GRAFFITI AND RHETORIC

BY

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ABSTRACT

Using Banksy as the primary artist of study, this thesis adapts present rhetorical research to understand the importance of location, timing, and credibility for the visual rhetor. Visual Rhetoric is a rapidly growing segment of the communication discipline. Graffiti as a method of communication offers an interesting site of examination for rhetorical theories both classic and contemporary. This thesis engages current lines of research on kairos, ethos and place-as-rhetoric to understand how graffiti means, and what role it can play in social movements and personal identity. Standards of kairotic speech for visual rhetoric are theorized. Understanding ethos as dwelling place reveals the underlying principles of Banksy’s success. Finally, using graffiti the rhetorical scholar is able to uncover how meaning becomes associated with particular places and potential strategies for altering that meaning.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In early 2008 street artist PAC, after several rounds with a recent acquaintance, was taken to an abandoned subway station four stories below New York City. He was shown a graffiti artists dream. Deeply isolated below New York City was thousands of square footage of canvas; long caverns that were virtually blank, difficult to get to and dangerous to paint on, the abandoned station became what is now known as the Underbelly Project. The possibilities were endless and over the next several years, PAC organized over 100 different street artists to come down to the station and make their mark.

Traveling to the station was difficult, and the primary entrance was built by the artist themselves. To this day, the details of the technology used to access the site have remained undisclosed. We only know they whatever was used has been destroyed in hopes of making the site even more difficult to reach. New York City has a long and complex history behind its infamous Metro, and there are literally dozens of abandoned stations where the project could be located. Since the project was revealed to the public in 2010 by The New York Times, many people have been arrested attempting to find it.

The operation was organized by PAC with the help of Work Horse and organically evolved during the two years the behemoth it is today. Relying on personal connections they had made throughout their careers, they led each artist down to the station to work on the project. While working the artist had to avoid subway line workers as well as general authorities suspicious of any individuals with paint cans and flashlights. The preparations to mitigate the risks were substantial. PAC states:
I remember the counting of headlamps, batteries, light stands, and tripods. I remember checking to see if batteries were charged and if cans had been shaken.... Mostly I remember lacing up my boots as tightly as possible, a ritual that would come to define my adventure. I remember the rules, a long list of what ifs, dos, don'ts, and in-case-of-emergencies.9

The idea of spending years painting a galleries worth of art only to make it as inaccessible as possible and impossible to financially capitalize on is beyond reason to some. Others conclude that it simply is not important. I however find it fascinating. The Underbelly project to me reveals what is the essence of graffiti. As someone who has struggled to understand conventional art wisdom and what makes a piece valuable, I get graffiti. I understand the desire to be heard and express oneself. I understand spending an entire evening on a piece that will only see the light of day once or twice before it is scrubbed from its existence by a city employee. While my personal connection with graffiti has not always existed, the first time it was explained to me, my outlook changed. Although not a graffiti artist myself, I have spent the last three years harassing any of my acquaintances who avow the title for pictures, stories and explanations.

Graffiti is one of the oldest practices of dissent still used today. The ancient Roman city of Pompeii has thousands of scrawling upon its walls preserved to this day. The content ranges from wishing a long life to the Emperor Nero, to basic drawings of peacocks.10 Graffiti can be found in virtually every city on earth and deserves greater attention from rhetorical scholars. Graffiti ranges from small scribbles on stall door in a middle school bathroom to gigantic stencils posted on the Gaza Wall. Graffiti is placed on trains, walls, inside museums and even on traditional billboards. Operating as a rich intersection of art, subversion and human communication, there are many opportunities
for rhetorical scholars on the subject. The purpose of this thesis will be to more fully explore graffiti from a critical rhetorical perspective.

This process of exploration will involve first the task of defining graffiti. Of the dozens of articles written on graffiti both within and outside our discipline only a handful even take a stab at defining graffiti and so far seem mostly inadequate. I will then discuss the current state of visual rhetoric and argumentation theory. Finally, I will outline the remainder of the thesis and the justifications for its completion.

**Literature Review and Defining Graffiti**

Rhetorical scholars have long grappled with how to approach the study of visual rhetoric. Combining aesthetics and argument in a way that requires substantially more interpretation by the viewer, this should be a primary site for rhetorical study. Traditional public address is straight forward in comparison. Specifically the study of graffiti offers the rhetorical scholar an intersection of subversion and discourse that has gone under theorized.

Unfortunately, the basic preconditions for theorization have yet to be met. First, one must rigorously define graffiti and determine what it is and is not. Defining graffiti is necessary for the development, application and refinement of any theory that hopes to be useful in explaining and understanding how graffiti operates. For example, the recent article “Addicted to the Risk, Recognition and Respect that the Graffiti Lifestyle Provides: Towards an Understanding of the Reasons for Graffiti Engagement,” by Myra Taylor, attempts to understand what motivates graffiti artists, without ever attempting to define graffiti or graffiti artist.¹¹ This person is a social scientist who traditionally claims to be “more rigorous” than rhetorical studies yet doesn’t define a core variable within her study.
Taylor went on to publish two more articles on graffiti without ever defining the term. This is not uncharacteristic of the larger body of literature on graffiti, frequently commenting and citing but rarely defining. Several others have defined it but did so poorly.

In particular D’Angelo, in one of the early rhetorical scholars who attempts to theorize graffiti defined it as “crude drawings, inscriptions, and markings which appear on billboards, fences, and walls and various other kinds of writing surfaces.”

This definition is somewhat lacking in its ability to distinguish between public art projects and graffiti. By including the word crude, the author has already asserted a negative view of graffiti as lacking artistic style and merit. It appears the primary point of differentiation is the skill of the artist which makes little sense. At what point is something no longer crude and instead polished and sophisticated? What differentiates a poorly done advertisement that appears “crude” from a tag by individual. Rather than defining graffiti, D’Angelo is conveying his impression of the graffiti he has encountered thus far which is a completely different task. This would be akin to defining meatloaf as “gross” simply because your mother was a bad cook. While gross might define your mother’s meatloaf, and crude might describe D’Angelo’s neighborhood graffiti, it is in no way descriptive of all graffiti and is contingent on the subjective evaluation of taste (in art or meat based dishes).

Stowers, in *Graffiti Art: An Essay Concerning The Recognition of Some Forms of Graffiti As Art*, argues:

In addition, graffiti art is not a spontaneous activity like tagging in the form of fancy scribble. The completion of a piece or a production involves a great deal of imagination, planning, and effort. The graffitiist first does a sketch. Then he or she plans out characters and selects colors. Next, the artist selects his or her "canvas" or surface and does a preliminary outline, followed by a filling in of colors and ornamentation, and then the final outline is completed.
While I have a problem with Stowers exclusion of tagging as a form of graffiti, this description of the process helps to highlight how complex and sophisticated graffiti can be. While graffiti can be crude, it does not have to be. Online videos documenting different graffiti pieces are testament to the levels of sophistication that go into some works. Some works take almost an entire day to complete and is done while avoiding detection. Not only does the definition offered by D’Angelo fail to make a distinction between corporate advertisements and graffiti, he limits it to a standard of “crude,” disavowing the artistic talent many artist have. Stowers does a much better job defining graffiti with:

grafficar [singular of graffiti] signifies drawings, markings, patterns, scribbles, or messages that are painted, written, or carved on a wall or surface. Grafficar also signifies "to scratch" in reference to different wall writings ranging from "cave paintings", bathroom scribbles, or any message that is scratched on walls. In reference to present day graffiti, the definition is qualified by adding that graffiti is also any unsolicited marking on a private or public property that is usually considered to be vandalism.14

The most important part of this definition is the last sentence. Everything before it is simply examples of graffiti, not an exhaustive list of graffiti. In 2007, an advertising company publically projected an advertisement for an upcoming movie on the side of a skyscraper in Boston. The advertisers had not asked permission from the building owners or the local police and the people responsible for the ad were arrested. I would argue this subversion of authority done through a projector should also count as graffiti.15 Although nothing was painted, written or carved we should consider it graffiti since it received similar recognition, just used a newer technology.
Similarly, the creation of the internet has opened up new avenues for expression. The internet has created new surfaces that artists can target such as the website that was used by the 2008 Obama Campaign (pictured to the right). A message that almost mimics the font created by a spray can has been coded on top of the Obama website. I have difficulty drawing a distinction of importance between this, and a piece of political graffiti aimed at criticizing a local politician. The only difference between the two is the medium upon which it is located. The location of the artist would result in their arrest, and this message would not have been approved if the artists had asked.

Stower’s last sentence is revealing in what is the essence of graffiti; however there is a problem with the word unsolicited. Soliciting is generally associated with asking, where as unsolicited generally means not asked for. This word does not make all that much sense in this context. Someone can solicit something even if it is illegal. In this case it might be one person asking a graffiti artist to do a piece somewhere they don’t
control. Does it not count as graffiti since one person asked them to do it? If an artist’s mother tells them “I want you to go out and tag as many places as possible,” since their mother solicited the tagging is that person not creating graffiti when they write their name in eight foot letters on the side of a bus?

While this scenario might seem odd, it highlights the nature of what the definition lacks. Specifically, Stower’s definition cannot account for who has to solicit to not make it graffiti. Missing is this concept of authority. The person or institution with the authority to solicit the art ultimately determines if it is graffiti.

Although Stower does qualify that graffiti is usually described as vandalism, this is helpful in including an example but not an exhaustive list of its descriptors. For example, a graffiti artist by the name of Banksy, placed his painting in the Tate Britain in London. The painting was an idyllic farmhouse, tucked away amongst forest that is interrupted with police tape that say’s “do not cross” across the front of the picture. The museum did not notice the unsolicited addition and the hoax was only discovered, when the backing on the piece gave out and the piece fell to the ground. To summarize, Banksy placed the painting in the Museum unauthorized, damaged nothing and was only discovered when his piece was no longer attached to the wall. It would be very difficult to label this vandalism, however the placement of art that directly challenges traditional art institutions would qualify it as graffiti.

*Graffiti can best be defined as an unauthorized publically displayed symbol.* This is both an exceptionally limiting definition while simultaneously rich. To fully understand this definition, each word and phrase shall be discussed below using examples to highlight what does and does not meet this definition.
The first part of this definition, and perhaps the most crucial is “unauthorized.” The concept of authority necessarily implies a power relationship where one force has the ability to dictate what is acceptable and punish forces that step outside those bounds. Unauthorized usually refers to unauthorized by a state, but can also include gangs, illegitimate local power brokers, or more recently website domain masters. This inclusion of unauthorized within the definition means that it no longer operates as graffiti if the context of the piece changes. Roland Bleiker in *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics*, argues:

The discursive dynamics through which transversal dissent operates are located in the spaces that lie between the strong and the weak, between dominant and marginalised discourses. The power that lingers in this void is best understood by shifting foci from epistemological to ontological issues. This is to say that one must observe how an individual may be able to escape the discursive order and influence its shifting boundaries.

Graffiti, because it is always unauthorized, serves to mark this space lying between the strong and the weak. The individual is able to escape the authorizing power and influence the shifting bounds of the descriptive order. Consider the concept of tagging.

Most attribute the modern graffiti movement as coming from New York City. One of the original artists used the tag “TAKI 183.” Through a city wide publicity campaign the artist was able to gain widespread notoriety. A “tag” is a way to identify different artists through symbols, a personal sign or a combination of letters. In the late 1960’s, Demetrius, a Greek delivery boy from Washington Heights, created the tag TAKI 183, referencing the Greek version of his name and his street number. His job as a delivery boy gave him ample opportunity to tag as many public surfaces as possible, becoming infamous throughout New York City. He was interviewed in 1971 for a New
York Times article about his methods and motivations, essentially causing widespread adoptance of “tagging”. New York City was teeming with under privileged youth searching not only for a way to express themselves but also to keep themselves busy. By identifying graffiti as operating between these strong and weak discourses, the rhetorical critic is able to understand how the everyday lives of individuals are influenced by power. TAKI 183’s successive fame and widespread recognition is testament to the power of repetition of images, something usually reserved for those with extensive capital.

There is the potential to misread graffiti and assume that because it is unauthorized it is operating from a marginalized or counter hegemonic position. However because it is unauthorized, these examples tend to weed themselves out. It is difficult to evade detection while simultaneously having publically endorsed a works intended goal. Some have argued that the example where film *Aqua Teen Hunger Force Colon Movie Film for Theaters*, a large scale commercial production by the Adult Swim Network, projected an advertisement on the side of a building, demonstrates the potential to misunderstand the clash of strong and weak discourses. Unfortunately, because it was for a commercial enterprise, it was very easy to locate who was responsible. The end result was “arrest of two men — Peter Berdovsky, 27, of Arlington, and Sean Stevens, 28, of Cambridge — who were charged with placing the hoax devices and disorderly conduct.” The reason graffiti is not easily co-opted is should a large entrenched interest wish to use it, it would be virtually impossible to not get caught.
The inclusion of the phrase “public display” is meant to simply denote that the graffiti is visible by some person other than the graffiti artist. This definition simply implies that if no one sees it, it would be impossible to discern if it is unauthorized or apply that ontological position. Some might argue this render’s graffiti as purely a social construction no longer having a connection to materiality.

Rather, this simply makes the social component a necessary, yet insufficient component. The physical presence of the arrangement of symbols is also necessary which has a very real material presence.

Finally, symbol is meant to be the arrangement of referents that can transmit meaning. Symbols include icons and even natural occurrences that are incorporated into the piece. This inclusion of “natural elements” might seem counter intuitive to understand as a symbol, however, when they are incorporated into a piece of graffiti; they come to signify more than just their natural presence. The picture to the right I believe demonstrates the use of natural elements to signify the characters afro.

The purpose of this section was to clearly and as vividly as possible define graffiti. A precise definition of graffiti is necessary for the rhetorical scholar to theorize more fully on how graffiti operates and judge if it is being effectively deployed. Although some art scholars might wish to make further distinctions within graffiti based on the
medium or the style of the artist, these although important distinctions, might not best be answered by a rhetorical scholar. The rhetorical scholar should focus their attention on how technique impacts what is communicated. To the rhetorical scholar, the decision to use spray paint versus brush is less important than the fact the artist just wrote “No War” on the side of the Sydney Opera house. This provides a transition to the next section, which explores the current theoretical lenses available for studying graffiti as visual argument.

**Theoretical Perspective**

As a communication scholar hoping to study graffiti there are several highly relevant lines scholarship I must engage. The first are foundational visual argument text’s that engage in debates over both what is argument and how visuals can engage in it. The second set of texts are adaptations of other case studies to serve as a guide in lieu of scholarship specific to graffiti. There is currently a gap in the literature applying visual argumentative theory to graffiti that other texts will be used to help fill.

The role of the images within argumentation theory has been a deeply debated topic within communication studies. Early debates focused on whether visual argumentation was possible absent any language. Now, scholars have begun to apply traditional argumentation theory to visual case studies to demonstrate the role a rhetorical scholar can play on non-oratorical artifacts. At this point in time, as the screen becomes more ubiquitous, the role images play is even more important. It is my desire that through rigorously applying these standards of visual argumentation to graffiti, we will not only demonstrate the usefulness of visual argumentation theory, but also point us to new areas of study.
Birdsell and Groarke in a special issue of *Argumentation and Advocacy*, outline three principles of visual communication for the rhetorical scholar to begin their examination:

1. such images can be understood in principle;
2. they should be interpreted in a manner that makes sense of the major (visual and verbal) elements they contain;
3. they should be interpreted in a manner that fits the context in which they are situated. Similar to verbal forms of communication and argumentation, we must situate the visual within its broader context to more fully appreciate its meaning.

Smith in “Aristotle’s Classical Enthymeme and the Visual Argumentation of the Twenty-First Century,” overcomes the obstacle that stumped many rhetorical scholars. The indeterminancy of many images makes the discernment of reasons from proposition difficult. She argues that the perception of this obstacle is the result of a misreading of Aristotle and what an enthymeme is. Rather than being a truncated syllogism, Aristotle’s enthymemes “are "considerations" that an audience is "swayed by when reflecting on an issue."” By changing our conception of the enthymeme, this opens the door for the audience’s consideration of logos, pathos and ethos in determining the sufficiency of the proposition being forwarded in an argument. The subjective interpretation process by the audience is always present in traditional verbal arguments and we should expect that comparable subjectivity in visual arguments as well. The considerations that are brought forth through visuals are sometimes less indeterminate than those brought forth through verbal argument.

Consider the verbal argument “the war in Vietnam is unjust, it causes lot’s of human suffering.” Left up to the reader is the interpretation of unjust, the types of human suffering, the magnitude of suffering, what should replace the war, and a great deal more assumptions the author is expecting the reader to make. Compare that to the image of
Kim Phuc, running naked from her Vietnamese home after being Napalmed by US forces. There is still clearly room for subjective interpretation but the types of suffering, the severity of it and what should be done (stop napalming villages) is as straightforward as any verbal argument.

Visual arguments Smith argues, rely on probabilistic premises and conclusions. That is, not everyone viewing the image will arrive at the same conclusion but a decent proportion of the audience will. Those presenting the image will pull on the general cultural knowledge and associations of the audience to hopefully arrive at desired conclusion. Just as the last paragraph relied on the reader’s knowledge of that powerful image of published over 40 years ago in Time Magazine, those making visual arguments rely on “common knowledge.”

Blair in “The possibility and actuality of visual arguments,” engages in visual argumentative theory with a description of a Benetton’s Clothing advertising campaign that ran in The New Yorker, during its “Black in America” series.28 He uses O’Keefe’s definition of argument as “a linguistically explicable claim and one or more linguistically explicable reasons”.29 Blair then asserts the non-sequitorial notion that racism is nonsensical therefore buy Benetton’s clothes, is evidence that the advertisements are not visual arguments. He holds that because the advertisement’s reasoning is inexplicable it cannot function as argument. The fundamental premise of the advertisements inexplicability is its lack of a claim and a warrant. We could expect him to apply this same reasoning to most graffiti. However, if
one expands their understanding of context, claim and warrant become more apparent. Perverse racism still exists in America and there are millions of consumer clothing options with superficial differences, we can read the advertisement as an assertion that the company is willing to take the public stand that racism make no sense (everyone’s heart looks generally the same), the reader should support financially a company with similar social justice views as their own. While it might not be a top quality argument, it certainly makes a claim and warrant’s it.

Similarly, graffiti is making an argument as to what is important and warrants itself in several different ways. Consider a simple tag such as TAKI 183. The claim is that the individual making the tag exists and is important. The warrant is the prolific nature of the tag and the sheer number of places Demetrius got the tag up. An individual encountering the tag multiple times in different locations throughout the city can understand themselves as having shared experiences with the tags author. Riding the same subway lines, passing the same corner store, seeing the same billboard every day, previously unconsidered individuals insert themselves into the everyday lives of other around them.

Moving generally from the theory to practice McNaughton, in “Hard Cases: Prison Tattooing as Visual Argument,” makes the argument for how visual argumentation works within prison culture. When most other modes of expression are severely limited by penitentiary organization, tattoo’s become one of the few methods of sharing meaning and exerting agency. The tattoos require cultural knowledge to make sense of them beyond simply aesthetically pleasing visuals. There are complex messages within the tattoo’s making arguments for certain values, ways of life and organizational structures.
Consider the placement of a Swastika on a prisoner’s chest. This tattoo indicates the prisoner’s membership within a neo-Nazi gang. A tattoo carries all the baggage of what that association indicates the same way a verbal proclamation would. This includes the superiority of Aryans, the notion of brotherhood amongst members and excessive violence towards outsiders. The placement and sizing of the tattoo might also indicate the strength in loyalty the person has. A large Swastika somewhere not coverable by clothing indicates an “all-in,” by the prisoner on the group affiliation and a commitment that is not mitigate by being fully clothed. By controlling their body when the state has denied their freedom, the inmates are also articulating a form of agency.

As Birdsell & Groarke suggest, the rhetorical scholar must attempt to fully excavate the context of the visual argument. The certainty of McNaughton’s conclusions however might be unwarranted. The context goes beyond simply an environment where personal expression is limited. There are also security concerns for many inmates. Rape, assault and other violent behavior is considered the norms in most prisons and gang membership can often reduce the risks of being the target of such behavior. In a prison context affiliation to neo-Nazi groups might simply be a security arrangement rather than an affirmation of hatred towards other races. This explanation and further problematizing of the visual arguments put forth in a prisoners tattoo’s seeks to highlight both the indeterminate nature of visual arguments, while articulating the grounds upon which we can still base conclusions.

McNaughton in her study hopes to “investigate how people make arguments-particularly for specific identities and social selves-in the absence of significant (or even any) face-to-face dialogue.” This study is particularly helpful in an understanding of
graffiti. Often graffiti offers an outlet for those who are disenfranchised by mainstream society, we can begin to see how it takes up an argumentative function. Graffiti artist often lack the sort of face-to-face dialogue that has been idealized in the public sphere, yet are certainly still members of that democratic society. McNaughton argues,

Identity is not merely performed but also argued, if one's identity is to be accepted one needs to mount a convincing claim to that identity, a claim that will be accepted by one's intended audience.\textsuperscript{35}

Expanding what has to be argued for, we can see how an artist might be laying claim to an identity or a place of importance within an urban dwelling that was previously unrealized. The placement of a graffiti artist name upon in a highly visible context is an assertion of their membership and importance within that location. Birdsell & Groarke argue “their capacity to naturalize, however, makes visual demonstrations powerful tools of persuasion.”\textsuperscript{36} The artist seeks to naturalize others to their presence.

As the debate over visual argumentation has matured, graffiti has more clearly come within the purview of the discipline. John Downing in \textit{Radical Media}, catalogues the various media forms operating from counter hegemonic positions.\textsuperscript{37} Downing differentiates radical media from traditional media through several characteristics such as low cost of production and use by marginalized groups. Among several other radical media formats, graffiti is explored in one of Downing’s Chapters. He cites pro-rock music graffiti in Soviet Russia and political statements scrawled in Nigerian bathrooms during the reign of military juntas. The focus of Downing’s analysis was on overtly political statements with clear objectives and denouncements of current authority.

Ono and Sloop in \textit{Shifting Borders}, discuss graffiti as it relates to “outlaw” discourses. Outlaw discourses are defined as discourses that are incommensurate with
conventional hegemonic discourses.\textsuperscript{38} They outline the role of the critic is to identify the productive outlaw discourses and incorporate them into existing systems of judgment. They recognize that not all outlaw discourses are necessarily positive and that the critic can play a role in navigating and passing judgment on their deployment. They contextualize this to political graffiti surrounding California’s anti-immigrant Proposition 187.

Although including graffiti within the realm of communication studies neither of these texts offered guidance for interpretation of graffiti, nor did they highlight the more unique aspects of the phenomenon. Another scholar, Ella Chmielewska, in “Framing [Con]text Graffiti and Place,” focuses exclusively on graffiti and points us towards the unique characteristics of graffiti.\textsuperscript{39} However because she fails to define graffiti, much of her analysis focuses on murals and sanctioned art projects. Chmielewska, who identifies locality as important to the study of graffiti, omit’s a discussion of power dynamic within the specific locality, something crucial in my proposed definition of graffiti.

Endres and Senda-Cook in “Location Matters: The Rhetoric of Place in Protest,” argue the importance of \textit{place-in-protest} in social movements and call for broader excavation by rhetorical scholars when studying social movements.\textsuperscript{40} The article argues that place can be used to by protesters to impart meaning into their more verbal messages as well as that protest can restructure traditional meanings on a place. Graffiti which physically restructures the visual place in its creation is briefly discussed as it relates to Alcatraz. Their analysis however is limited to graffiti operating within larger organized social movement’s, must be adapted to understand a singular instance of graffiti upon a wall. The bridge between in-depth analysis of graffiti and its situation against hegemonic
power structures has yet to be fully articulated. This will be explored more fully in later chapters.

**Justification**

This thesis has the potential to make several meaningful contributions to the study of graffiti. First, this thesis will hope to more rigorously study and understand graffiti. Although there is already significant scholarship on visual argumentation, and graffiti gets mentioned in several works on protest, little scholarship explores graffiti in-depth. The rhetorical tools already developed should help to guide this application with some adjustments to the unique form that is graffiti. Considering the prevalence of graffiti through both time and place, it is important for the rhetorical scholar to as completely as possible, be able to dissect, evaluate and understand different pieces and their significance as it relates to human communication. Although ill-equipped to pass judgment on the aesthetics of a piece, the rhetorical scholar has many theoretical lenses that require minor adjustments to fully appreciate the meaning of a piece.

Because of a different set of decisions made by a graffiti artist than other traditional artist, location becomes a crucial component of graffiti and how its meaning operates. Location, serves as a necessary supplement to traditional rhetorical understandings of *kairos*. How does the drive by authorities to erase the rhetoric, implicate what is the opportune moment. As Birdsell and Groarke argued, this extra attention to context is necessary especially since graffiti’s context is unique in that it is both unauthorized and publically displayed. The objective will be to develop a theory of the role location and how it can affect the meaning of graffiti.
An extension of a unique component of graffiti is its interaction with ethos. How does a rhetorical scholar account for ethos when many pieces are anonymous and the subject position of the artist is often hidden? Or how does an anonymous subject position develop credibility, such as Banksy, who’s “identity” has not been revealed, but can animate a public persona to receive positive reception. A rhetorical scholar must look beyond traditional tools of the discipline in understanding how an audience might interact with an argument in lieu of traditional credibility markers. Graffiti can force us as rhetorical critics to completely flush out component’s of credibility that are able to operate without a visible author. This piece will seek to demonstrate if that is possible and if so, how can it be done.

Turning from the question of how artist gain credibility, how does a piece seek to operate to change the meaning of a place. While the previous line of inquiry assumes a static location for graffiti, the meaning of that location is inherently rhetorical and can thus be redefined through continual alterations to place. Graffiti which is always a material change to place, effects and shapes this process and can reveal other methods for doing so.

Finally, I hope to expand our understanding the public sphere and what we ought consider argument. What we account for in our conceptualizations of the public greatly impacts our evaluation of that public. To argue we have a fully functioning democracy while ignoring the messages of millions of youths seems counterintuitive. The development of an appreciation for graffiti can help to have a more inclusive public sphere. During an age with increasing visual communication due to the proliferation of screens, it is even more important to fully understand the role images play within society.
and affect our everyday lives. Roland Bleiker has argued that the study of resistance and subversion should focus on the level of the everyday where the hegemonic meets the marginalized. Graffiti because of who does it, why they do it and how they do it provides an excellent rich location for these encounters at the everyday level.

Some of these goals are more easily achieved than the others but potential failure should not necessarily be a limiting factor. If nothing else, I hope this thesis will at the very least make the reader appreciate graffiti and view it more favorable than previously. If the only outcome of this thesis is that the reader takes more notice of the graffiti around them and can more competently appreciate its meaning I will consider it a success. The scope of this project touches on many areas of communication scholarship not even mentioned and could be useful in ways unforeseen by myself. The next section will be a preview for the article.

**Chapter Outline**

The chapters will be organized along the principles of rhetoric explored within. The second chapter will address visual argument and will focus specifically on location and how that intersects with graffiti’s meaning, “Kairos, Visual Rhetoric and Graffiti”. The third chapter, “Dwelling with Banksy,” will explore the generation of ethos by graffiti artists and their messages. “Place-As-Rhetoric” will both build and depart from the previous chapters by focusing how pieces of graffiti can operate to change or reinforce the meaning of place. Finally, “Chapter V: Conclusion,” will discuss the broader implication of the arguments forwarded in the other chapters.

The second chapter will examine how location operates within graffiti as a component of its meaning. This will be done by expanding an understanding of *kairos,* to
account for spatial not only temporal components of rhetoric. This analysis will explore the importance and the limitations of location in grounding and framing an argument and attempt to fully tease out the complexity of the ways location can operate.

The third chapter will explore ethos in graffiti. Arguments require credibility for their force, and graffiti’s unauthorized nature problematizes many traditional sources of credibility. This chapter will explore other mechanisms graffiti uses to generate ethos both among other artists and with a larger public audience. I will look at both artists who cultivate a following through claiming their works in public areas as well as pieces that make an argument yet the creator remains anonymous. Ideally, the juxtaposition will highlight a range of possibilities for how ethos operates outside of more fixed subject positions. Ethos as dwelling place will be explored as an appropriate lens to the application of graffiti. Because visual rhetoric has neglected to outline the ways in which images effects ethos, this thesis will borrow from other areas of the discipline that have done considerable work on the concepts of visual ethos.

Using the considerations generated from these first three chapters, I will look place-as-rhetoric. Chapter II will operate largely from the assumption that location is static, while chapter IV will more fully explore what that assumption entails. If meaning is derived from location, how does that location get its meaning will be the fundamental question driving the chapter.

Finally the conclusion will discuss the totality of the implications in the preceding chapters. How this new knowledge implicates the broader public sphere and future areas of research will be explored. The conclusion will summarize as much as it promotes
further questioning and hopefully leave the reader feeling the thesis was not a waste of time.
CHAPTER II: KAIROS, VISUAL RHETORIC AND GRAFFITI

It is 10 A.M. on a hot and sunny summer morning. My girlfriend and I are walking down the Coney Island boardwalk to the beach shop where we both work. As we approach we notice someone had tagged the large metal curtains that we lowered each night to protect the windows. At first I am happy, I recognize the tag from the area and have seen it in a few other places. DG is clearly defined in large thick letters. Then my heart sinks, I read what comes after the DG, this poor artist is grieving. The piece is a memorial piece. After the DG, I can make out R.I.P. MWC. For a moment, I stop and identify with the artist. My own feelings of loss emerge from where I had stored them and I feel as if I know exactly how the artist feels.

Just four hours later the pieces had been erased. They were scrubbed from the Earth, never to be witnessed again had a picture not been taken to preserve them. I could not help but think that my boss would not have dared to disturb a memorial in most contexts. Then again, most other forms of rhetoric are not actively sought out for the sole purpose of erasing them. This notion of disappearing rhetoric is intrinsic to graffiti. Most rhetorical artifacts are actively preserved. Newspapers from 100 years ago are actively restored and cataloged, diaries of relatively
insignificant historical figures are placed in museums. Every single conversation, comment or remark made in the White House is recorded and archived. I can find the transcripts to a commencement address made at a small liberal arts college sixty five years ago, but the only remaining trace of the memorial for a man’s death is the data I stored on my personal cell phone. My cell phone and this thesis are all that preserve the memorial of MWC and DG’s desire to share their loss, but I would not chalk this up as a rhetorical failure just yet.

Normal conventions dictate that memorials should attempt to transcend time and speak to future audiences about the sacrifices made by their predecessors. Society often enables spaces for these memorials, in the form of monuments, gravestones and obituaries. Unfortunately, all of these authorized forms of grieving are often inaccessible to many marginalized individuals. Conventional or a hegemonic approach by rhetoric to this phenomenon might be inclined to reject the merits of such a piece wholesale on the grounds of its inappropriate nature. However if one doesn’t view the rhetoric from the position of authority, and rather suspends their judgment of the piece to evaluate it on the conventions that produced it, the piece has a much richer meaning.

In an increasingly imagistic economy, traditional assumptions about mechanisms for persuasion have to be revisited. Recently, kairos has reemerged as a cornerstone of rhetoric. Although sometimes explained as only the use of “opportune time,” Kinneavy and several other have defined it as both “right measure and time.”

Graffiti serves as a rich site for examination and because of its unique interaction with the concept of time. Not only do artist have seek to forward “timely arguments,” but as soon as they are displayed become a target for law enforcement officials to silence. Kairos can be traced
through Sophistic, Isocratean, Platonic, Aristotelian and Ciceronian texts. The question of “good timing” has been expanded to look at the moving contingent discourse surrounding a rhetorical artifact to understand its position in relation to them.

This is important to the rhetorical scholar for several reasons. First, it directs our attention to contingent variables that should be analyzed when dissecting a rhetorical artifact. How does the illegal nature of the work effect timing considerations for the artist and how are these considerations effected by other variables such as location? Second, it enables educators to pass this knowledge onto students who can perform their own social activism. In a world where communication is becoming more imagistic and new spaces are opened for negotiation of societal rules and norms, determining appropriate timing and measure becomes even more complex.

The unique attributes of graffiti make it a rich source for case studies. Due to its illegal nature, the timing is never “right,” and unlike other artifacts, hegemonic forces literally erase these works as quickly as they can muster. As such, placement becomes a primary evaluative tool, where the artist must balance visibility and accessibility while evading those who wish to prevent such acts from occurring. Questions of what constitutes good measure are difficult, elusive and ever changing. Graffiti is also unique in that it always occupies a place. Speeches and written argumentation often operate independently of their physical locations, something graffiti literally cannot do.

The goal of this chapter is, using graffiti as a data set, contribute to our understanding of kairos. Then, from this understanding I hope to develop the tools necessary for a more complex interpretation of kairos both in graffiti and visual rhetoric.
This is useful not only to the potential activist attempting to enact change, but also the rhetorical scholar studying acts of protest.

The first section will engage in current lines of research over *kairos* and demonstrate their applicability to graffiti. The second will explore the art of tagging and how it functions. Finally, I will conclude by outlining the implications of these finding and demonstrate the importance of graffiti on both rhetorical scholarship and the world outside the academy.

*Kairos*

The Greek god *Kairos*, youngest son of Zeus, is claimed to have sported a reverse mullet, long locks of hair that spilled over his brow but almost completely bald in the back. He donned wings on his feet and moved quickly. The significance of his haircut was that it meant he could only be seized from the front, and once he had passed there was no catching up and grabbing him. The foundation of the word rather than providing us with a definitive answer gives a gesture to the spirit or essence of the word.

*Kairos*, the opportune time, is contrasted with *chronos*, or linear time. The former requires a subjective evaluation in order to comprehend and evaluate, not present in *chromos*. *Kairos* is closely related to the concepts of decorum and appropriateness. The first appearance of the word *kairos* appears in the Iliad to describe a vital or lethal place in the body that requires extra protection. Hesiod, the seventh century B.C. poet is credited with coining the maxim, “observe due measure, and proportion [kairos] is best in all things.”

Plato believed *kairos* was the application of the lessons learned in rhetoric to the particular situations as they demanded. Knowing when one should evoke a certain type
of proof was an indicator of a master of oration rather than merely a student. Aristotle argued that discourse must be adapted to the topic and audience and, *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* are evaluated according to *kairos*.  

Gregorias and Protagoras were some of the first to apply the concept explicitly to rhetoric. The sophists argue perceptions of timeliness add to the persuasive force of a message. In *Palamedes*, Gregorias describes how appropriateness is effected by “the time” and situation. Gauging and meeting the expectations of the audience within the moment demonstrated a command of *kairos*.  

Cicero was one of the first to completely merge the concepts of propriety and timing. He argued that that one must do what is appropriate within the bounds of decorum. Decorum were the laws of speaking that should never be broken, where as appropriateness could be negotiated in each situation. He recounts the use of comedy by a government official addressing the populous. The success of the speech is attributed to the decision by the orator to use popular language instead of what other senators expected.

The New Testament is also reliant on the concept of *kairos*. The very first words uttered by Christ are “The time[ *kairos* ] has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). There are over 100 more references to *kairos* in the New Testament. Much of the fulfillment of spiritual obligations is contingent upon certain circumstances occurring and the opportune time revealing itself. God isn’t described as operating along a human chronological understanding of time and instead operates on “God’s Time.”

These different themes and conceptions, although different, seem to be consistent with one another. Kinneavy, fully defines *kairos* as “the appropriateness of the discourse
to the particular circumstances of the time, place, speaker, and audience involved.” Sheridan, Ridolfo and Michael argue that this materializing of *kairos* makes visible methods of communication that have historically been overlooked. Although difficult to teach in a college classroom, assessing the available means of persuasion means considering that a well written essay might not be as effective as a poster campaign or a short web clip that is shared online.

This understanding of the contingency of appropriateness is helpful in understanding graffiti. Although one might wish to discredit the rhetoric of graffiti in its entirety, an adjustment of the cultural unit we use to judge appropriateness might be more useful to the rhetorical scholar. The next section will explore the conventions among graffiti artist to understand how one can evaluate their relationship to *kairos*.

**Tagging and Kairos**

Some might argue that tags do not serve any rhetorical function. At the most basic level however, they seek to make the argument for worthiness and value of the artist. As Ella Chmielewska writes, “graffiti is an act of pointing to itself, an act of calling attention to self while designating specific place as well as indexing its environ and authority of the writer.” The artist is articulating a claim to the space they are drawing on, not to the ends of ownership, but to their work being an improvement over a blank wall. Additionally, they make arguments to other artists about which artists are good and who is disrespectful. The same way a billboard that simply states McDonalds, Nissan, or Chooselife argues to get customers and support a cause with literally nothing but their name, a tagger asserts their importance and participation in a cities life.
As with any artist, graffiti artist must spend time developing their style and becoming proficient with their tools. They have to learn the intricacies of different paints and design principles for their canvas and countless hours perfecting color combinations and line placement to really make their piece pop. However, in addition to the development of traditional artist skills, they spend considerable time and effort on the placement of their piece.

Consider the image to the right. This tag was placed on the Brooklyn Bridge in the mid 80’s and is one of the most famous tags in graffiti history. It was 119 feet above the ground and visible for miles. Although the tag is comparatively simple, the location and visibility are what make this piece. They are actually two separate tags: “Sane” and “Smith.” These were two brothers who frequently tagged together. Joseph Smith recalls “any graffiti writer with a great partner will tell you that a small bit of competitiveness can inspire great feats.” This highlights the nature of how location plays into the argument for a pieces worth and the taggers credibility. The danger inherent in placing such a tag only aids to make it more spectacular. Not only does it demonstrate a commitment to the art, it serves a practical purpose of being difficult to erase by officials or go over by other artists.
High visibility also serves as a qualifier of good work. This is to say a piece can be judged independent of the risk involved, if the spot is seen by many or is particularly effective at gaining attention. Pictured below is one of LA’s most famous tag’s, SABERs piece on the LA River. Located across from Amtrak lines, the piece was seen by thousands daily. However not only did the artist choose a high traffic area, the piece is one of the largest illegal pieces ever created. The piece is 250’ x 55’ and took a year to complete. The piece dwarfing the train cars highlights just how large it is. It is important to note that the artist had to balance finding a canvas large enough to fit this piece and the visibility of the work.

Both of these examples help to demonstrate the ideal characteristics of pieces that must be adapted to the situations as they present themselves. The pieces were covered by city officials and returned to being the blank walls that they were before however, despite the violation of property and anti-vandalism laws, communicated good measure to the community of other artists and fans they were seeking to address.

Although personal risk is one of indicators of a pieces value, targeted repetition also serves to make an argument for the tagger’s credibility. Tagger’s who are the most prolific on a specific subway line in New York City would earn the title “King of ___ Line.” If they kept it up long enough to get a tag on every single line, they earned the

Figure 6 Photo by Saber. All images and the underlying artwork is protected by copyright.
Beginning in New York City, subways became a prime location for youth to assert their agency around the country. Those crowned “King of a Line,” would sometimes be recruited by local gangs to get the gangs notoriety in exchange for money, drugs or friendship. Primarily these arguments resonate with other graffiti writers and demonstrate a system for judging each other’s work. Although outsiders pass judgment, recognition by another writer often motivates the graffiti artist to keep up their art.

Taggers can also make arguments amongst themselves more directly through location by going over another’s piece. Just as one artist claims their work improves a blank wall, one tagger is claiming superiority over another. Writing over another artist’s piece is tantamount to a declaration of war and often both parties launch into contest to see who can get the most on each other’s pieces. For example, in London, during the late 2000’s, street artists Banksy and Robbo started a competition for one particular spot. The back and forth continued for several years until ultimately Robbo passed away and Banksy put up a memorial piece commemorating Robbo’s work. The use of the same location communicates a response to a target audience (Banksy or Robbo) that would not be the same if located elsewhere.

This process of erasing intersects with visual rhetoric. On one hand erasing prevents further communication by a piece, but also simultaneously gives it power. It is in the negative response to graffiti, that the artist becomes certain his message is not only received, but that a response was given. It is also process of erasing that prevents the collapsing of a distinction between graffiti and authorized street art. Disappearance and erasing is an assumed outcome by artist before they even begin.
Additionally, proximity to trauma, has emerged as an evaluative tool for demonstrating *kairotic* speech. The memorial piece described in the introduction highlights how pieces can be used to help individuals cope with trauma or draw attention to that trauma. Banksy’s placement of pieces on the Gaza wall and in New Orleans on the three year anniversary of Katrina, operated to call attention the ongoing violence and marginalization occurring in those areas. Although some might argue that there was nothing opportune about the timing of those pieces, ongoing suffering should always be an opportunity for action and mobilization of consciousness. The full implications of the pieces in Gaza and New Orleans will be discussed in other chapters, but for now serve as a warrant for the considerations of artist trying to communicate a message.

Finally, some might argue the significance of the Underbelly Project in New York City undermines the credibility that visibility is a primary objective because access to the pieces was closed off when the project was completed. However, as several artists explained, the exclusion of the broader public was an intentional part of the design to re-center graffiti around relationships amongst artists and away from the increasing commercialization of graffiti style.\(^\text{76}\) The primary argument being forwarded is a claim to the identity of graffiti artist and the maintenance of what that identity ought to include.

This section served to highlight how traditional tagging operates along its own conventional norms that are different from traditional speech. It also demonstrates that conventions can be developed that fly directly in the face of traditional power structures. Location is primary component of these rhetorical artifacts and operates in several ways. It can be a signifier of an artist’s status and standing within the graffiti community. It can also serve to denote a response to another artist and disrespect to them. This is balanced
with the conventions of aesthetic design and a simultaneous goal of producing something that is visually appealing.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to first fully explore the differing ways values are negotiated within the tagging community. Traditional conceptualizations of *Kairos* asked us only to attend to questions of timing which are ill suited to understand the phenomenon of graffiti and evaluating its effectiveness.

For the graffiti artist, everyday is an opportune time for them to go forth and claim their identity, much more salient in their considerations are where will they claim such an identity and how will they adapt it to the location. Because an artist assumes that at some point the work will be erased, they have to capitalize on the short window between a pieces competition and its destruction to achieve their goals. Artist can accomplish this by having a particularly large piece that is impossible to miss, or a piece placed at a point that is visible to a large number of people. Artist can also seek to communicate dislike for another artist by the placing of their piece on-top of another’s. 

Tagger’s have to consider sizing, placement and visibility above opportune timing. These repeated reconstructions of place have culminated in sustained meanings both to broader audiences in addition the tagging community. Finally proximity to trauma can serve as a persuasive force that gives way to *kairotic* rhetoric.

To apply traditional western norms of timing and measure would evaluate traditional tagging and illegally placed street art as ineffective communication. This however glosses over the complex ways in which meaning is generated through tagging and street art and the conventions within a community that society ought to value. It also
seems problematic to have such a dismissive view of the way people deal with loss and trauma.

This research demonstrates the complexity present within visual communication, ripe for rhetorical scholar’s examination. Additionally, this brings us to the question of how we should teach activism within the classroom. There are more possibilities than ever for engagement through the use of images and these images require new considerations for effectiveness. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to definitively say professors should advocate for their students to illegally engage oppressive institutions. However, the ways in which artist such as Banksy call attention to trauma has portable implications for authorized forms of resistance. Strategies such as foregrounding the individuals suffering in a conflict or contextualizing a specific event within a larger struggle for resisting oppression can be applied to authorized forms of resistance.

Additionally, this chapter adds to the discussion for understanding and appreciating a community one isn’t a part of. By focusing on how other artist evaluate the pieces and what different styles, placement and images mean the rhetorical scholar can have a more accurate account of the individual’s motivations and goals. Even if one is morally disgusted with vandalism and believes there is zero worth in graffiti, it is probably beneficial to understand the motivations of an artist and enable some common ground.

Finally there are several future lines of research that still require more consideration. The ways in which the written or spoken language impacts the interpretation of visual rhetoric would be one potentially fruitful exploration. The pieces here are interpreted from the perspective of English as a native language, which has
several entailments for how one (me the author) would interpret and subsequently investigate said images. For example, I have a tendency to attempt to read images left to right and that has potentially impacted my conclusions.

The next section will be an examination of how graffiti artists are able to generate credibility. A subject position is typically assumed when we discuss the cultivation of ethos. However, many graffiti artist due to fear of prosecution keep their identity hidden yet still command the same credibility as an individuals who background is available for interrogation. Banksy didn’t always garner international media attention with the creation of his works and the next chapter will attempt to understand his achievement of anonymous celebrity status.
CHAPTER III: DWELLING WITH BANKSY

Rabea Darduna, is a father of six, living in Gaza. During the summer of 2014, he sold his front door to a local artist after another graffiti artist had painted it. The door was all that was remaining of the man’s home after it had been destroyed by fighting. The artist paid Darduna $175. It is estimated that the door, is actually worth many times that. The graffiti artist who had painted a Greek goddess holding her head in defeat was Banksy. Once it was revealed who the artist was the door instantly became worth a small fortune. This chapter will seek to answer the questions: Why Banksy? What made him become and internationally recognized artist while so many countless others are forgotten? Why are people so comfortable sharing and talking about his work but hesitant to voice their own concerns? How do the pieces he paint’s without compensation and often illegally, fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars at auction?

Although the door certainly looks like a decent enough painting and I myself couldn’t come close to reproducing it, Rabea Darduna, demonstrated how important a prior relationship between the audience and Banksy is to, give value, to his art. Those had to know who Banksy was before the door becomes the subject of particular interest. Evidence of a previous reputation affecting the meaning of the piece is of central concern to rhetorical scholars. This chapter will first outline current research on ethos and visual rhetoric then examine how Banksy manages his relationship with his audience.
Theory

Several rhetorical scholars have demonstrated the need for the development of a literacy of visual rhetoric. Now clearly within the disciplines field, scholars have articulated the imperative for teaching these skills to students and fully theorizing what these lessons should cover. *Ethos* remains a critical component of rhetoric for understanding pieces persuasiveness, and therefore warrants a specific attendance by rhetorical scholars in the realm of visual rhetoric. I believe graffiti provides an example of a particular method of visual communication that can yield insights into this endeavor.

*Ethos* was long reduced to be defined as the “credibility of the speaker.” It is an evaluation of the person’s character based on the variables the audience has available to them. Drawing heavily upon Heidegger’s writing, Hyde and several others have called for refocusing of that understanding of *ethos*.Humans, he argues have an innate call of conscience. This call to conscience is what enables and motivates human beings to care for and appreciate the subjects surrounding them. This is a fundamental orientation towards life’s purpose. This is important to the rhetorical critic because it provides a grounding for evaluation of the ethics of a rhetor. Therefore, it is necessary to not simply understand *ethos as credibility*, but also the ways in which the audience is invited to dwell within the rhetorical space created by the rhetor, and answer this call of human conscience.

This chapter will incorporate two theoretical lines of inquiry to lay the groundwork for exploring *ethos* in graffiti. The first component will summarize current visual rhetoric research on *ethos* and begin to try and outline the applicability of other research done to understanding the *ethos* of Banksy. The next component will outline a
more complete understanding of ethos to be applied to the work of Banksy. It is my hope that by uniting these two bodies of research, a more complete understanding of how one can be deemed credible without ever having to reveal who they are.

**Visual Communication and Ethos**

There are several current lines of inquiry into the role of classic concepts in visual arguments. Blair describes ethos as an appeal to the character or stature of rhetoric in their chapter “The Rhetoric of Visual Argument.” Kostelnick describes how symbols can come to have more or less credibility based on audiences past experiences when outlining how individuals account for previous distortions of graphs representing scientific data by being skeptical of future graphs objectivity. He highlights the reciprocal nature in which visual rhetoric must meet certain expectations while simultaneously engendering them. Overwhelmingly the concept of ethos is left unexplored in visual rhetoric and is taken for a given that it’s classical definition is sufficient.

Unfortunately, most of these studies didn’t seek to explore the relationship between speaker and audience, or in this instance, artist and audience. Some areas of the communication discipline have more thoroughly explored the relationship between ethos and visual rhetoric. Most extensive work appears in the context of corporate visual identity. This is helpful because the principles for communicating credibility and persuasiveness from a corporate standpoint can be adapted to understand an artist’s ethos. While the motivations behind an artist and a corporation can certainly be different, this does not mean that the tools they use to achieve widespread recognition are necessarily different. Velstos outlines the role of a corporate visual identity:
A corporate visual identity is a package of elements used by organizations to unify their communications. The elements of a visual identity provide an organization with an opportunity to differentiate itself from competition, build a relationship with the audience, create credibility, and bring order to chaos. Graffiti artists have a similar set of challenges: differentiating themselves from other artists, attracting audience’s attention, and establishing themselves as credible social commentators. Bringing us full circle, Velstos holds up the 2008 Obama campaign as the gold standard of marketing for its ability to quickly establish him as credible, and convince America to vote for Obama for next president. She highly indebted the success to the images produced by Sheppard Fairy, longtime friend of Banksy and graffiti artist. The potential to generate credibility through visuals will be the focus of this chapter. Velstos work in particular focuses on the decisions made by start-ups and smaller corporations that don’t have the resources to hire a professional marketer or brand consultant, paralleling many graffiti artists.

There were three standards isolated behind an effective corporate visual identity: consistency, clarity and flexibility. These principles of design are important for the development of ethos. Although it may seem as if Banksy is constantly reinventing street art, several strains of design appear to be reoccurring themes. Banksy’s pieces although witty, still contain a clarity forsaken by many artists. Finally, if we understand the usefulness of flexibility in good design, Banksy’s choice to remain fully anonymous seems more strategic. A more thorough connection between corporate visual identity and Banksy will follow.

Consistency is an evaluation of the unifying design components, and the similar repetition of those components. In professional communication this might entail standardized document formatting decisions used on all official documents form a
company. It guides the audience and directs which portions of a page their attention should be directed, developing an ability to predict how information will be arranged as well as what information will be arranged. Taggers like TAKI 183 are known for their consistent deployment of the same tag ad infinitum. While absolutely integral to the development of the modern tagging style, TAKI isn’t frequently seen as a credible social commentator or skilled artist. Consider Benny’s, from the Basquait biopic film, insight on the trials of an artist:

And you gotta do your work all the time when you're not doing that. The same kinda work, the same style – over and over again, so people recognize it and don't get confused. Then, once you're famous, you have to keep doing it the same way, even after it's boring – unless you want people to really get mad at you – which they will anyway.84

An artist is tasked with the dual objective of their style being recognizable while still producing novel and unique pieces. The demand for consistency, while necessary, cuts against a core component of art, creativity. This article will seek to understand how these objectives are negotiated.

Clarity although similar to consistency, is the degree to which individuals will differ in their interpretation of an artifact. Basic principles of language dictate there is almost never a one-to-one ratio of what is intended versus what is understood; rather varying degrees of interpretation are required by the audience. The less left up to interpretation the more clear a message is. Western communication in particular has a tendency to value clarity or directness of a message.85 Clarity can be aided by the consistent deployment of messages by helping the audience know where to look or it can be generated within a single text by minimizing opportunities for misinterpretation.86 One might argue things like abstract or impressionist art indicate an acceptability of
unclarity and the deliberate mystifying of a subject. However, those art forms did not simply spring up as methods of artistic expression, they were taught, learned, developed and refined over time resulting in the creation of conventions upon which individuals could base their interpretations on. It is clear that we are meant to allow ourselves to pause and take in the artwork and that the feeling of uncertainty over the message is intentional.

Flexibility is an evaluation of how effectively the other two characteristics, clarity and consistency, are achieved in different contexts. In professional communication this might be a question of how well an organization can adapt its logo for different settings or having marketing campaigns targeting distinctly different audiences without undermining previous communication efforts. This requirement is perhaps the easiest for graffiti artist to achieve as their entire craft is developed around evading detection and taking opportunities when they present themselves. The principles of a good corporate visual identity also offer insight into graffiti artists. Before we can apply them to Banksy however, a discussion of ethos is necessary.

**Ethos As Dwelling Place**

In its most basic sense, ethos has been described as “an appeal to the character or stature of a person or a role to lend credibility to what is portrayed.” It is contrasted to the logical appeals of logos and emotional ones of pathos. Students of rhetoric or even high school English in some cases, are taught this basic triangle of persuasion and asked to examine rhetorical artifacts for their presence. This is a useful tool for demonstrating to students that rhetoricians don’t rely on a single strategy but on a combination of all three and that persuasion is neither the simple presentation of irrefutable logical proofs
nor just the engagement of powerful emotions. However, more recent scholarship has called on us to understand *ethos* as a *dwelling place*. This expanded interpretation can be helpful when exploring visual rhetoric and provides a method for understand the relationship between rhetor and their audiences.

Hyde posits a more “primordial” meaning of *ethos* as a dwelling place. The book on the subject that he edits and writes the first chapter for, provides several other articles helpful for understanding the role of *ethos* within graffiti. Craig Smith reads Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, through the lens crafted previously by Aristotle’s *Ethics*. He grounds the evaluation of ethical rhetoric in its ability and intent to achieve good will, or the unreciprocated well-wishing of others for their own sake. This seems helpful in understanding Banksy, who has a penchant for advocating on the behalf of the marginalized. Watts in “The *Ethos* of Black Aesthetic,” outlines how Neal was able to create and evoke an alternative *ethos*, than several previous black intellectuals by focusing on the generative power of blackness rather than the destruction of whiteness. Unfortunately, all of his analysis is confined to written texts and doesn’t account for any visual component of the Black Arts Movement. Both of these articles are helpful in understanding how we apply this larger understanding of *ethos* to yield a more complete rhetorical criticism.

Poulakos uses a letter describing a red lotus in a thorn field, sent by a soldier stationed in Vietnam during the war, to outline the celebratory potential and importance for rhetoric. Through rhetoric, the audience is invited to dwell temporarily within the space created by the rhetor. Poulakos argues it is in the moment in which we celebrate beauty that life is given value. The soldier feels the call of conscience to share his
witnessing of perfection and beauty. Constant criticism he argues prevents the enjoyment of life and calls for balance within the communication discipline as well as individuals everyday lives. The act of deflecting attention away for “problems” to celebrate “beauty,” reminds us of the reasons for solving problems in the first place. The parallels between the red lotus in a thorn field and a depiction of children playing on the beach on the Gaza Wall seem to reveal the nature of the ethos created by Banksy.

Several recent articles covering the use of graffiti in Cairo post-Mubarak support my belief that there is a potentially fruitful application of this concept of ethos to graffiti and specifically Banksy. Badran in “Dis/playing power and the politics of patriarchy in revolutionary Egypt: the creative activism of Huda Lutfi,” gives an exhaustive history of Lutfi that includes not only a description of her many popular works but also her liberal education and the foundation of the ethics she articulates. However, Badran takes for granted the success enjoyed by Lutfi and leaves unexplored the question of her ethos and the ethos of the pieces she creates never outlining what sets her apart from other artists. There is certainly an implied reverence the author has for Lutfi, but I’m still left wondering “why her?” at the end of the article.

Bardhan (different scholar than Badran) and Foss in “Revolutionary Graffiti and Cairene Women: Performing Agency through Gaze Aversion,” studied a series of graffiti paintings in Cairo from different artist. Although their descriptions explain how the pieces invite spectators to know-together and dwell, it lacks an exploration of ethos and the relationship between the artists and the audience. They mention a “revolutionary ethos,” but leave the phrase undefined. Although they admit that they selected depictions
of females that were most popular, little articulation of how that is gauged or inferred is present.

Graffiti offers the opportunity for a unique exploration of ethos for several reasons. First most theorizing on ethos assumes a concrete orator or body from which the rhetoric comes. Many artists don’t come forward to reveal that body and thus the piece becomes the subject communicating ethos. Additionally some artists explicitly criticize celebrity culture and our affinity to over obsess on an individual. How does an artist maintain a relationship if at all with the media while simultaneously making them the object of criticism?

**Banksy’s Ethos**

The section will be applying the standards outlined for a good corporate visual identity to the work of Banksy. I will interpret these standards through an understanding of ethos as dwelling place. This will essentially be an attempt to outline how the design of the pieces invites its audience to dwell together and share a truth. By looking at what constitutes “good design,” I hope to understand what has made Banksy so successful and well known.

This section will first highlight the components of Banksy’s work that achieves the principles of a good corporate visual design. Then I will analyze how they function to communicate ethos. I have selected components from Banksy’s work that I believe demonstrate and create the identity that makes Banksy successful and while there is some arbitrary nature behind selecting the works, I’ve attempted to include adequate analysis for the premises of the arguments to show it isn’t accidental but deliberate design choices.

**Consistency**
Graffiti artists have several mechanisms at their disposal to communicate consistency to their audience. In the realm of corporate visual identity this entails controlling all official communication to have the same letterhead, logo placement and frequently reinforce certain values. Repetition is central to this notion of consistency. Consistency operates as an indicator that the rhetor is aware of the previous communications between themselves and the audience and are continuing to view that communication as valuable. The audience is reassured that the reasons for which they have come to appreciate a particular artist are still valid. While it may seem as if the works of Banksy are many independent unrelated pieces, several recurring themes, components and fonts help to unite this work across time and location. Examples of these unifying design characteristics are his use of several fonts, repetition of rats and frequent turn to focus attention on marginalized groups.

Banksy has several fonts that he’s used across the years. The most emblematic and attributable to Banksy is blood red lettering. Frequently he uses a technique of over applying the paint to achieve a dripping effect. Against the frequently grayscale and brown cityscapes, this color choice stands out against its background. Sometimes he will invert this coloring choice and use white dripping lettering against a gray background, or grey lettering that is stamped over by red stencil lettering. Both of these manipulations solidify the importance of the red lettering in Banksy’s designs by referencing and
building upon it. This lettering has been used in Bristol, London, Glastonbury, New York, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Boston, Melbourne and is even the font used for the title art of his film “Exit Through the Gift Shop.” The red lettering highlights the individuality of marginalized bodies through its intentionally imperfect painting techniques. It is frequently used to represent the voice of the underclass. This is in contrast to his other frequently deployed font best summarized as bold face stencils. The bold face stencils usually speak from the voice of authority. The consistent deployment of these characteristics becomes a shorthand way to identify a Banksy piece.

Another unifying theme of Banksy’s work is the depiction of children. Almost every city he has placed his graffiti includes at least one piece with children in it. The children are frequently engaged in leisurely activities and play. The use of children is frequently central to the argument being made, usually a call for recognition of the people forgotten in a conflict. At the very least, the children serve as a reminder of the people effected by a conflict, but with little agency to influence such a conflict. Another frequent character in Banksy’s work is the rat. Usually coupled with a witty quote, the rat helps communicate the presence of undesirable bodies that have something important to say. Rats are everywhere, in every city, on every continent, and our standard disposition is one of contempt and ignorance, similar to many individuals orientation towards less desirable bodies in society.

Clarity

Banksy is able to achieve clarity in his work on two levels. The first is the repeated themes and techniques in his work serve to create a predictive element where one approaches a piece expecting it to be advocating for marginalized individuals. The
distinct usage of fonts helps delineate different voices. Once those observations have been made by an audience member, future interpretations come more rapidly and we are more certain of their validity. The consistency help the audience’s brains know what they need to be processing and where to look for it.

The second is through heavy handed criticism. Many of his works require very little cultural knowledge to understand.

Consider the image with red lettering depicted previously, although still using irony, the message is that graffiti can be a useful subversive message for change. The image of the national guardsmen looting the store simply required one be aware of the recovery efforts after Katrina to understand. The image to the right is a blow-up doll resembling a prisoner that was placed without Disney’s consent in one of their ride exhibits. This was placed right after the Abu Ghraib story was breaking. Even the most novice cultural participant and critic had the knowledge necessary to interpret the piece. This is not to say all of Banksy’s work is direct and straight forward, rather enough of it is to draw people in and keep their attention long enough to understand his more complex pieces or at least attempt to understand them. This begins to get at the nature of ethos, where audience members use past experiences with the rhetor to evaluate his current message.

**Flexibility**
The diversity of locations targeted by Banksy operates as testament to his flexibility. The sheer number of cities he has done work in rivals the advertising campaigns of a small multinational corporation. The number of different ways he has deployed the consistent features within his pieces demonstrates the malleability of those features. His usage of a stuffed rat to place in a natural history museum, or the red lettering on the DVD he released proves that his style is adaptable to many different contexts.

Flexibility is enabled by the goals of Banksy as well. There are marginalized individuals and oppressed populations throughout the globe giving him endless possibilities from which to advocate. Because he refuses to abandon anonymity, charges of inconsistency are more difficult to substantiate. He never has to worry about an Al Gore, jumbo jet type moment. Banksy deflects attention away from him as a celebrity subject by simply refusing to cooperate with traditional media outlets, enabling a greater focus on his work and preventing accusations of selling out. This forces a reliance on the body of work produced by Banksy to make evaluations rather than any external indicators.

Implications

Understanding the ways in which Banksy is able to maintain a good corporate visual identity still doesn’t explain his success. It is the ways in which is good corporate identity enables a co-habitation and dwelling together that makes Banksy a success. To understand his success we must understand how his pieces operate to invite the individual to dwell within an idea. The ethical grounding of those ideas and the repeated well wishing of others for their own sake is what truly animates the *ethos* of Banksy. This
cultivates a relationship between the audience and the artist, where the audience feels comfortable being invited to know something together with the artist.

Consider how images of children engaged in leisurely activity invites the audience to share a truth. While the audience ponders its meaning they remember their own childhoods. The time where our biggest responsibility was making sure we were home for dinner. Even if someone had a tumultuous childhood, they often know that a childhood is meant to be enjoyed and innocence cherished. This is a comforting place to dwell and remind us of the imperfection preventing it from being material. Whether it is a poor federal disaster response or an increasingly militarized border, people with no control over the conflict are suffering. Childhood innocence operates as a perfect ideal to be praised, valued and celebrated, directing individuals’ efforts towards enabling it for others. People don’t perceive Banksy as credible because of a liberal arts education and his experiences as an oppressed individual rather the ways in which his pieces capture a truth already held by the audience and ask them to explore it further.

The consistency of his work in both topic and design elements provides an comfortability in our confrontation with powerful oppressive forces. By consistently advocating for marginalized groups, personal risks of proclaiming Banksy’s legitimacy are comforted. Places which the individual dwell rhetorically or physically have an expectation of consistency. The places, in which we are comfortable although we can grow and learn, don’t frequently radically shake up our world view. Rather they nurture it slowly through repeatedly identifying the problem in a predictable manner and in a consistent way. The primordial call of conscience to be ethical is motivated by Banksy’s
work and simultaneously drives him to repeatedly fill cities with his work providing the
clear opportunity for us to share a truth.

The clarity in which he makes his most basic orientation towards ethics known
provides a foundation of mass appeal. There is little contestation that Banksy aims to
have individuals pay more attention and thus attend to the needs of currently
marginalized bodies as communicated by many of his more heavy handed pieces. Obtuse,
intellectual and dense calls by the academy to heed this call of conscience often lack the
same type of clarity presented by Banksy. The idyllic beach scene painted on the Gaza
wall operates as the letter recalling the red lotus is a field of thorns. Reminding viewers
there is a greater human endeavor than geopolitical management of bodies and providing
oppressive security and that is the recognition, celebration and sharing of beautiful
perfection. Sometimes a feeling of hopefulness towards a situation can be difficult but by
reminding us off the great potential for good in the world one might be a little more
motivated to strive for it. He balances his criticism and negativity towards the world with
a celebration of our most cherished ideals.

The flexibility in which he can present a criticism of completely different
governmental regimes, individuals and organizations demonstrates a unifying mechanism
for oppression, the silencing of marginalized bodies. If human energy was more invested
in uncovering voices it didn’t frequently encounter, the opportunity to identify and
empathize with them would be greatly expanded. He can make changes for whatever city
he is in to make it resonate more thoroughly but this fundamental arrangement of power
provides a global canvas for his critique. These three principles work in tandem with one
another to successfully communicate Banksy’s identity.
Conclusion

The three basic principles of a corporate visual identity can be adapted to help rhetorical scholars understand the relationship between an anonymous artist and their audience. Rivaling branding efforts of most multinational corporations, Banksy has achieved international recognition and appraisal. Today, his work is some of the most sought after by collectors and can cost more than a house. It is the long standing cultivation of a relationship where the audience feels comfortable in dwelling with Banksy, in the production of knowledge that can be quite saddening.

This is useful to the communication discipline for several reasons. First, it informs scholars of the important role images can play in constructing and communicating credibility of the rhetor. Banksy has only made himself available for three interviews in the last fifteen years as he has climbed to fame almost entirely on the messages communicated within his pieces. Second, this supports the notion of understanding ethos as dwelling place, in understanding how those images are persuasive.

While it is intriguing that an individual could reach such a large audience while revealing so little about their identity, it is also somewhat horrifying. It reinforces the notion that in a new economy of images, as individuals we must be vigilant of the persuasive forces at work. Marketing and branding efforts are likely to continue to increase in complexity as technology develops and big data makes targeting particular demographics more effective. Although we could oppose such a shift, the rhetorical scholar is much better situated to demystify the persuasive forces than preventing their occurrence all together.
CHAPTER IV: PLACE-AS-RHETORIC

On August 9th 2014 at 12:02 p.m., Michael Brown was fatally shot by officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson Missouri. Michael Brown was 18 at the time and his death sparked widespread protest in the United States. Several conflicting accounts emerged following the incident and national headlines were rife with debate over the “facts,” and who should be held responsible. Some witnesses held that blame should be placed on Michael Brown, who in a marijuana induced psychosis, rushed the officer who only fired out of fear for his life. Other witnesses contend that Michael Brown had his hands in the air and Wilson shot him out of racially motivated malice. Largely unknown prior to this incident, Ferguson Missouri was thrust into the national spotlight.

Angelina Jolie is the director of a film released on Christmas Day, 2014. The film, Unbroken, follows Olympian Louis Zamperini through his trials in WWII. New York City subways have long history of commercial advertisements, and posters for the film were plastered throughout the subway lines. One of those posters however were doctored. Pictured to the right, an unknown graffiti artist doctored the commercial advertisement as their way of contributing to the national debate. Here the artist is forwarding an argument as to what the dominant meaning of Ferguson, ought to be as well as that we

Figure 10 Photo by Andrew Semans. Photo and all underlying artwork subject to copyright
should care at all that there is a narrative for Ferguson, Missouri. There is also an
implicit jab at the film, for its focus on a distant unbelievable true story, when there are
unbelievable true stories happening every day. The stakes of this debate go beyond the
scope of simply whether justice is served from a legal standpoint. Rather they will
become the foundation of the dominant narrative over the public’s memory of Ferguson.
More simply put, the graffiti artist seeks to have an impact over what the phrase
“Remember Ferguson,” will mean twenty years from now. They will not have the sole
control over meaning but will absolutely constitute a part of it.
How these images inform the public memory and alter the meaning of place to
achieve persuasive force will be the driving question of this chapter. This has obvious
implications for protest and social movement rhetoric. Additionally, this analysis can
make visible some of the other ways commercial forces define place enabling greater
critical self awareness.
Outline above is an example of how rhetoric effects our knowing of place.
Chapter two focuses heavily on how the location of a piece of graffiti impacts its
meaning. It operates largely from the position of a location’s meaning being static. This
chapter will more fully explore that assumption in its investigation of place in protest. I
will first outline the framework for understanding place-as-rhetoric, then explore graffiti
within that framework.
Place in Protest Rhetoric
Place can operate in protest rhetoric in several ways. First it can use place-based
arguments. The environmental movement frequently invokes positive conceptions of
locations to justify saving them. By characterizing certain habitats as pristine and
irreparable, individuals can be motivated to protect certain places. These arguments might require people have knowledge of a location, but not that the arguments be made in a certain location. These arguments tend to rely on static notions of place assuming one’s own interpretation of natural beauty is widely applicable.

Place can also be understood as place-as-rhetoric. Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook provide a useful framework for rhetorical scholars to understand place-as-rhetoric in social protest. They argue that traditional rhetorical scholarship that focuses on words and bodies used by a social movement, fails to account how these are always situated in a particular place and what the place does rhetorically to the words and bodies. The scholars conclude that there are three ways in which place-as-rhetoric operates in social movements: “(1) building on a pre-existing meaning of a place, (2) temporarily reconstructing the meaning of a place, and (3) repeated reconstructions that result in new place meanings.”

Although Endres and Senda-Cook mention graffiti it is only in connection with larger more formal social movements such as Native American or Gay Rights. Most of their analysis focuses on large scale demonstrations and festivals, omitting smaller acts of resistance that don’t constitute their own social movement. As discussed earlier, Roland Bleiker contends that attention to everyday act’s of resistance is necessary to more fully contextualize the shifting bounds of power that are acting upon individual. These two lines of theoretical inquiry provide the jumping off point for the preceding analysis as understanding graffiti as utilizing place-as-rhetoric in everyday acts of resistance.

There is one particularly important distinction between place and space. Space refers to a notion of how society and social relations are regulated (private versus public
spaces). This is more general and abstract in comparison to place, which is a particular location semi bounded unit including a material manifestation and the symbolic qualities (the city of Cincinnati). The primary difference is that place describes a material component not necessary in space. This conceptualization of place is helpful in understanding graffiti because every act involves material imposition of the paint on the environment in addition to ideological contestation of boundaries. It accounts for both the material and the symbolic culturally negotiated components of our interactions with a geographical location.

Endres and Senda-Cook’s work provides a valuable tool in understanding the rhetoric of place in social movements. They even go so far as discuss graffiti in relation to the Native occupation of the Alcatraz Island. However, their examples are all in the context of clearly defined social movements and formally organized acts of protest. As discussed previously graffiti operates heavily on the level of everyday resistance and frequently independently of larger social movements. It is important for scholars to verify work and replicate the data so first this chapter will articulate the ways in which Banksy supports Endres and Senda-Cook’s analysis of social movements. Then, I will move to a smaller unit of analysis and build on the previous discussion of kairos, to demonstrate the frameworks applicability to tagging and smaller acts of resistance. Although they might not be described as a social movement, tagging moves and contests the bounds of social acceptability.

**Banksy and Place**
The graffiti artist Banksy, provides a litany of examples and innovation for the use of graffiti in social criticism. The primary innovation by Banksy has been his usage of location for his arguments. Some of his work is reflexive and takes aim at the gatekeepers of the art world, while others seek to highlight the underside of society that is largely ignored.

On several occasions Banksy decided to display his art in formal museums. In an exhibit on Roman British Art, in the British Museum he managed to place a piece depicting a caveman filling his shopping cart with groceries, and managed to stay on display without being noticed by museum workers for several days. 100 He also used this tactic in the British Natural History Museum, placing a dead stuffed rat, who had been dressed in sunglasses with a backpack and microphone, on display, with the caption “You can laugh now, but one day they will be in charge.” 101 These are significant displays because neither of them were authorized by museum personal. He repeated this tactic in other museums such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum and the American Museum of Natural History, the Tate and the Louvre. 102 His work would go unnoticed by the officials for varying amounts of time and pass for an official exhibit.
Within art institutions, there is an implied control over what art is, and what is not, worth studying, by its inclusion or exclusion in museums and galleries. People with degrees in art in positions of power, are those that act as the gatekeepers, suggesting whether the art/artist is worthy or not. Banksy disrupts this control by walking straight past the gatekeepers and including his work in some of the most prestigious museums on Earth. The pieces ability to simultaneously be absurd in content and pass as official museum exhibits foregrounds the highly subjective nature behind delineating good art from bad. These pieces make significantly more nuanced arguments when the location is taken into account. Playing off the pre-existing meaning of an art institutions authority he temporarily reconstructs its makeup to reveal arbitrary nature of its credibility. There is little evidence here that Banksy is capitalizing on opportune timing rather he is demonstrating good measure, making the pieces look just enough like traditional exhibits to go unnoticed by staff but imbuing them with messages that undermine their credibility. In the process of this criticism, he creates a slightly more whimsical understanding of serious art and the places that hold them.

Bypassing conventional control to make a statement about the art world is only one of the ways in which Banksy has altered a places meaning to strengthen or contextualize the arguments within his artwork. He has also taken aim at government institutions, contextualizing his graffiti within their boundaries of geopolitical control or influence. In 2005 he painted a series of images along the Gaza wall.

The 425 mile Gaza Wall has come to symbolize the conflict between Palestine and Israel, that in no small part is influenced by actors thousands of miles away such as the United States. It is a classical convergence of both local and global politics. The
local conflict between both groups has been continuing since the end of World War II, costing countless lives on both sides and degrading the quality of life of all of those involved (with the exception of the arms producers). Globally it has come to signify a conflict between the Eastern and Western religion and ideologies. The United States has continued to financially support Israeli forces maintaining the wall while the UN has explicitly condemned it as illegal.

Banksy’s decision to target this wall was in no way coincidence or accidental. The series of images includes things such as idyllic images of paradise revealed through cracks in the wall, a girl being carried away by balloons and a ladder leading over the wall. The themes of innocence lost and escapism within the pieces helps to highlight the situations of those engulfed in the conflict. Many of those dying in the conflict have little to do with its creation and few tools resources to escape it. The location of the pieces on the wall enabled viewers to understand the images as arguing to forefront the bodies of those involved rather than the ideologies behind the competing powers. The walls importance in global conflict helped ensure that there was international coverage of Banksy’s stunt.

The Gaza Wall, like the construction of many walls, was justified as necessary for security. Banksy plays on this pre-existing meaning when he depicts small children being trapped by the wall. He reveals the fissures between the ideal of the wall, keeping people safe, and the effects of the wall, imprisoning and harming bodies with little agency to change their situation. These were temporary reconstructions of the wall through art only meant to last several weeks before being painted over. His visual reconstruction as well as many others oral and written denouncements of the wall have
culminated in a somewhat sustained interpretation of the wall as oppressive. Although clearly many disagree that the wall is oppressive, there is at least some undeniable opposition to the wall and what it represents.

Three years to the day after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, Banksy put up several pieces in New Orleans. Many of the pieces repeated themes that were present in his Gaza Wall work such as the depiction of innocent children and the endorsement of escapism, in addition to several more specific to the city they were painted in. In one piece he depicts National Guardsman looting a store, a commentary on the racist media coverage following the storm and the underwhelming support provided by the government (pictured right).

The timing of the pieces reveals several things to the rhetorical scholar. The perversion of the role of the National Guardsman reinforces and reanimates the arguments made immediately following Hurricane Katrina. It rhetorically constructs New Orleans as a both a city receiving inadequate government aid, and as a place for criticizing the media and the government. These pieces came years after the storm and media coverage had long since moved on. This rhetorical artifact simultaneously asks us to remember New Orleans and the suffering that occurred following the Hurricane, and decouple the criticism of the government and media coverage from that specific location.
Although the storm has long passed, the institutions that exacerbated the suffering have not.

Sendra and Cook argue that repeated acts of protest in the National Mall have come to make it associated as a place to protest the government. They argue that the three forms of “place-as-rhetoric work in concert with each other” to achieve such a result. Banksy was not the first one to level a criticism at the government or the media following Katrina, but rather uses the pre-existing meaning of New Orleans being where FEMA failed, to contextualize his criticism. No other city in the US can imbue a rhetorical artifact with such a specific meaning. By 2010, two years after Banksy did New Orleans, most of the pieces had been painted over, highlighting how these rhetorical constructions of place are temporary. Prior to Katrina, New Orleans did not have the meaning necessary to contextualize such a piece. The material forces of the storm although responsible for the destruction, did not create the meaning of FEMA’s failure, rather the repeated rhetorical acts following the storm created that now pre-existing meaning.

As the chapter on *kairos* outlined, more is at play than simply timing. The timing of the pieces was on the three year anniversary of the storms landing. The same way one might use the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech to question if we have met the goals he laid out, Banksy uses the anniversary to remind us of the inadequacy of government institutions. The use of the anniversary aids the pieces in contextualizing their meaning, however it is secondary to the location in the sense the same image becomes significantly less powerful if placed on the same day in any other city.

This act of referencing a specific government failure, also seeks to universalize our interpretation of the event. This is to say by bringing it up three years later, Banksy is
arguing insufficient reforms have happened since this failure, and it is not simply something to be thought of as “happening back then,” and progress must still be made. Just as the individual asking if MLK’s dreams have been realized, we already know the answer and are more interested in the why. Banksy reminds of the suffering that occurred in New Orleans following Katrina but in an attempt to sustain, reinforce and cultivate a broader consciousness of the problems for marginalized groups. Katrina operates as the warrant for his larger criticism of society and how it deals with underprivileged individuals. In a seemingly paradoxical relationship the same qualities, location and timing, that make the pieces coherent, Banksy disavows those as the thesis of his argument. The pieces about Katrina and New Orleans, are not only about Katrina and New Orleans, but much broader than that.

Although Katrina recovery efforts and Middle East Peace efforts can be discretely identified to be described as social movements, not everything moving the bounds of the social is given that label. Due to it unauthorized nature, tagging is an intrinsically subversive act. Circumventing property rights, individuals assert their importance to the world as of greater value than the rule of law. Consider all of the conventions for graffiti outlined previously. These conventions operate as proof to the power of temporarily reconstructing place. As the kairos chapter discussed, the temporarily of a piece is frequently assumed when graffiti is created. Yet complex mechanisms for interpretations have developed that were not passed down from the heavens, but rather created through repeated acts of transgression.

The conventions behind denoting which artist are of value is also the result of reconstructions of place resulting in new meaning. The NYC subways became known as
the place an artist needed to target if they wanted certain titles. These titles had material consequences like employment as well as less tangible but still important consequences like respect. Being able to claim the title of “All City,” for example is built on the pre-existing meaning of the subways of going all over the city. These repeated, yet temporary reconstructions of place culminated in a new meaning in line with the goals of the individuals seeking to negotiate their identity.

On an even more micro-level, the going over of another’s piece demonstrates how a reconstruction of place can give place new meaning. Because not only is the artist asserting their own identity is important through the tag, but making a comparative statement their work is MORE important than the first artist. Even if both pieces are covered up and erased, the meaning that was derived from them while they were overlayed still exists. When Banksy returned to the site where he and Robbo had contested their artistry skills, he built on that meaning and left a memorial, articulating his desire to remember and honor a great artist, as being more important than the “turf war” they had engaged in. The conventional negotiation of what it means to go over another’s work is the result of the development and refinement of conventions surrounding graffiti that could only have been developed by temporarily and repeatedly reconstructing place.

Banksy’s own contribution to that convention was to reassert that artist ought compete with each other when they are disrespected, however, disrespecting someone’s piece, doesn’t have to mean they lack all value. Using the same convention that going over is a signal of claiming something is more important, Banksy reminds us that the people really are more important than the tag.
Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to take a closer look at Banksy to highlight the effective command he has over visually reconstructing place. Many of his pieces are heavily indebted to their location for contextualization of meaning. However, while being simultaneously indebted to a pre-existing meaning, they seek to culminate in a new meaning for that place. There are a myriad of relationships between location and argument that Banksy reveals, demonstrating the usefulness of Sendra and Cook’s framework for studying place.

This chapter also demonstrates the roles that tagging plays in altering the conventions that govern it. It important to remember that the conventions surrounding graffiti are not static law passed down from the heavens, but rather norms that are constantly being renegotiated through place-as-rhetoric. This demonstrates the opportunity for individual voices to begin reconstructing places to be in line with their own goals. Rather than a fatalistic perception of places meaning being pre-determined, individuals have the agency to enact some meaningful change to that meaning resulting in something new.

There are also important considerations for the development of a public memory. Graffiti offer’s one of the ways in which an individual can impact the historical narrative of a location. Right now we are still witnessing conflicting narratives over the meaning of Ferguson. The stakes, already mentioned, are simply what will it mean in the future to “Remember Ferguson.” Will it be a rallying call for social justice or a moniker of justice served? The next and final chapter will take the individual conclusions already made and expound upon their implications and what they mean in totality.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

By this point the reader should be expecting a description of some graffiti and accompanying introduction.

The power of unstated conventions to shape our expectations was hopefully demonstrated. The fundamental objective of this thesis was to try and develop existing theories of rhetoric to explain, explore and understand graffiti.

My first objective was defining what I meant by graffiti and taking a stance on what graffiti is not. From there I was able to use several important pieces of scholarship in the discipline to apply ancient concepts of *kairos* to graffiti and reveal the conditions of *kairotic* graffiti. The next chapter sought to situate contemporary rhetorical scholarship on ethos within visual rhetoric, requiring I borrow several standards of professional design. Finally, I explored the ways in which place-as-rhetoric operated in graffiti trying to understand the ways in which locations come to have certain meanings.

The implications of the preceding chapters go beyond only graffiti. There are several contributions and questions answered that are useful in outlining the future of the discipline. Additionally, this thesis demystifies several processes that might be helpful to the potential graffiti artist or political activist. Finally, the very nature of the human spirit and how we should orient ourselves to others is given consideration.
Graffiti, or an unauthorized publically displayed symbol, is a fascinating rhetorical concept with many implications for our everyday lives. My research has considerations for several areas of the academy. First, this thesis attempts to make a compelling argument for the applicability of many of the classics to contemporary developments in rhetoric. Most of these applications pertain to visual rhetoric, however, they are also a component of social movement rhetoric. Not only does this implicate the theories we use to animate our criticism but how we teach the practice of rhetoric in the class room.

Both *kairos* and *ethos* can be traced back to ancient Greece. Almost three thousand years later we can still use the concepts to both understand and teach rhetoric to others. As the communication discipline grows both in content are and numbers, rhetoric can continue to adapt the tools it has to confront the larger body of artifacts that fall within its purview. New ways of communicating are unlikely to constitute such a large paradigm shift that a complete reinvention of the wheel is necessary, however, we should be mindful of the assumptions that different components of rhetoric are founded on should the circumstances change.

In addition to implicating how rhetoricians research, those ideas can be applied to the classroom. Most rhetoric programs do not emphasize visual rhetoric. Although mentioned in relation to other oral rhetorical acts, visuals aren’t afforded unique examination. Considering the explosive growth in the use of images to facilitate human communication it seems imperative that a greater emphasis be placed on nontraditional modes of communication. This is necessary to ensure that students become critically self-reflexive about the persuasive forces operating upon them, and also promotes more
effective activism. A student only capable of writing lengthy research papers to communicate their message is unlikely to be an effective activist. Social movement courses could be particularly well suited to evaluate visuals within a movement and try to learn the processes necessary for students to create their own visuals.

As borrowing from several professional communication texts demonstrates, we have a lot to learn from each other. Individuals should be leery of disciplinary boundaries and attempts by gatekeepers to devalue productive scholarship on the grounds it transgresses those boundaries. Rigorous examination and fruitful insights should be the basis for promotion and publication of work. Interdisciplinary efforts can more effectively grow when scholars feel their work will always have a place to be published, even if it blurs traditional disciplinary lines. Too much splintering of expertise risks producing scholars and activist only capable of describing a tree and missing the larger forest. Social movements operate across a wider range of technologies, communities and strategies and fully exploring one from a rhetorical scholar standpoint requires the ability to appreciate how these work to complement each other.

Clearly useful to other rhetorical scholars and individuals within the academy, this work is also potentially useful to the novice graffiti artist. Learning how to use a spray can at night, while avoiding detection is difficult in its own right. Simultaneously negotiating the conventions behind placement adds an additional layer of difficulty. It would be unfair for me to write this much about graffiti artists with no attempt to write to them.

The ways in which conventions for the practice emerge helps reveal the how an artist can gain standing in the graffiti community. This also helps highlight how an artist
can push and alter the conventions of the activity. By focusing on the contingency of place, and how it can be altered through repeated temporary reconstructions I hope to highlight the processes by which an individual can change the expectations of others. While not an easy process to enact and alter by any stretch of the imagination, clarity aids in affecting such a process.

The chapter on *ethos* can be helpful to artists trying to develop their own recognizable style. The cultivation of a unique style can be an effective mechanism for an artist to begin to develop a relationship with their audience. This also reveals a tactic for developing an ethos without revealing ones subject position. While I have the luxury of believing I can criticize many oppressive institutions without fear for my safety, this is not a universal belief and many individuals risk bodily harm to spread their message. While still risky, anonymous graffiti can operate as the voice of the subaltern, without offering up a body to punish. Many conflicts of our time are still characterized by extremely brutal regimes that silence any dissent and anonymity is a necessity.

This thesis also provides guidance to individuals wishing to use graffiti within larger social movements. The tactics used by Banksy and outlined in preceding chapters can be applied to other goals and movements. The use of certain cities or historically contested buildings can contextualize a piece to give it meaning. Making visible all of the decisions and individual makes when crafting a persuasive piece, elucidates that areas that can be altered to produce a different effect.

Finally this thesis contributes to the conversation over the ideal ordering of society. The fundamental call of conscience coined by Heidegger and rearticulated by Hyde offers an interpretation of the human condition that provides a foundation for
morality. It is an answer to what is the meaning or purpose of life. The skill in which the rhetor responds to the call of conscience is the foundation for the rhetorical scholar to pass judgment. This means evaluating not only the way in which the speaker’s style generates a dwelling that is comfortable and inviting, but also considering the ways in which that logics forwarded in that construction exclude or marginalize certain bodies. That is to say the rhetorical scholar must consider all individuals affected by the construction of a dwelling place not merely its current inhabitants.

These judgments cannot be made in lieu of an ideal, and therefore celebration and demarcation of an ideal is necessary as well. The sharing of the beauty of a red lotus in a field of thorns heavily parallels Banksy positioning a beach scene on the Gaza Wall. The appreciation and recognition of beauty are necessary motivators for identifying and modifying that which is not ideal. We should preserve the passing moments of perfection not simply to be in awe of them but to inform of us of the ideal state we should be pushing the world towards.

If society accepted that graffiti is a symptom of a fundamental call of conscience, it might be less motivated to erase it. Leaving these spaces of identity formation intact and focusing law enforcements efforts elsewhere seems like a better to treatment of graffiti. I would never be willing to desecrate a memorial and grave yet so many thoughtlessly do just that when they erase the pieces commemorating dead artist. Society regularly subordinates economic interest to allow and enable the process of grieving, giving people several paid days off or burying a casket costing thousands of dollars defy economic rationalization. We should be more willing to allow these different grieving
processes especially those emanating out of spaces lacking adequate access to the condoned forms of grieving.

This thesis also contributes to the question of which discourses constitute the public sphere. By definition graffiti is undemocratic since it rejects the majority’s desire for property law to be maintained at all times however, it still forwards valid arguments and reveals problems of the status quo. The conditions for effective “democratic” deliberation require substantial access to capital. Designing persuasive campaigns that follow the law is a financial burden not everyone can meet. We should be unwilling to disqualify their perspective simply because they cannot afford a billboard to authorize their message. There is also unequal access to the types of education that can make someone an effective orator. Privileging public speaker’s and verbal exchanges within the public sphere further exacerbates the marginalization of voices.

Although I consider my research valuable, it poses as many questions as a answers. Future inquiries into graffiti might continue the process of adapting the tools of rhetoric to meet the specific circumstances of graffiti. Additionally, this work is limited by its focus on Banksy. Banksy is important to study for rhetorical scholars because he is the most well know graffiti artist on Earth. This was helpful for the process of researching in that most of his work gets preserved on the internet and I could follow his work over fifteen years. Applying this method retroactively to any other artist would be difficult as none of them have been documented to the same extent as Banksy. I would be interested in following a different artist for an extended period of time or working with lots of artists in a single city as an alternative method to secondary internet sources.
The second significant limitation to this study is my own perspective. I’m a privileged middle class white male and this in no small way affects my outlook on life. Based on photographs that have caught the skin of the artist’s hands and interviews with his voice, I’ve deduced that Banksy is also a likely a white male. A larger project should not only seek to verify my results with individuals of different backgrounds, but explore the differences in our experiences of the same piece of art. While I will never be able to remove my own perspective entirely, I can make what constitutes it apparent and could offer alternative accounts. Despite these limitations the potential value if this thesis outlined above still stands. At some point we have to accept that we will never be able to account for absolutely every variable in rhetoric, but we can get close and develop theories and models with both predictive and explanatory value.

As technology changes at an ever increasing rate, rhetorical scholars will be presented with new challenges for understand the communication that surrounds us. Some individuals might look at the uncertainty with dismay; I however, see it as job security. We need to continually refine the tools we have at our disposal and develop new ones when necessary if we hope to keep ourselves relevant in the ever changing world around us.
Endnotes


3 Ibid.

4 Rees, Street.

5 Farrell, Underbelly.


7 Farrell, Underbelly.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.


14 Ibid.


17 Ibid.


20 Ibid.

22 Ibid.


See also


25 Birdsell and Groarke, Outlines, 104.


27 Ibid., 104.


31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.

34 Birdsell and Groarke, Outlines.

35 Mcnaughton, Hard Cases, 142.
36 Birdsell and Groarke, *Outlines.*


41 Birdsell and Groarke, *Outlines.*


51 Ibid.


54 Ibid.


56 Ibid.


63 Ibid.

64 Exit Through The Gift Shop. Directed by Banksy. 2010


66 Ibid.

67 Lachmann. Graffiti. 1998

68 Ibid.

Lachmann. Graffiti. 1998

Style. Silver. 1983

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid. P XX.


86 Veltsos, Decoration. 2008


97 Ibid. P 266

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid. P 259.


For example, next time a student is disrespectful in class, consider tagging that car their parents just bought them to take them down a peg.
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