invite us to rethink the whiteness, the emptiness and the silence.



Fig. 15. Carnation Revolution, Mural Painting. Personal Collection, Lisbon, 2015.

If the gestual emblem of uprisings, as Didi-Huberman suggests (*Levantes* 123), is the closed fist and the raised arm, we may infer that the expression in a face tired by the unfulfilled desire to have a voice has the scream as an emblem. The scream is an emotion, that is, a movement arising from some feeling or perception that is set in motion on the threshold between inside and outside. The expression of the muted and silenced voice is revealed to our eyes when these faces are painted on the surface of walls. If the political bodies of the city allow no space for what must be said, the desire for visibility and legibility is inscribed on the walls. The power of the scream is the double bind that articulates the pathos of the entrails of the city space with the horizon of expectations that modernity offers us. This is the movement of the gestures driving the images stored in the social memory to reconstruct the past, witnesses to the glimpses of resistance and hope that can illuminate our present time.

## IN FRONT OF THE WORD, THE IMAGE

Without letter, no spirit.  
*Novalis*

In addressing the notion of dual distance, we aimed to reflect on the position of the viewer-reader towards the sensible experience elicited by urban



interventions. This approach was intended to highlight the process of transmuting word into image. This transmutation results from the viewers positioning themselves towards the written text. In line with Mondzain (15), we are convinced that viewing is a gesture similar to the action of writing or drawing. The reader's action of reading thus becomes essentially linked to the texts on the walls. For Artières (38), these inscriptions are traces of an account that mobilizes a particular type of reader: the mobile reader. This reader becomes a witness to the historical turbulences of our time, unveiling the connections between these texts and historical images.

The image presented by the parietal word is the result of a game of associations that forgo the status of research laboratories and investigations typical of art studios. The sensible dimension arises from the active gestures of e-motions, that is, a movement that stir up the collective perceptions of the world. The ethos of these images, thus, relates to what Barrento (53) called "ethics without qualities" because they are built with fragments of thoughts of uncertain origin. The space of the city is touched by instantaneous articulations that sometimes forge alliances aimed at reflective co-creation practices and sometimes allow a way of viewing that reflects a certain relationship of forces. Hence the fact that the aesthetic experience is built by violence, through forces that mobilize or stifle a collective sentiment. It is this that consolidates the notion of territory, because in this process the groups, their words and their identities are constituted.

The moment the city walls turn into writing studios, the death of the author is outlined. The movement of the word ends up realizing the romantic notion that every reader is an extension of the author. Because the essence of the work will be produced infinitely by the emergence of new meanings, by different views of it. Visibility strategies would necessarily be associated with a collective production of knowledge: forms of knowledge manifested in the complexity arising from uncertainties in face of the truth. As Barrento states, fragments lack a rational proof, and therefore, they only reveal a poetics of the encounter expressing the approximations or distances resulting from different ways of thinking. Therefore, it would constitute itself as the image of thought. In other words, graffiti are visual expressions of the movement of a form of spatial-temporal thinking. Futurists referred to graffiti as words in freedom, a heritage reconfigured by the conceptual artists of the Situationist and Fluxus movements, who aimed to displace the words of everyday utilitarianism to integrate them into a new experience of the city. Notably, these practices questioned the supports, the practices and the enunciation of the creative experience. The notion of thought in action gains a clear prominence the moment writing is transfigured into a performance of the incorporeal. The artistic production thus finds in the action of writing the same expression and problematization of other artistic languages such as painting or drawing.





Fig. 16. Word or Painting? Ben Vautier, Acrylic on canvas, 50x61cm, 2018. Eva Vautier Gallery, Nice, France. Source: <https://eva-vautier.com/boutique/mots-peinture-ben/> Accessed 25 May 2020.

Ben Vautier's work "words or peinture?" (2018) allows us to understand the appropriation of the graphic gesture as a pictorial intention, but at the same time, we see that the experience of the reader is a device for producing the work. In using this process, Vautier questions the problems of authorship and artistic legitimation, since creation depends effectively and affectively on the relationship with the viewer's experience. A text without the reader, going back to the verse of Drummond (186), is a silent word in the dictionary state. We must penetrate the words quietly so that each one can be realized in its state of silence. The face of the word is poetry, and it becomes an image through tenacious artistic production.

What we see is a way of engaging the aesthetic experience that redefines the notions of artistic praxis and aesthetic claims. If Street Art expresses rage through marginal procedures and collective actions, the transfiguration of the artistic spirit is a result of the word as thought in action. The Atelier Populaire, developed collectively by students in May 1968 at the School of Fine Arts in Paris, is an example of this. The student revolt generated collective practices that questioned the means of expression and production of social problems. According to Goudinoux (57), what is in question is the redefinition of the author's role through an identity alternative to the subversion of creative action. The irony expressed in the posters through a game of the unsaid engages the spiritual dimension of the image produced by the text. Visual poetics is the result of the emancipatory creative ideals that challenged both art and literature.

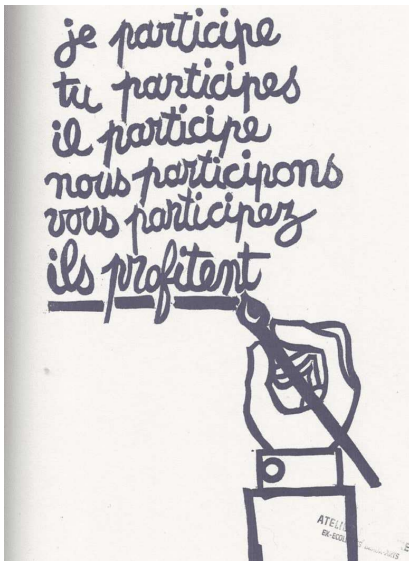


Fig. 17. Poster, Atelier Populaire, École de Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1968. Edited by Bernadette Caille et al., 28.

Stefan Brüggemann (1975) introduces the syntax of social upheavals in the sensible dimension of art. However, the word is not instrumentalized by the artist; it is the expression of a movement through which the images of contemporary social problems are transfigured in a critical manner. From this perspective, the political dimension of the experience is inscribed in artistic praxis both to reflect on a conception of freedom and to impart a sensible nature to the word resulting from the graphic gesture. In the manner of Warburg (*Histórias* 84), we can say that Brüggemann's hypertexts also reveal the images of life in motion because we recognize in these graphic acts the survival of conceptual art gestures.



Fig. 18 - Headlines & Last Lines in The Movies (Protest), Stefan Brüggemann, 2014, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada. [www.stefanbruggemann.com/work/exhibitions/2014.02/index.html](http://www.stefanbruggemann.com/work/exhibitions/2014.02/index.html) Accessed 10 Jun 2020.

According to Colard (16), Brüggemann's work problematizes the literary dimension of the text. The critic asks us: "How can we be so textual and at the same time so little literary?" Perhaps answering this question is possible insofar as the legible and



the visible do not coincide. However, he says that Brüggemann manages to find new literary possibilities in the texts of urban graffiti. Colard tells us that in that sense, then, nothing is more literary than his works.

Just as walls became a space for social and political struggles, the pedagogy of art incorporated new collaborative perspectives and practices. Relational aesthetics produced a new relationship between space and time in order to disrupt the atelier experience. The notion of co-creation transformed the closed space of the atelier into a laboratory open to the concept of project and expanded to include experiments involving shared and procedural objects. The encounter became the locus of the artistic activity, increasing the importance of the creative context, aiming to be an art of the social interstices. Art came to be understood as a place that fostered a specific sociability, particularly in its insertion in the city space. In this regard, Bourriaud (32) explains that relational aesthetics, in its essence, is an image of the transitivity that informs the relationships between the image, the viewer and the world.

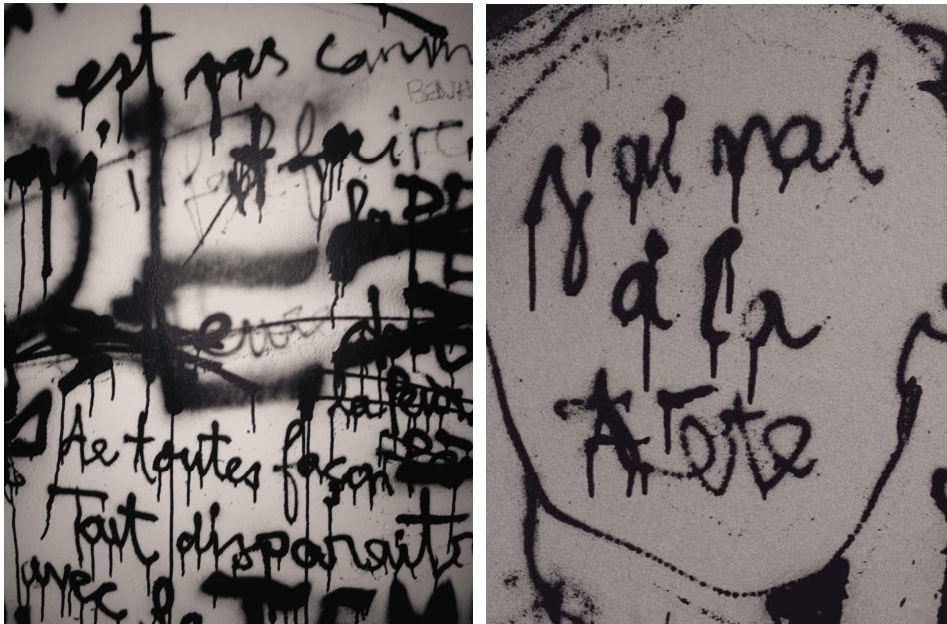


Fig. 19 - Dran, Interior, Palais de Tokyo, Paris. Personal Collection, 2015

Thus, as the word becomes a device to mobilize artists, viewers and the social space, it will point to other forms of linguistic subversion. The work of urban artist Dran, exhibited at the Palais de Tokyo in 2015, helps to examine these new exchanges between words and artistic praxis. What is evidenced by the displacement of the word toward the walls is the engagement with the place and the territory. The aesthetics of the revolt incorporated into the graffiti becomes in itself a space for political discussions related to both the system of art and culture and the changes resulting from creative actions taking place in city spaces and in daily life. In a way, this common space of the



word in the expanded field of the city is itself a method that allows artists and spectators to collectively build the artistic image of a counter-power.

As Goudinoux (62) explains, the essence of collective creation includes a problematization of power relations. Thus, the works of anonymous artists, such as Dran and Banksy, raise questions about the meaning of collective life by exploring our forms of symbolic communication. Graffiti is essentially the enjoyment of meaning through the image of the word. They are an expression not only of a form of writing subjected to the artistic praxis but also refer to the performatization of discourse in the public space. Graffiti, therefore, are also collective devices that question the values of the past regarding the collective ways of doing and being. On the other hand, these devices can enrich the set of values that underpin the artistic field and define its place within the cultural system.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The paper presented an analysis of the expanded field of the word in the context of the city and in the artistic practice. Our aim was to reflect on how writing can open new perspectives for language and for human interactions in the social space. We intended to show that, with regard to transgressive and civil disobedience practices, the movement of words on city walls reveals a poetics exception. Graffiti strengthens the revolt of the words written on the walls, transfiguring itself into a poetic fragment that sheds light on social, cultural, aesthetic and political issues. The relational dimension of the word on the walls of cities, galleries or cultural institutions reveals the new visibility strategies aimed at strengthening the voices muted by political and symbolic struggles. The result is the emergence of a form of poetry without poems, in which poetry is built in a raw state. The prose of the world becomes the core of the purest expression of thought. The walls become thresholds where boundaries are approached, contact zones between the inside and the outside of language. As a threshold, walls introduce the tradition of writing into the political tensions of the social space. The parietal word becomes an account of the encounter between poetry and prose, engaging the imagination and the social memory in the scream of the outraged walls (Tessier, 2015, 22).

In this sense, poetry becomes polyphonic, and begins to express the communal spirit. In the manner of Lautréamont (DUCASSE, 2001), poetry is everyone's creation and not of a single author. In the action of writing, thought becomes a laboratory experiment of new concepts and worldviews. Graffiti becomes a kind of mural poetry articulated by the visual poetics of the fragment. These fragments offer us the opportunity to experience the crossing of the threshold between duration and finitude. As a poetics of fragments, the graffiti, as Barrento (2010, 65) writes, is "a continuum that is always open... like the image of a murmur.



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