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Introduction

Located in the heart of Toronto, Graffiti Alley is a renowned tourist spot for lovers of street art. However, the alley also has a striking lack of management. Through mapping, we tried to visualize a spatial relationship between the murals and the businesses on Queen Street West (figure 1), but we discovered no significant connection between them. Inspired by the alley's lack of management, we decided to investigate the benefits and limitations of having a single authority, such as the West Queen West Business Improvement Area (BIA), to impose central management on Graffiti Alley. We chose the BIA as the hypothetical management authority because, during our research, we learned that the BIA is developing a management plan for Graffiti Alley. Ultimately, we will argue that central management under the BIA would clean the alley up in terms of garbage and vandalism, but conflicting visions of the alley mean that the BIA would be in tension with the alley's other users, namely artists and private businesses.

Background and Literature Review

In 2010, Rob Ford, the former mayor of Toronto, started an initiative to eradicate graffiti. He denounced graffiti and called it sheer "nonsense" (Gee, 2011). However, many property owners on Queen Street opposed the idea of being responsible for the cleanup (Johnston, 2011). Besides, some wanted the graffiti to remain on their buildings. In 2011, the City of Toronto held a Graffiti Summit to start a conversation among municipal politicians, graffiti artists, businesses, and residents. The summit produced StreetARToronto (StART), a program under the City that still runs today. StART aims to replace graffiti vandalism with creative murals that beautify and improve the city, much like the murals on Graffiti Alley do ("StreetARToronto," n.d.).

As in most urban cities, graffiti in Toronto is a controversial topic, but there is a remarkably limited scholarship on graffiti policy in Toronto. The zero-tolerance policy, which enforces the unequivocal eradication of all graffiti, is common in North America. Cities such as New York City (Kramer, 2010) and San Francisco (Shobe & Banis, 2014) have adopted a zero-tolerance policy based on the broken windows theory. According to the theory, graffiti is akin to broken windows, which gives the impression that a neighbourhood is infested with crime, hence justifying government intervention. Melbourne, on the other hand, initially held a different view. The City tried to be more inclusive by developing a Draft Strategy of "negotiated consent" and "zones of tolerance" for graffiti (Young, 2010). However, in 2006, the City replaced the Draft Strategy with a zero-tolerance policy for no apparent reason. This new Graffiti

Management Plan erased almost all traces of the initial strategy, rendering Melbourne comparable to many North American cities.

Compared to these cities, Toronto has a slightly more relaxed view of graffiti, even if this was not always the case. However, all these cities are similar in the sense that they strive to maintain state control over the urban landscape. There is a shared, underlying desire for the state to be the sole decision-maker of how to design the city. What differs is a matter of degree. Toronto is willing to allow graffiti in some spaces but only under its supervision. The zero-tolerance policy takes the position further by stating that no graffiti is allowed at all. In both cases, the state retains control over the vision and aesthetics of the city.


Methodology and Reflections on Methods

We employed three methodologies for data collection: mapping, photography, and interviews. Our map mostly served as inspiration for our project, thus it will not contribute much to our upcoming analysis. We drew inspiration from the book Infinite City by Rebecca Solnit (2010), specifically the map "Monarchs and Queens: Butterfly Habitats and Queer Public Spaces." The map places two seemingly unrelated concepts into conversation with each other, revealing an otherwise hidden thematic connection. Similarly, we wanted to visually represent the building types and murals in Graffiti Alley to discover potentially hidden relationships. Continuing our visual research approach, we took photographs that attest to how the alley is managed or mismanaged. We deliberately focus on everything but the graffiti, so that we can find a narrative of how the overall space is managed. Our final methodology is interviews. Taking cues from Jacob and Furgerson (2012), we developed our interview protocol with simple questions at first to learn about the interviewee, then progressed to tougher questions about the alley's management. We contacted shops along the alley by phone until we secured an interview with the server of a local restaurant. Once we arrived at the restaurant, we managed to speak to the store's manager and a customer who fortuitously sat on the board of the Queen Street BIA.

Photography is an inherently subjective act. We do not take photos to capture the "reality" of space but to evoke its feeling and materiality, to reveal the researcher's embodied presence in space (Hunt, 2014). Our interests guided what we shot so that the photos are not arbitrary pieces of Graffiti Alley as it is, but specific pieces of data that contribute to our research. That said, the three of us have different subjectivities influenced by our academic backgrounds and personal interests. The question "do you see what I see" that May and Pattillo-McCoy (2000) raise is made quite literal for us. Our photos show how we see the world differently. Again, subjectivity is not a limitation. Our differences complement each other's findings, creating a richer picture

of the alley that points to the multiple ways in which management reveals itself visually.

Our positionality had a greater impact on our interviews. The three of us presented ourselves as university students researching the alley. Being students did not help us initially until we called the server at Java House, who we learned later is a recent university graduate. His similar background to ours might have inspired sympathy. Once we arrived at the restaurant, our positionality helped us in some ways. The BIA board member overheard our interview with the server and offered to talk, so he was interested in speaking to students. In contrast to the BIA member, the store manager was reluctant to be interviewed, perhaps because students were not his priority as people to connect with. Our interview process demonstrates what Erving Goffman (1959) wrote about decades ago: we always present ourselves in certain ways so that the social situation is desirable to us. How our interviewees wanted to present themselves motivated their responses and willingness to talk. We acknowledge these performances and work with the responses that we receive. An important limitation to note is our limited amount of time to conduct interviews. We could not speak to more businesses, which would have given us a more comprehensive and diverse set of opinions.

Results and Data Analysis

Synthesizing our data, we find numerous benefits and limitations with the Queen Street BIA imposing central management on Graffiti Alley. In terms of benefits, there are five main ones. Firstly, the current lack of management has led to a poor state of cleanliness (figures 2 and 3). Not only are there no public garbage bins, but the bins for businesses are mostly locked. Kenny, a server at Java House, explains that "we have to be very careful because we could be fined" if, for example, visitors throw non-recyclable items into the recycling bins. Gene agrees that having more receptacles is key to reducing pollution to the alley. Under the BIA's management, there can be increased public bins and proper maintenance of garbage. Besides garbage management, Gene proposed more lighting fixtures and public seating areas to reduce ongoing illegal activities, such as vandalism, smoking, and drug use. Indeed, encouraging the flow of people through the alley would help improve security, bringing the notion of "eyes on the street" (Jacobs, 1961) to life. Strengthened security overlaps with our next point, which is the control of vandalism and illegal activities themselves. The BIA can provide the alley with increased security through targeting criminal behavior, supporting properties that are vandalized, and controlling tagging on windows, walls, bins, and parking signs (figures 4 and 5). Lastly, the BIA can repave the bumpy alley road which negatively affects visitors' experience of the space (figure

6). What is particularly interesting is that there are certain zones in the alley that are under construction, but the public street is simply disregarded.

As for limitations, the first is that the BIA primarily acts out of self-interest. The BIA board consists of store owners on Queen Street, so they would want to benefit the area or their stores. Secondly, the BIA limits the freedom and input of artists in various ways, such as through excluding street artists from the BIA, a point that Gene admitted to, and regulating what murals are allowed. Kevin, the manager of Java House, surmises that central management would indeed curb freedom of expression. Thirdly, a conflict between private businesses and public space would arise because stores currently use the alley for various purposes, such as garbage bins, seating areas, and parking (figures 7 and 8). If the BIA takes over, they will use the space for other functions, setting up potential disputes over how space is used and shared. Finally, the proposed removal of illegal activities does not solve the problem. It is possible that crime would not disappear but would be displaced to another space in the city, probably close to the alley itself.

These limitations are not reasons to halt the pursuit of management. The community garden in the alley demonstrates that proper management is possible (figure 9). The benches, healthy growth of plants and lack of litter on the ground are indicators of good management. Although both Graffiti Alley and the garden are public spaces, the latter is distinctly better managed, perhaps because of the negative perception of graffiti lingers in Toronto and around the world. As mentioned earlier, Toronto under Rob Ford is comparable to Melbourne, New York City, and San Francisco. These cities have changed graffiti from an artistic practice into criminal activity. Whereas people put effort into maintaining an urban oasis like the community garden, fewer people care about the upkeep of Graffiti Alley. After all, it is simply a space of "crime" and "vandalism." More importantly, it is always the state that defines "crime." Even if the BIA were to manage the alley, it does not disrupt state control over urban space since BIAs operates in partnership with the city. Therefore, imposing central management may have specific benefits and limitations to Toronto's Graffiti Alley, but the notion and framework of graffiti management is nothing new.

Conclusion

We have argued that imposing central management on Graffiti Alley would bring slightly more benefits than limitations. On the one hand, the alley would improve in cleanliness, safety, and overall maintenance with the BIA responsible for managing the space. On the other hand, the BIA would necessarily be in tension with artists and private businesses, who each have their interests and visions of the alley. The BIA might even be in tension with its own goals since security is not as readily achievable as desired. Based on these conclusions, it is natural to ask whether the BIA should

lead the central management of Graffiti Alley or whether central management should be implemented at all. Our data is too limited, and our arguments are too speculative to properly answer those questions. Indeed, we are not sure whether the benefits and limitations we discuss will manifest under the BIA's management. What is important is that we stop to consider the potential benefits and limitations, so that central management is not merely a disguise for zero-tolerance.

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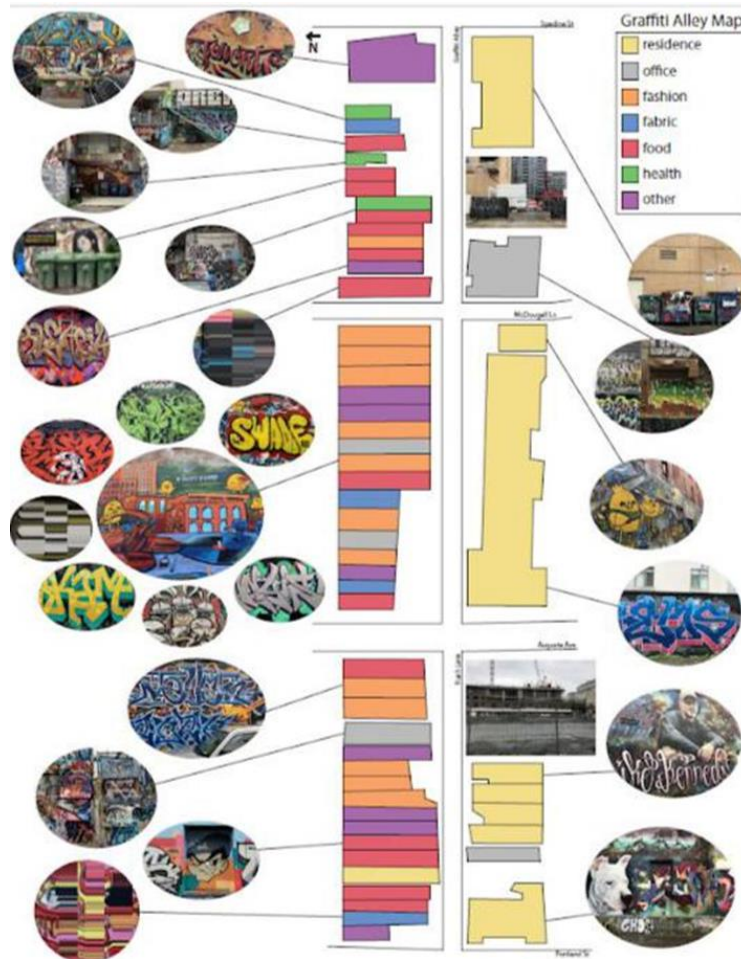
Map

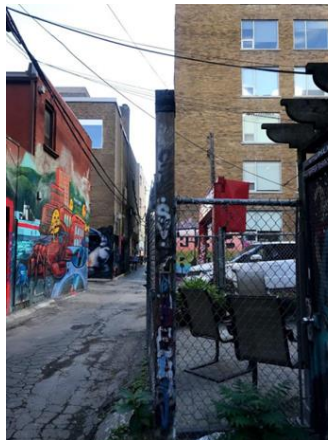Figure 1: Our map linking building types to graffiti murals

Photos

Figures 2 and 3: Garbage overflow and disposal on the ground

Figures 4 and 5: Tagging on parking signs and garbage bins



Figure 6: The alley's bumpy, cracked road




Figures 7 and 8: Public space used for private seating and parking

Figure 9: Community garden