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**Tensions in Urban Street Art: a Visual Analysis
of the Online Media Coverage of *Banksy Slave
Labour***

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MSc in Global Media and Communications

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Dissertation submitted to the Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, August 2013, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Media, Communication and Development. Supervised by Dr Myria Georgiou.

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Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

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Tensions in Urban Street Art A Visual Analysis of the Online Media Coverage of *Banksy Slave Labour*

Elisabetta Crovara

ABSTRACT

The controversial removal of Banksy's street arts, "Slave Labour" in February and "No Ball Games" in July 2013, from the walls of North London, was followed by a public outcry attracting the attentions of the major media outlets. By comprehensively exploring notions of culture and creativity in the city, the field of urban studies offers a constructive framework able to shed light on these events. After a theoretical overview of creative cities and city branding, this research will sharpen its focus to "Banksy Slave Labour" case as an example of how the contentious debate surrounding street art can be understood within the notion of urban marketing and creativity. Thus, a research question is posed: "how are tensions underlying practices of street art represented in the British online media coverage of 'Banksy Slave Labour' case study?" To answer this question, a visual semiotic and discourse analysis is applied to four videos and one slideshow from British National and local online newspapers. The denotative and then connotative/discourse investigation of the data collected leads to the following results. First, there is confusion in both terminology and legality of urban street art and graffiti practices. Second, the media representation suggests that the councils and the local residents do not consider street art as a tool for city branding but as a form of art embedded in the every day life and the identity of the artists and communities. I conclude by suggesting that additional paths of investigation on the role of street art in urban environments could shed further light on the tensions underlying this practice and potentially indicate viable solutions. Such research, I argue, is the *conditio sine qua non* to the delineation of urban policies that could foster a mutually satisfying environment for street art and policy makers.

INTRODUCTION

“Banksy's ‘No Ball Games’ artwork ‘stolen’ from north London street to be auctioned despite protests against its sale”

(Mail Online, 2013c)

“Banksy's ‘Slave Labour’ mural taken from wall and put on U.S. art auction website for £450,000”

(Mail Online, 2013a)

In recent times, we can observe a lively media debate regarding street art in London. Particular attention has been given to the removal of two artworks, “Slave Labour” and “No Ball Games,” belonging to the famous Bristol-born street artist, Banksy. The first piece, removed from a wall in Wood Green (London), has been auctioned and subsequently sold; the second, is still held by the London based auction house Sincura Group. In both cases, the prospect of an auction has triggered large protests and campaigns (for example: “Bring Back our Banksy” by the Haringey Council in Wood Green) organised by local residents. In response, UK as well as London-based media covered this news extensively, giving rise to a debate relating to the legality of the removal and sale of the pieces as well as the legality of the practice of graffiti/street art itself.

Defined by Scachter (2008: 35) as one of the “most ubiquitous sources of visual culture in the contemporary urban metropolis”, street art and graffiti have also been at the centre of a contentious academic debate. Scachter himself, for example, introduced his investigation into the “production, consumption and destruction of street art in London” (2008: 36) by asking whether graffiti and street art are “art or vandalism.” Furthermore, the same question is suggested in Cronin’s paper on “Resistance and the Vernacular Outdoor Advertising” (2008: 65) and McAuliffe’s (2012), “Graffiti or street art? Negotiating the moral geographies of the creative city”. The latter, in particular, argues that “the rise of creative cities discourses...has afforded the opportunity to rethink how creative practices of graffiti writers and street artists are valued” (ibid: 189).

However, this affirmation suggests questioning if and to what extent the so-called “creative cities” fully permit and promote practices of graffiti and street art.

With the aim of avoiding a categorical “yes”/“no” answer, it is crucial to investigate how street art and graffiti are considered in London. Particularly useful is to explore (a) the definition of these objects of contention (graffiti or street art?) and the resulting legal

problems; (b) are graffiti/street art legal or illegal practices? and (c) is it legal or illegal to remove, and eventually sell, them?

As evidenced above, 2013 British online media coverage offers a fertile soil to investigate this field and potentially clarify these problems. In fact, by analysing the online media coverage on the “Banksy Slave Labour” removal from Wood Green, the main aim of this research will be the investigation of the representation of tensions underlying urban street art and graffiti. Such a careful description, I argue, is the *condition sine qua non* to the delineation of urban policies that could foster a mutually satisfying environment for both street art and policy makers.

In order to contextualize this case study, several theories will be introduced *Theories and Concepts* section. In particular, after a brief overview on the classical approaches to urban theory, as well as the postmodern ones, the notions of culture and creativity in the city will be discussed. After presenting Richard Florida (2002) work “The rise of the creative class” countered by Andy Pratt (2011) in his article “The cultural contradiction of the creative city”, the discussion will focus on the tensions between perspectives on culture which support city branding strategies and others “aimed at supporting, improving or reflecting communities and their shared... understanding” (Cochrane, 2007: 117). Urban graffiti and street art are pragmatic examples of the tensions embedded in the notion of urban culture. Indeed, the specific case of “Banksy Slave Labour,” will be investigated by conducting a visual analysis of the video news published on British (national and local) online media (including Mail Online, The Guardian, The Telegraph, BBC online and The Evening Standard). Finally, the main findings will be discussed in view of the theories and concepts explored in the *Theoretical Background* section.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

An Introduction to Urban Studies

“Urban studies is a very recent field of study, yet cities are one of the oldest artifacts of civilized life”
(Sennett, 1969: 3).

As the American sociologist Richard Sennett has observed, before the Industrial Revolution, academics considered cities to be a mere mirror of the society itself and not as a field of study worthy of its own. However, due to the industrial development during the 19th century, the phenomenon of urbanization changed the approach to urban life. Human migration from rural to urban areas made cities larger centers, more populated and more heterogeneous. Hence, become a composite and intricate space, cities were considered “something to be explored as a problem of itself, that could not be understood by the use of a few easy labels or categories” (Sennett, 1969: 4).

Urban theory was born to try to explore this new dimension of city life and spaces. However, as Hubbard (2006: 9) warns us, “the notion of theory is a complex one, and much misunderstood”. In fact, it is difficult to identify one single approach to the study of the city. Urban theory is more as a set of ideas, deriving from different fields and backgrounds, such as physics, cultural studies, literary studies, psychology, politics, economics, sociology, criminology and history (ibid: 10). Indeed, the first classical schools of urban theory reveal different perspectives in the understanding of the city.

First, thinkers belonging to the so-called German School, including Max Weber and George Simmel (and later Oswald Spengler) (see Sennett, 1969) were respectively concerned with the ambivalent consequences of the “lack of identity” of the city dwellers (Hubbard, 2006: 20) and about the psychological adaptation necessary for urban life. Second, one of Simmel’s pupil, Robert Park, together with Ernest Burgess, funded the first established sociology department in the world, the University of Chicago Department of Anthropology and Sociology, which soon became synonymous with “urban sociology” (Hubbard, 2006: 25). Their main contributions, still extremely influential today, are the employment of research methods such as participant observation and ethnographic technique aimed to investigate the life of “different social groups- or subcultures- existing on the margins of society” (ibid).

During the second half of the 20th century, the so-called “Marxist Urbanism” was introduced. Including famous thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre (see for example, 1996), Manuel Castells

and David Harvey (see for example 1989b), the Marxist approach to urban studies was mainly based on the idea that “organization of space is fundamental in the reproduction of labor power (hence capitalism)” (Hubbard, 2006: 35). In other words, by considering “the built environment of the city [as] a social construct subjected to dominant power relations, exploitation, and conflict always in play in capitalist social formations” (Eade & Mele, 2002: 5), Marxist urban theorists emphasize the power of the (capitalist) structure over the (city dwellers) agency. Therefore, they mainly adopted a political economic perspective, defining political economy as the “study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources” (Mosco, 2009: 62).

The Postmodern City

Years later, in the 1980s, during the so-called “Post-fordist” or “Postmodern” era (Lyotard, 1984; Harvey, 1989a) the Marxist human geographer David Harvey argued that the pervading relativism of the world had a “disorienting and disruptive impact upon political-economic practice [and on] the balance of class power, cultural and social life” (Harvey, 1989: 284). Therefore, the city, as the world, became a “liquid” reality (Bauman, 2000), and could not be studied anymore by solely drawing upon materialistic and economic dynamics.

Instead, the city started to be considered in its immaterial forms. For example, according to Miles et al. (2003: 3), the city is an “event” or a “performance,” while for Eade and Mele it is both a space of meaning and identity making and a text continually “re-interpreted and re-negotiated by the citizens” (2002: 6). For Kevin Lynch, probably one of the most influential American urban planners and author, the main layer of analysis of the city was its “image” (1960). Indeed, as Donald (quoted in King, 1996: 1) puts it “the city is above all representation”.

David Harvey (1989a), in his analysis of the “condition of post-modernity”, understood the cruciality of the immaterial forms of the city. He merged the urban political economy perspective – which focus on the capitalistic structure of urban government and economy– and the post-structural one – which focus on the “commodified signs, styles, metaphor and images” (Hubbard, 2006: 85) of the urban environment. In particular, post-structuralist approaches, such those as Foucault, Derrida and Baudrillard, put emphasis on questions of language and representation to find a new way of understanding processes of place-making and space-making which intertwined both material and symbolic dynamics (ibid), such as cultural production and consumption. Indeed, according to Hill (2000: 54) “the postmodern

city is not [only] defined by its industrial base but by its consumerist environment of malls and museums, characterized by revivalist architecture and ‘heritage’ refurbishment”. This shift in urban theories has become known as the “cultural turn” (Eade & Mele, 2002; Hubbard, 2006).

Culture and The City

As Scott argued (2000), culture and place have always been tightly linked to each other. However, if before culture was “narrowly place-bound” (ibid: 3), today, in a world where cultural flows are becoming more and more intense (Appadurai, 1990), culture reveals itself in the forms of globalized “events and experiences”. Moreover, “in the world of the globalized marketplace, cities have been discursively positioned in a wider competitive market” (Cochrane, 2007: 112). Aware of this global competitiveness, urban governments have understood the crucial role played by the image, namely the “brand” conveyed by the city environment. Hence, as David Harvey (1989b: 50) put it, urban governments have experienced a “shift from managerialism to entrepreneurialism”. For example, they have started to be much more “innovative, exciting and *creative*” (ibid, emphasis added).

Creative Cities

In their analysis of “creative cities,” Fusco et al. (2011: 15) argues “cultural production itself has become the “new key for success,” the “major economic sector” and the “source for the competitive advantage of cities”. As a result, the major cities in world, in order to attract tourists and financial investment, in efforts to maintain their competitiveness in an increasing globalized world, branded themselves as “creative” cities. As Florida (2005: 1) argues, this creative turn of urban environments is mainly due to “the decline of physical constraints on cities and communities” which allowed “creativity” to “become *the* principal driving force in the growth and development of cities, regions and nations”. Moreover, Cronin (2008: 79) posits that a key role in this shift was played by the “‘culture industries’ such as advertising, music, film, and publishing”, which, on the other hand, have been “reframed by academics as ‘creative industries’.” The change in label was aimed to delineate “the conceptual and practical convergence of the creative arts (individual talent) with the Cultural Industries (mass scale) in the context of new media technologies within a new knowledge economy” (ibid).

Branded Cities

The work of Richard Florida on the “creative city” has been highly influential in terms of urban policies, but at the same time this notion has also been highly criticized. For example, in his paper entitled “The cultural contradictions of the creative city”, Andy Pratt (2011) claims that the work of Florida has led to what he calls “hard branding” of cities, namely urban governments have borrowed marketing and branding tools from businesses and management fields in efforts to “redefining –or reimagining- each individual city in ways that fit with the dominant perception of urban success” (Cochrane, 2007: 112).

One of the dangerous outcomes of city branding is that culture no longer “exists in its own right” but instead “is [...] seen to flow from business aspirations” (Garcia, 2004 in Cochrane, 2007: 114), conveyed and advertised throughout the globalized urban marketplace. In other words, according to Andy Pratt (2011: 7), culture has become a commodity in the hands of city governments to the extent that branded cities have essentially become “consumption hubs, and as such unsustainable, without huge re-investment periodically.” In a similar vein, in his overview of the so-called “cultural turn of urban policy”, Cochrane (2007: 108) cites Fainstein and Judd (1999: 4) to argue that the “tourist city” is now “sold just like any other consumer product,” in particular a *mass* one. To be sure, both Bianchini (2004 in Cochrane, 2007: 108) and Pratt (2011: 8) identify both “uniformity” in city images and “hegemony” in urban projects as possible results of a branding strategy, which therefore promote only a specific and more appealing type of culture over local ones. In fact, even the search of competitive difference through uniqueness and authenticity coming from locally rooted traditions, ends up being homogenized. Furthermore, it “may lead to the construction of similarity as the same symbols are mobilized in different places, while that process is itself consistently undermined by the same search” (Cochrane, 2007: 109) for global competitiveness.

However, at the end of his discussion on urban cultural branding, Cochrane adds that “urban cultural policy is not only about competitions” (Cochrane, 2007: 117). Instead, there are some underlying tensions that must be taken into account. Indeed, culture must also be considered “as something that is shared by communities and is ‘an essential element of everyday life and identity’” (ibid). Hence, there is an on-going tension between perspectives on culture which help boosting place-branding strategies and the others “aimed at supporting, improving or reflecting communities and their shared (or contested) understanding” (ibid). One empirical example of this conflict is urban graffiti/street art.

Urban Street Art: the Underlying Tensions

“Street-art (or if you prefer, graffiti), in its various forms and manifold designs, is one of the most ubiquitous sources of visual culture in the contemporary urban metropolis. Since its modern inception in the 1960s and ’70s, illegally placed images have remained a focal issue for both artists and public authorities...[Indeed,] It is, on the one hand, considered to be pure, unmediated expression and the most natural manifestation of public art; but, on the other, it is considered to be defacement, destruction, and an anathema to a ‘civil’ society.”

(Schacter, 2008: 35)

In line with Scather, both McAuliffe (2012), in “Graffiti or street art? Negotiating the moral geographies of the creative city”, and Cronin (2008: 65), in “Resistance and the Vernacular Outdoor Advertising and Graffiti” have identified the tensions underlying the practices of urban street art and graffiti.

Before discussing those tensions though, it is crucial to try to define graffiti and street art. “Graffiti” says McAuliffe (2012: 190), “typically relates to a range of practices from tagging through to elaborate ‘pieces’ (from masterpiece) with a focus on stylized words and text, usually including the tag name of the artists/writers and their associated crew”. Moreover, graffiti are usually illegible and incomprehensible, therefore are seen as an “appropriation of public space” for “egocentric form of private communication among writers” (ibid). Street art, on the contrary, since including a larger range of “artistic practices” has a more “public address, less tied to the subcultural practices and conventions” (ibid) proper of graffiti. Despite these distinctions, it is not always possible to separate between the two activities. This causes confusion in recognizing the legality or illegality of graffiti/street art.

However, the increasing popularity of some artists (i.e. Banksy) and the spreading of their works on the walls of global cities have changed the approach of urban governments towards street art. Once only confined to subcultural practices and seen as “visual terror” (Rosewarne, 2004), McAuliffe (2012: 189) argues that graffiti has developed as a tool to find “a place in the city via presence of discourses that challenge an indiscriminate criminalization of them”. For instance, the “creative cities discourses,” discussed in the paragraphs above, have allowed graffiti and street art to be recognized as forms of creativity, and because of this, to be valued (ibid).

Along the same lines, but with possible negative implications, Anne Cronin (2008: 66) interestingly links “subversive” forms of art, such as graffiti, to urban entrepreneurialism. In her words “if we listen carefully to the hegemonic discourses of urban entrepreneurialism we

may be able to access other subterranean, vernacular discourses – resistant, subversive...- that are brought into relief and partial legibility by those same hegemonic discourses” (ibid). For instance, outdoor advertisements and campaigns incorporate both entrepreneurialism and branding logics together with the graffiti forms (see for example: <http://www.symbolix.com>).

Hence, in the “creative city,” it has become difficult to distinguish between the projects created by grassroots groups and local artists (what I call *bottom-up* processes) and those that responds to city branding strategies (*top-down* processes). The blurred boundaries are fertile soil for critiques from both sides. For example, as stated above, city councils might criminalize graffiti as an illegal activity. On the other hand, some artists, such as Hewitt and Jordan (quoted in Cronin, 2008: 78) define some forms of street art as too public and at the service of entrepreneurial projects: “‘The economic function of public art is to increase the value of private property’ and ‘The function of public art for regeneration is to sex up the control of the under-classes’”.

Street Art in the Creative City: Two Examples from London

London is the epitome of creative cities. Indeed, as Cronin (2008: 79) emphasizes, “the creative industries are central to how UK government frames growth initiatives and international competition” to the extent that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2001, quoted in Cronin, ibid) has fixed the goal of rendering Britain the “world’s creative hub.” Moreover, last year, London has been the host of two mega events that embodies the most logics of city branding and urban cultural entrepreneurialism: the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee (May 2012) and the Olympic and Paralympic Games (July and August 2012). In fact, such mega events are deemed to be crucial tools in the urban governments’ attempt to survive in the global interurban competition (what is the *most* creative city?) and also to foster (and finance) urban regeneration.

In the particular case of London 2012, the whole area of East London has been part of a considerable urban renewal scheme. The “International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) support for London arose from the city’s focus on regeneration in an area of cultural diversity and social deprivation that incorporate five designated ‘Olympic boroughs’ – Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest” (Imrie, 2009: 132). Together with this major goal, “London’s bid for the 2012 Olympic was similarly driven by a stress on multiculturalism” (Cochrane, 2007: 117). For example Brick Lane and Banglatown (both in Tower Hamlets) were “launched to the world as the ‘Curry Capital 2012,’ in order to promote

the area “as a cultural and entertainment hub for media, spectators and other visitors to the Games” (Towerhamlets.gov.uk). Indeed, one of the most common practices in the promotion of city cultural events is “to build on existing [...] traditions and understanding to reposition places along lines which fit with the limited range of images preferred by upmarket tourists and potential investors” (Judd and Fainstein, 1999, quoted in Cochrane, 2007: 109). However, Bianchini (quoted in Cochrane, 2007: 119) criticizes this type of “urban branding at the neighbourhood community level” as “inflexible” and “not sustainable” since it “sets up a series of monocultural experiences in the city,” almost imposing a particular brand image on an area that is more than uniquely the “Capital of Curry.” In fact, Brick Lane and the so-branded *Banglatown* are the most fertile center for street art in London (see for example “London Creative Walking Tour”, by Alternative London).

Furthermore, during the Olympics, the area of Brick Lane has been a place of tensions between urban councils and local community. In fact, in order to advertise the area as the “Curry Capital”, Tower Hamlets Council commissioned a billboard that covered a famous street art piece (ROA’s “Crane”) in Hanbury Street (see image 1, Appendix II). The local community rose up with a petition claiming that “to recklessly take away this well loved piece of artwork from the people of London is incredibly short sighted and suggests that the council sees no place in our community for art and creative freedom, but only for advertisements with the intention of financial gain.” (Tower of Hamlets Council).

The opposite of this occurred during the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee. In fact, in May 2012 a graffiti appeared on the wall of a Poundland store on Whymark Avenue in Wood Green. The piece, later entitled “Slave Labor (Bunting Boy)”, “shows a boy hunched over a sewing machine stitching union flag bunting” (see Image 2 Appendix II, BBC news, 16 May 2012). It was, and still is believed to be, the work of the Bristol-born street artist Banksy. Indeed, “Professor Paul Gough, from University of the West England, an academic who studies the artist, suggests the image has all the hallmarks of a genuine Banksy” (ibid). After almost nine months from its appearance, on the 17th of February 2013, the piece disappeared from the wall in Wood Green and showed up for sale on an American Auction Website (Fine Arts Auction Miami) with an estimated price between 500,000/700,000 US\$ (Tottenham Journal, 18 February 2013). After massive protests from the Councils and Wood Green local community, the auction was withdrawn. However, the piece appeared in a second auction in London (June 2013), organised by the Sincura Group, for a minimum bid of £900,000 (BBC news, 2013a). The day after it was sold.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The two events presented above, ROA- Brick Lane case and Banksy-Wood Green one, have revealed two completely different approaches toward practices of street art. Both Banksy and ROA are famous street artists (Complex Magazine, 11 July 2012). Why was one criminalised and the other protected? Why did the local community of Tower Hamlets have to start a petition *against* the Council decisions, while the Council of Haringey worked alongside the community to bring back the piece of art?

These questions, together with the debates triggered by the removal of a second Banksy, “No Ball Games” at the end of July 2013, suggest that urban policy dealing with street art is not yet clear, even in cities branded as “cultural and creative,” such as London. Indeed, Pratt in his paper on “Policy transfer and the field of cultural and creative industries” (2009:1), points out that “there is still little consensus, nor an unambiguous convergence of opinion” on the “definitions and policies” (2009: 10) of cultural and creative industries. The same can be argued about cultural practices of street art in the city. Despite the increasing interest of policy makers in culture and creativity (Pratt, 2009), the case studies presented above suggest that urban policy dealing with street art is not clear. This prompts questioning if and to what extent the so-called “creative cities,” offer fully recognition to activities such as graffiti and street art.

With the aim of avoiding categorical “yes”/“no” answers is crucial to investigate how street art and graffiti are considered in London. Particularly useful is to explore: 1) the problems in defining graffiti and street art; 2) the legality of the practice of street art itself; 3) the legality of the removal and auction of pieces of street art. By investigating these topics, it may be possible to discover whether street art is considered as a marketing tool for branding the city or, on the other hand, as an essential element of every day life in the city and identity (matters already theoretically discussed through the previous paragraphs (Cochrane, 2007, McAuliffe, 2012; Cronin, 2008).

As evidenced above, 2013 British online media coverage offers a fertile soil to investigate the tensions underlying street art practices and potentially clarify them. In particular, by analysing the online media coverage on “Banksy Slave Labour” removal from Wood Green, the main aim of this research will be the investigation of the representation of the tensions underlying urban street art and graffiti. I argue that such a careful description is the *conditio sine qua non* to the delineation of urban policies that foster a mutually satisfying environment for street art and policy makers.

Indeed, this research will attempt to answer the following question:

How are the tensions underlying practices of street art represented in the British online media coverage of “Banksy Slave Labor” case study?

RESEARCH METHOD

Why Visual Analysis?

In order to properly choose the method of analysis, I have carefully deconstructed the research question above:

What is the context of the RQ?

The research question has been formulated after a literature review dedicated to the context of the research: the city (London in this case). As previously explained, with the so-called “cultural turn” (Eade and Mele, 2002; Hubbard, 2006), urban theory shifted its research interests from the analysis of the material aspect of the city to the immaterial one. In other words, the increasing attention to cultural aspects of the urban environment prompted researches to focus on the “image of the city” (Lynch, 1960) together with “its representation in a variety of media” (Hubbard, 2006: 59).

What are the key concepts that will shape the analysis?

As discussed in the conceptual framework, the key concepts that will guide the analysis belong to the main discourse of *street art* in the *creative city*. Urban researchers such as Barnes and Duncan (both in King, 1996: 4) have suggested focusing on discursive representations (spoken, read and written city) of the city. Hence, textual and visual materials would both have been valuable data to be analysed, employing respectively discourse analysis and visual analysis.

However, visual material (news video) and visual methods have been preferred over textual material (news articles) and discourse methods of analysis. This choice stems from two main reasons. First, the discourse analysed, “street art” is image-based. Therefore, in order to conduct a comprehensive research on city image and art policies, a visual approach is required. Second, visual data in the form of videonews allowed the merging of voices (transcribed and then analysed by the researcher) and images. Hence, these types of data

offer a fertile ground for “intertextuality,” defined by Rose (2001: 136) as the “way that meaning of one text or image depends on the other image’s meaning.” Indeed, the video analysed are parts of an online newspaper article and include in them a mix of text (spoken) and images. Second, from a more pragmatic prospective, images are usually a more powerful way to represent and convey information than text. In fact, video news are able to condense lot of information and different points of view in a shorter period of time and in a more dramatic (for example non-verbal communication turns to be crucial) way than text.

What is the level of analysis?

The word “represented” in the research question led me to consider visual methodologies. As Stuart Hall argued (1997: 15) the concept of representation has come to occupy...[an] important place in the study of culture.” Indeed, “representation” allows to “connects meanings and language to culture.” (ibid). Moreover, according to Van Leeuwen & Jewitt (2001:92), visual semiotic analysis, guided by the question “What do images represent and how?” is mainly concerned with questions of representation, since it “provides a method for analysing how visual representations convey meaning.” (Hall, 1997: 41). Hence, in order to investigate how urban cultural practices, such as street art, are represented in the British online media coverage, visual semiotic method of analysis will be employed, where semiotic, as defined by the French critic Roland Barthes, is considered as “the study of signs in culture, and of culture as a sort of language” (Hall, 1997: 36).

Why merging Visual Semiotic and Visual Discourse Analysis?

As Hall (1997: 43) points out, a Barthesian semiotic approach is more “concerned with the ‘play’ of meaning” than with the delineation of meaning based on a “scientific analysis of language’s rules and laws.”. In fact, from a semiotic perspective, representation is investigated in relation to signs and language. However, when “cultural representations” are the field of research, the meaning conveyed “often depends on larger units of analysis – narratives, statements, group of images, whole discourses which operate across a variety of texts”. Therefore, in order to comprehensively investigate the representation of the underlying tensions in street art practices a broader level of analysis is needed. In particular, a discursive approach is a crucial notion associated with the French philosopher Michel Foucault, which is concerned with relations of power rather than relations of meanings (Hall, 1997).

In line with these theories, the data will be analysed first from a semiotic point of view. In

this initial step, a denotative analysis (see Appendix III) will be conducted to give a detailed description of all the scenes in order to identify the main “signs” (Rose, 2001). The second step will be a connotation analysis which, even if still belonging to semiotic field, constitutes the link to visual discourse analysis. In fact, by identifying the meanings implied through the signs (denotative level) it is possible to further investigate the discourses lying behind those meanings (Rose, 2001). The last level of analysis includes the crucial step of “intertextual” analysis (Rose, 2001: 136 and 143), since it implies the identification of other images and discourses that underpin the representations recognized in the previous step of analysis. In other words, the mix of visual semiotic and discourse analysis allows the researcher to both investigate the level of representation (semiotic) and the level of discourses beyond those representations, and by doing so makes possible to identify the cultural and power dynamics in the data analysed (Rose, 2001).

Why not Other Research Methods?

Despite the advantages just explained, visual methods of analysis also present some drawbacks, which can be overcome by adopting a self-reflexive approach to the research. In particular in analysing video news the researcher has to be aware of the biases stemming from the mediation of the information when transformed in “news” video. This risk could have been avoided by conducting direct interviews with the people involved in the case (for example the members of Haringey Council). However, the Councillors have already made several public statements, interviews and press releases. Hence, since “coherence” is a key requirements for public figures such as council representatives, it would have been difficult to extrapolate more and different information from the ones already presented online and in newspapers.

A second disadvantage of visual methodologies in analysing the urban environment is identified by King (1997). Studies analysing media representations of urban environment risk neglecting that the material space itself (the physical city) is a “representation of specific ideologies, of social political, economic and cultural practices of hierarchies and structures” (ibid: 4). Therefore, a visual ethnographic (Pink, 2008) analysis or participatory observation would have been a useful complementary method. However, due to time constraints and the nature of the case study itself this was not possible. In particular, the story of the “Banksy Slave Labour” has faced a fast pace development: the condition of the wall, of the auction and the opinions of the council and local, were changing on a daily basis. Hence, online news have been the quickest, most representative and, somehow, most reliable portrayal of the situation.

For all the reasons listed and explained above, visual analysis of video news has been chosen as the main method of the research. The next paragraph will present the “operationalization” of the method selected, starting from the sampling strategy moving through the actual steps taken to analyse the data.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sampling of Data

Case study: why Banksy?

The field framed by the research interest - street art within the creative and branded city – demands the choice of a peculiar case study pertinent with the three key topics. “Banksy Slave Labor” case, not only has been a recent and widely debated case, but also was set in the epitome of creative cities (London); it included both dynamics of city branding (top-down approaches of urban governments, namely the action of the Council of Haringey) and street art (Banksy and bottom-up dynamics such as the locals petitions and participation to the case). The high publicity of the case (it also appeared on social networks such as Twitter – see #bringbackBanksy at twitter.com) has been referred to in order to collect the actual data.

Data collection: why and how?

Video news has been chosen as type of data. These are more concise and richer than text in conveying verbal and non-verbal information. Moreover, as Knoblauch (2008) has argued, visual form of communication, such as video, are easily accessible via the web in their digital form. Hence, for practical and pragmatic reasons, videos have been chosen as the data of the analysis. Below are the detailed steps taken to sample the video.

1) I have selected the UK online newspaper with more online traffic.

National newspaper website traffic for May 2013 (source ABC):

- Mail Online: 8,234,043, up 46.8 per cent
- Guardian.co.uk: 4,665,414, up 37 per cent
- Telegraph: 2,853,819, up 12.7 per cent

- The Sun: 1,777,360, up 16.4 per cent
- Mirror Group Digital: 1,240,826, up 62.2 per cent
- The Independent: 1,203,826, up 68.9 per cent

(Press Gazette, 20 June 2013)

2) In order to have a local perspective on the case, I have selected the local newspaper and local community pages on the website of the Haringey Council (described as “external links” on which the Council has no responsibility of content and claims). The following newspapers were included:

- The Haringey Independent
- Tottenham and Wood Green Journal
- The Evening Standard

(Source: Haringey Council)

Moreover, BBC online news has been added to the list as have a PSB source of news.

3) The words “Banksy Slave Labour” were used in the search engine of each online newspaper homepage. (In some cases, the word “labour” has been removed to avoid confusion with articles regarding *Labour Party*).

4) Articles between the 18th of February (one day after “Slave Labour” was removed) and the 25th of February (the main protest event) have been selected.

5) I have looked for video news in the articles selected. These were found in the following online newspapers (for detailed sources see Appendix III):

- Mail Online
- Guardian Online
- Telegraph Online (same video, from ITN, as Mail Online)
- BBC online

The Sun was not possible to access (submission fees were required). The Mirror GD, the Independent and all the local newspapers did not have any videos.

However, to avoid not having any source from a local point of views, a slideshow (photo plus captions) from the Evening Standard has been selected for the analysis. The sampling

strategy shows an asymmetry between national sources of data and local ones. This has been considered throughout all the research, analysis and results.

Operationalization: a Guide For The Analysis

In order to apply visual methods of analysis to the data, Rose's book on "Visual methodologies" (2001) has been consulted. Drawing upon Rose's theory, I have constructed my own guide to follow during the actual analysis of the visual material. Table 1 in Appendix I summarizes the steps taken.

The step of denotation was the most time consuming. As Appendix II section 1 and 2 evidences, the denotative analysis was performed twice. The first time, I have accurately transcribed and analysed the data scene-by-scene, word-by -word. The second, I have summarized in prose the notes previously collected. This second draft has been the one analysed at the connotation-discursive level, during which colour codes have been applied (see Table 2, Appendix I: for example of colour coded analysis see Appendix IV).

In conclusion, the visual semiotic analysis of the 3 videos (Mail and Telegraph have the same) and 1 slideshow will identify the key signs (denotation). The signs will be then linked to their meanings (connotation) and, finally, to the main discourses lying behind those meanings. The passage signs-meaning-discourse will be carried out in a "deductive" (Lidlof, T.R., 2011:246) way, namely concepts from the theories discussed in the literature chapter will be applied to the data analysis. However, if some if divergent/different discourses will be identified during the analysis, it will be discussed in the results section.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

What Do the Videos Show? A Denotative Perspective

Mail Online (source: Edwards, 22 February 2013)

Video M (Mail online), 1min 39 sec long, (original source: ITN), was published on the Daily Mail online on the 22 February 2012 (updated on the 23 February 2013). The visual parts of the footage are accompanied by a journalist's voiceover that explained the key information regarding the news. It was entitled “*Stolen Banksy goes up for sale.*”

The video starts by showing the wall in North London (Wood Green) where the graffiti used to be, now covered by other graffiti. For example, one of them shows two black and white stick men, one running with something in its hands and the other with its arms up in the air, together with the written sign “DANGER THIEVES” (scenes 1 and 2, 0:00/ 0:10).

The following scenes show the picture of Banksy Slave Labour (scene 3, 0:10/0:19), and (scenes 4, 5 and 6, 0:19/0:30) the Auction House in Miami (FAAM, Fine Art Auction Miami) where the original graffiti is held. In the scenes 6 and 7 a man from the Auction House, Frederick Tuth, is interviewed. In the scene 9 (0:36) the video returns to be set in London; it shows the now empty wall in Wood Green, while the voiceover introduces Alan Strickland, one of the Councillors of Haringey, who, speaking in front of the empty wall, counters Tuth's perspective (scenes 10 and 11, 0:39/0:48). Scene 8 (0:33/0:36) deals with the details of the auction; indeed, booklets with “Slave Labour” on the coversheet are showed.

The video comes back to Wood Green, where two locals, a woman and a man are separately interviewed (scene 12, 0:57- 1:11 and scene 13, 1:11-1:20). For the second time, the video shows the empty portion of the wall, while a mother and child pass by holding hands (scene 14, 1:20/ 1:23). Scene 15 pictures the Councillor again (1:23/1:33), who explains his concern about the removal of “Slave Labour.” The footage ends (scene 16, 1:33/1:39) zooming on the graffiti “DANGER THIEVES,” already showed in scene 1.

The Guardian (source: The Guardian, 24 February 2013)

Video G, 1 minute and 24 seconds long, (source: “Reuters” - uk.reuters.com), was published on Sunday 24th February 2013 on The Guardian website. It was entitled “*Banksy mural: Miami auction house withdraws item from sale.*”

The video has not journalistic voiceover. Before the download, the video has a still frame (a sort of preview, scene 0) which shows the new graffiti appeared on the wall where “Slave Labour” used to be. These include: on the right a black and white rat; in the centre a facial portrayal of who seems to be a nun with a red star on her right eye; at the bottom a small stencil picturing a grey elephant and on the left side two black and white stick man with the sign “DANGER THIEVES.” On the sidewalk, on the left, there is a bucket and a mop. The central part of the wall looks wet.

The actual video starts (scenes 1, 2 and 3) in a foreign setting: a building with palm trees and the logo “FAAM” (Fine Arts Auction Miami) on the windows. The next scenes are in a large room, where people sitting down as a public watch a screen with works of art on it and listen to a man standing and talking at the bottom of the room (scene 4, 0:07/ 0:18 sec). After 6 seconds (scene 5) the camera zooms on the man (allegedly an auctioneer), who is interviewed. The man, looking busy, tidying papers, answers very briefly.

The next scenes show the Auction booklet with “Slave Labour” on the coversheet (scene 6, 0:23/0:29), the “rat” graffiti on the Wood Green wall (scene 7, 0:29/0:32) and a group of people chanting “*Oh bring Back, oh bring back our Banksy...*”, protesting with posters in front of the wall (scenes 8 and 9, 0:32/0:38). A woman from the crowd (scene 10, 0:38/0:43) is then interviewed. The next parts of the video show more people chanting, smiling, shouting: Three scenes (12, 13, 14) are dedicated to them. The last frame (scene 15, 1:00- 1:15) portrays the wall during night-time, with the graffiti having already appeared in the preview of it. Two passing by (not identifiable) seems to say (the scene is disturbed by a car) ***There was a Banksy on the wall***.

The Telegraph (source: The Telegraph, 2013a)

Video T (The Telegraph), 1min 39sec long, (original source: ITN), is exactly the same as the one of the Mail online (see paragraph 3.1.1). It has been published on the Telegraph online on the 22 February 2013 and it was entitled “*‘Stolen’ Banksy goes up for sale in Florida.*”

It was also accompanied by the following caption: “*A Banksy mural is expected to sell for more than \$500,000 in Miami after being removed from the side of a Poundland in north London.*”

BBC News (source: BBC news, 22 February 2013)

Video B (BBC, 2013b), 1 minute and 46 seconds long, was published on the BBC online website on the 22nd February 2013 with the title “*Banksy auction: London’s anger over missing artwork*”.

The images of the video are accompanied for the whole length by a journalist’s voiceover. The video starts by showing the portion of the wall in Wood Green where “Slave Labour” used to be and where now they are two new graffiti: the two stick man with the sign “DANGER THIEVES” and a flashy pink dinosaur. The next two scenes are pictures of the wall when the Banksy’s was still there, covered by Perspex. After the image of the booklet of the Auction of Slave Labour, scene 6 and 7 (0:24/0:33) go back to the wall with the removed graffiti. After (scene 8 0:33 – 0:42) two locals are interviewed (same people and content as VIDEO M and T).

Countering the previous arguments, while showing the building of the auction house in Miami (scene 9, 0:42/44) and its interiors (scene 9-10-11, 0:44/0:50), the scene 12 (0:50/1:04) introduces Federick Tuth from Fine Art Auction Miami (in the caption), who is interviewed (same as VIDEO M and T). The next 20 seconds are an overview on Banksy artistic legacy; indeed 4 graffiti of the famous artist are showed (see scene 13 in Appendix 1 for details). At the minute 1:23 (scene 14), as the caption “Alan Strickland – Haringey Councillor”), pictured in front of the blank portion of the wall, argues against the behaviour of the Auction House in Miami.

The last two scenes (15, 1:34- 1:39 and 16, 1:39-1:46) show, in contrast, the portion of the wall when Banksy “Slave Labour” was on it, with the little real Union Jack flags, and after, the blank wall, from a right hand angle, with the new graffiti on it (stick men “DANGER THIEVES). The camera moves fast left to right and zooms on right part of the blank portion, where there is a little hand written sign “*Banksy (not)*” with an arrow pointing at the spot where “Slave Labour” uses to be.

London Evening Standard (source: London Evening Standard, 24 February 2013)

The slideshow (s.show) is composed by 6 images with related captions and it was complementary to the article entitled “*Now bring back Banksy boy: Slave Labour mural withdrawn from auction at last minute,*” published on the 24 February 2013 (original source: Reuters).

The first image, captioned “*Work in progress: a street artist adds a heart to the image of a nun pasted over the Banksy gap in Wood Green,*” is the same frame of the thumbnail of VIDEO G (preview-0 in the Appendix 1).

The second image (caption “*Protests: angry residents demonstrate against the removal of the Banksy work*”) pictures people protesting in front of the wall. They are shouting or chanting (they have their mouth open) and holding poster saying, “*Bring back our Banksy*”. The 3th and 4th images show the new graffiti appeared where “Slave Labour” used to be; respectively the two stick men with the sign “DANGER – THIEVES,” a flashy pink dinosaur and the black and white rat (protected with Perspex) holding the poster with written “*Why?*” (legend: “*Banksy bites back? Graffiti at the site where Slave Labour used to be*” and “*Ratty: the mural that appeared next to gap where Slave Labour used to be.*”).

Together with the subtitle “*Under the hammer: the webpage of the Miami auction house that is selling the Banksy,*” the 5th frame shows the FAAM webpage with the details of ‘Slave Labour’ sale planned for Saturday 23rd February 2013.

The last slide is dedicated to the original “Slave Labour” where it was still on the Wood Green wall, covered by the Perspex. A man is touching (repairing? Replacing?) one of the corners of the protective board (caption: “*Slave Labour: the Banksy mural that appeared in Wood Green during last summer’s Diamond Jubilee.*”).

Discussion of the Findings: A Connotative and Discursive

As explained in the Methodology chapter, the first part of the analysis has been dedicated to a denotative investigation of the data. In particular, the video have been first deconstructed and divided into the different scenes. Secondly, drawing upon the first deconstruction, another denotative analysis (combining visual, spoken and written text) caption and subtitles has been conducted. This second step is crucial in order to undertake the actual connotative and then discourse analysis.

The current section, investigating the five sources of data together, will present the results of the analysis and their discussion in relation to the theories considered in the *Theoretical Background* section.

(To be sure, a crucial emphasis in this part of analysis has been placed on *Intertextuality*,

namely the investigation of the elements that contextualizes the videos: news article, captions, subtitle etc.)

Graffiti or Street Art? A Problem in the Definition

Graffiti is not synonym of street art. In fact, as explained in the theoretical chapter, graffiti “typically relates to a range of practices from tagging” to more complex works, but always “including the tag name of the artists/writers and their associated crew” (McAuliffe, 2012: 190). Indeed, graffiti are considered as a subculture production, performed illegally, and therefore, often criminalized. Street art, on the other hand, while still linked to “subcultural conventions” (ibid), is now considered as a proper public form of art. However, street artist often also perform without permission.

The blurred boundaries between the two practices, claimed by McAuliffe (2012), are reflected in the videos analysed. In fact, throughout the data (spoken and written text), there is a recurrent confusion in the terminology. For example, in article title of videoM, “Give us back our Banksy! Auction house selling ‘stolen’ **art** is bombarded with calls...as rat shows up next to missing **graffiti**,” Slave labour is defined as both “art” and “graffiti” in the same sentence. In the title of videoG, instead, Slave Labour is called “mural” (“Banksy **mural**: Miami auction house withdraws item from sale”) as in the caption of videoT (“A Banksy **mural** is expected to sell for more than \$500,000 in Miami...”) and in the title and image 6 of s.show (“...Slave Labour **mural** withdrawn from auction at last minute”). Moreover, the image of the black and white rat (see image 3 Appendix II), which appeared next to the spot where Slave Labour was, is called “mural” as well and a man (see image 3 Appendix II), spraying an image on the wall is called “street artist”: “Work in progress: a **street artist** adds a heart to the image of a nun. Differently from the other videos, the title of videoB considers “Slave Labour” as an “artwork” (“Banksy auction: London’s anger over missing artwork”) and “celebrated piece of **work** by **street artist** Banksy”.

This diversity in definitions, while seeming superficial, might be dangerous when trying to define policies related to practices as street art. This point is made clear in videoG by one of the locals of Wood Green, who, while participating in the protest in front of the wall, says to the journalist:

[...] for us this is not **graffiti** and for many people in local community also in London and across the country this is **street art** and...raises a fundamental point about who is responsible for street art and who morally owns it and the community owns it and I feel that is why they are here today.

As the woman points out, the unclear terminology brings up importation questions about the property rights of the piece of street art, a question that the media coverage of the case does not help to make clear. In addition in the articles, the journalists together with the councillors and the locals interviewed, often refer to “Slave Labour” as “Banksy.” For example, the article in the Mail Online (2013b), attached to the video, is entitled “Give us back our Banksy,” same sentence chanted and written on the posters of the protesters showed in videoG (“Bring back Banksy”). Moreover, also the Councillor of Haringey Alan Strickland, calls “Banksy” the piece of street art (video M and T):

“if a Banksy can be taken out of a wall and sold for a half million dollars in your street, what about the Banksy in my street?”

In the case of street art, where copyright laws are not yet clear and well defined, this personification of the artist with its work might be a fallacy of representation. Indeed, it might imply that the owner of the work is its producer, a fact that the “Slave Labour” case counters.

Returning to what the woman interviewed in videoG, another key term in her argument is the term “morally owns.” Indeed, another key discourse traced throughout the data, is the question of legality versus illegality: first of the practice of street art itself and second of the sale of this type of piece of work.

Confusion in the Legality of the Practice of Street Art

The question of legality/illegality of street art itself has been investigated in several accounts dedicated to this urban practice (for a detailed legal and economic analysis of graffiti see D’Amico and Block, 2007). Indeed, graffiti are often used in acts of vandalism, as the project of “Keep America Beautiful” in “graffiti hurts” (www.graffitihurts.org) claimed: “graffiti is the most common type of property vandalism according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Immediate removal, within 24-48 hours, is one key to successful graffiti prevention.”

The problem arises when graffiti is confused with street art, as the terminology issues investigated in the paragraph above evidences. Indeed, “the graffiti/street artist” – even here there is not a clear use of terminology – “has always had to negotiate the ambivalences that exist at the edges of legality” (McAuliffe, 2012: 190). This ambivalence is also brought up by Raphael Schacter, who in the introduction to his investigation into the “production,

consumption and destruction of street art in London” (2008: 36), ask the reader, and as well as himself: “So, is it art or vandalism?”

The answer to this question is not clarified in the media representation of the case study analysed. First of all, in all of the videos and also in the slideshow, great space and therefore, great relevance is given to scenes that picture the new images (see images 3 and 4 in Appendix II) appeared on the wall where “Slave Labor” used to be. In particular, the still frame (preview 0:00) of videoG and the first slide of s.show portray the wall in Wood Green covered with layers of graffiti and a man, captioned as “street artist” by the London Evening Standard, who is spraying a heart on it. Moreover, on the sidewalk there is depicted a mop and a bucket and the central part of the wall appears to be wet. This means that someone has tried to clean it to remove the new graffiti. From an intertextual point of view, the legality/illegality discourse is emphasized in the videos M and T by the journalist voiceover. In fact the hook phrase of the video is:

A rouse brewing over this wall in North London, **not that it has been covered in graffiti** but that somebody has removed the graffiti, [...] The **spray graffiti** will be sell for half million dollars, maybe much more.

The first sentence implies that the news dealing with these topics tend to focus on acts of vandalism, while a graffiti removal is almost never the focus. Moreover, the second sentence, by using the adjective “spray” connotes that the journalist almost does not believe that this type of art can be worthy of that sum of money or even of “much more”.

This data evidences that for the moment, even in the epitome of the creative city of London, the media do not give a clear definition and portrayal of street artist practices. Their position indeed is still at the edges of legality. Therefore, even if, as McAuliffe (2012: 189-90) claimed, “the rise of creative cities discourses [...] has afforded the opportunity to rethink the way creative practices of graffiti writers and street artist are valued,” the “paths to recognition” seem still long and tortuous.

Divergent Claims on the Legality of the Sale

The fulcrum of the debate around “Slave Labour,” especially during the days when the videos were published, has been the legality/illegality of the removal and sale of the piece. This conflict also included polemics on the ownership of the work. In the data analysed, different parties, including the auction house, the councillor and the local community, have their

respective claims. The media “boundary work” (Dayan, 2007; Silverstone, 2007: 19) has the role of drawing the attention of the audience to some perspectives and withdrawing it from others.

Media “boundary work”

From a visual point of view, in all the videos there is a slight tendency to give more space to images that show the wall in Wood Green (see image 4 in Appendix II), than showing images of the auction house in Miami. However this might be due to logistical reasons: all the online newspapers are British, therefore it is easier to film in London than in Florida. Furthermore, all the videos insist in frequently showing the gap on the Wood Green wall where “Slave Labour” used to be. This repetition suggests that the removal of the piece has almost left something more than only a physical whole: it is the source of an emotional wound for the local community.

This emotionality is especially demonstrated in videoG. In fact, the Guardian video, together with the s.show, is slightly different from the others in this regard. While videos M, T and B, have an overall voice over all of the segments involved in the case, videoG places greater emphasis on the claims of the local community and artist. For example, eight scenes, from 7 to 14 (total length 28 seconds) are entirely devoted to the local protest (chanting, shouting, holding posters) in front of the wall of Wood Green (see image 6 in Appendix II).

From an intertextual point of view, the discourse of legality/illegality of the sale can be found in the use of the words (written/spoken) of the journalist. Across the different titles, subtitles and caption, the “removal” of the graffiti acquires different connotation. For example according to both the Daily Mail and Telegraph, Slave Labour has been ‘stolen’ (original in quotation marks). Moreover, both video M and T do not exclude the possibility that the sale might be illegal. Indeed, as the voiceover argues in the scene 8 (0:33/0:36), the sale of the piece is expected “on Saturday, unless the auction will be found **illegal**.”

In contrast in the Guardian, the piece of street art has “vanished” from the wall, while according to the BBC has “disappeared” and “rumours” says it has been “removed by the building’s owner.” Going back to a visual point of view, all the videos and the s.show emphasize the opinion of the local graffiti writers/street artists. To be sure, in all of them is showed, the black and white graffiti picturing two stick men (one running and one with its arms up in the air) that, with the signs ‘DANGER THIEVES’ (see images 3 and 4, Appendix II), clearly connotes that “Slave Labour” has been stolen. Suggestively, all the four videos end

with the image of this graffiti (video G also zooms on it).

Claims of the auction

In both videos M,T and B, the allegedly owner of “Slave Labour,” Frederick Tuth from Fine Art Auction Miami, is interviewed. The news present this part of his speech: “...people in England have complained that the work has been **stolen**. That is absolutely incorrect, because the work was painted on a **private wall and the owner can do whatever he wants with his own wall.**” Hence, the auction implies that the legal owner of the piece of art is the owner of the surface where it has been painted. However, in videoG, the auctioneer does not seem that much at ease. As the caption of the the video says “**Frederick Tuth, auctioneer at Fine Art Auction Miami, would not comment on why the piece was taken off the auction block.**”, and when a representative of the auction is asked by the journalist “Could you tell me why the Banksy was removed...?” the man “answers” very quickly showing a nervous smile “...that is why we sent you a statement for that...ok? Thank you.” Hence, this connotes the contested nature of the legal ownership of the piece.

Claims of the Council

Since “Slave Labour” appeared on the wall of Turnpike Lane in Wood Green, the Council of Haringey has been its proud protector and promoter. As soon as the piece disappeared in February 2013, the Councillors prompt the local community to get together and react against the “robbery”. Indeed, they launched the “Bring back Banksy” campaign, including a facebook group, a twitter page (#bringbackbanksy) and they invited the residents of Haringey to “Email the Miami art auction house - Info@faami.com - where the Banksy is set to go under the hammer this Saturday, with an estimated price tag of more than \$300,000” (to read the text of the open letter, see <http://Haringey.gov.uk/bringbackbanksy>). Moreover, both Alan Strickland, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, and Claire Kober, Leader of the Council, wrote several letters to the Arts Council of England (Peter Bazalgette, to the Banksy owner (Frederick Tuth), to the Miami Major Regalado and to the Secretary of DCMS (Rt Hon Maria Miller MP). (The letters are all available at the link http://www.haringey.gov.uk/index/news_and_events/banksy-campaign.htm.)

Regarding the claims of the council represented in the data, in video M and T the Councillors Alan Strickland is shown twice (Frederick Tuth once). Countering the Miami Auction, he argued that the removal and sale of “Slave Labour” “[...] seems quite wrong [...] it is completely counter to the spirit with which Banksy gave it to us.” Moreover, in the same

videos, he added later that the fact that the graffiti has been removed risks to set “a precedent” for “if a Banksy can be taken out of a wall and sold for a half million dollars in your street, what about the Banksy in my street?” The same claim is made by Strickland in videoB: “...if Banksy starts to be removed, sold at very high prices then Banksy across the world may start to disappear and find themselves not in your neighbour but in an Auction House.”

In these claims there are two points worth for discussion. First, the use of the word “precedent” raises a fundamental point. According the Anglo-America common law tradition, a precedent is defined as a court decision that is cited as an example or analogy to resolve similar questions of law in later cases. (<http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com>). Indeed, what the Councillor is implying is that if the removal and sale of the piece of art will be allowed, it might become a common and accepted practice in future.

Alan Strickland was not wrong. Even though “Slave Labour” was withdrawn from the Miami auction, it was sold later in another auction by Sincura Group in London (June 2013). Not even two months later it happened again. On the 27th of July, while accomplishing the analysis of “Slave Labour” case study, the following headings appeared on the British online news websites: “Banksy's No Ball Games artwork 'stolen' from north London street to be auctioned despite protests against its sale” (Mail online, 2013c) and “Banksy's 'stolen' No Ball Games mural to sell at auction” (The Telegraph, 2013b). These titles present an identical situation as the one that happened in February: “Slave Labour,” as Strickland suggested, did set a “precedent”.

Second, the Councillor always speaks in the plural “we.” This connotes a strong sense of community. For example the use of the possessive adjective “our” introduces in his speech a discourse of belonging and communal identity. Banksy was not only a piece of art in the street: it was part of the community. Banksy, personified in his art, became a local, an entity you could encounter in “your” street. Indeed, the media coverage placed great emphasis on the image of the “gap” in wall.

Claims of the Local Community

The discourses of community and belonging suggested by the Councillor’s words, are confirmed and underpinned by the voice of the locals portrayed in the videos, as even the words used in the campaign “Bring back **our** Banksy,” chanting from the crowd showed in video G “Oh bring Back, oh bring back **our** Banksy...” and the text in the poster “We want to

save **our** wonderful Banksy...” Furthermore, one of the locals interviewed in video M,T and B even claims “it should be kept here for the community” since “**it represents [its] struggle**”. Hence, Banksy and his “Slave Labour” has become a symbol of the community and of the neighbourhood. It is its image and its own “brand”.

However, this is a particular case of city branding, different from the one investigated in the theoretical section of this paper. In fact, it is a brand practice that, even if it is helped and supported by national institutional bodies such as the City Council, comes from “below” and stems from the grassroots groups. To be sure, as Cochrane (2007) also points out, city branding practices do not always exploit culture as a tool to win the urban market competition. Instead, culture has to be crucially considered as “something that is shared by communities” and as “an essential element of everyday life and identity” (Cochrane 2007: 167).

CONCLUSIONS

As evidenced above, the removal and sale of Banksy’s “Slave Labour” have triggered an already contentious debate around the practices of urban graffiti and street art. The main aim of this research has been to expose the tensions underlying these particular practices. By first focusing on the conflicts already characterising the notion of urban culture, I have theoretically analysed three specific conflicts relating to graffiti and street art discourses: 1) the problem of terminology (graffiti or street art?); 2) the legality/illegality of the practice itself; 3) how the practice is considered by urban institutions (city council claims) and local residents (local community claims). Following this analysis, the resulting theoretical concepts have been applied to the online media coverage of “Banksy Slave Labour”, analysed from a visual semiotic and visual discourse perspective. A crucial aspect of the operationalization of the research has been the intertextual analysis of written and spoken texts.

The data analysis has led to three core findings.

There are still difficulties in clearly defining and distinguishing graffiti (which is mainly tagging and writing associated to a crew or subculture) and street art (artistic practices with a more public address and which is less tied to subcultural practices) (McAuliffe, 2012).

These terminology problems are strictly related to the policy issues. Indeed, if it is difficult to distinguish between graffiti (often vandalism) and proper street art, it is not possible for city

governments to establish which practices should be legal and which one should not. The media coverage of the “Banksy Slave Labour” case does not provide a clear solution to this issues either. Rather, it suggests that the path to recognition of street art practices in the creative city is still long and tortuous.

The analysis of the media representation of the city council and local community claims have evidenced that street art can be considered as a form of culture embedded in the every day life practices and identity of the residents and not only as a cultural marketing tool for city branding.

The cases of “Slave Labour” and “No Ball Games” outline a paradoxical approach and consideration of street art practices by both media and city councils. On the one hand they are valued to the extent that the auctioneer could sell them for almost a million pounds. On the other hand, city councils still do not considered them as a proper forms of art, since they do not have proper policies that regulate their production, consumption and distribution. Furthermore, this research has suggested that these tensions are portrayed in the media as well and, as results, they are perceived by the citizens.

The conclusions of this research are only a starting point for future investigations. Additional explorations in relation to urban street art could shed further light on the tensions underlying this practice and potentially indicate viable solutions. Such research, I argue, is the *conditio sine qua non* to the delineation of urban policies that could foster a mutually satisfying urban environment for street art and policy makers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: TABLES

- *Table 1: Guide (self elaborated) to visual semiotic and visual discourse analysis*

DENOTATION	Q: What or who has been depicted?
CONNOTATION - DISCOURSE	Q: What meanings are implied through the signs represented? What is the main discourse laying behind these meanings?
INTERTEXTUALITY	Q: What other images and discourses reinforce and legitimize this representation?

- *Table 2: Colour code for connotative and discourse analysis*

CONCEPTS	COLOUR
Street art (definition issues, tensions)	GREEN
City council (framing, claims)	PINK
Local Community (framing, claims)	RED
Salient inclusions/exclusions	ORANGE
Time frame dedicated to each perspective	BLUE

APPENDIX II: VISUALS

- *Image 1: Roa's Crane in Banglatown (source: Tower Hamlets)*



- *Image 2: Banksy's "Slave Labour" in Wood Green (source: BBC news)*



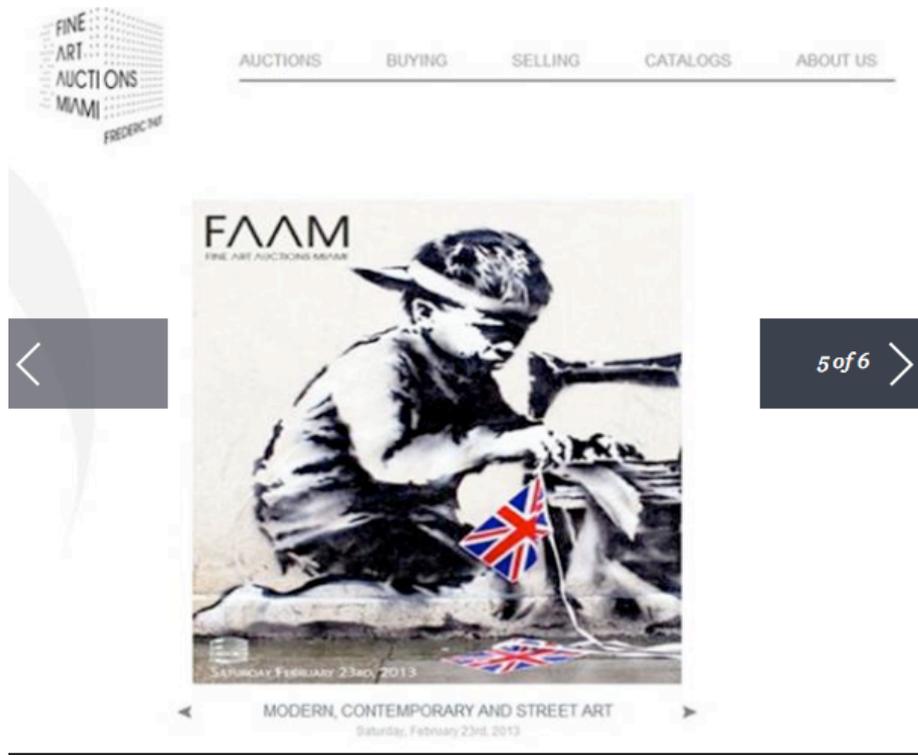
- *Image 3: Graffiti on the wall in Wood Green (source: London Evening Standard)*



- *Image 4: The “gap” on the Wood Green wall after “Slave Labour” removal (source London Evening Standard)*



- *Image 5: “Slave Labour” on the Miami Auction webpage (source: London Evening Standard)*



- *Image 6: The Local community protests in front of the wall (source: London Evening Standard)*



APPENDIX III: DATA SOURCES

VIDEO - Mail Online - VIDEO M

- Search word (in the website homepage): 'Banksy Slave Labour'
- Published: 22 February 2012, 16.55. Updated: 23 February 2013, 08.57.
- Source: ITN (<http://www.itn.co.uk>)
- URL: <http://www.ymail.co.uk/news/article-2282958/Banksy-Auction-house-selling-stolen-art-bombarded-calls--rat-shows-missing-graffiti.html>
- Length: 1min 39sec
- Last date accessed: 27th July 2013

VIDEO 2 - Guardian Online - VIDEO G

- Search word (in the website homepage): 'Banksy Slave Labour'
- Search word (in the 'Editorial choice' page): 'Banksy'
- Published: Sunday 24 February 2013
- Source: Reuters (uk.reuters.com)
- URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/video/2013/feb/24/banksy-mural-miami-auction-video>
- Length: 1min 15sec
- Last date accessed: 27th July 2013

VIDEO 3- Telegraph online - VIDEO T

same video as VIDEO M (same source ITS) **

- Search word (in the website homepage): "Banksy Slave Labor"
- URL: www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/9888244/Stolen-Banksy-goes-up-for-sale-in-Florida.html
- Date: 7:25PM GMT 23 Feb 2013
- Length: 1min 39sec
- Last date accessed: 28th July 2013

VIDEO 4 - BBC online - VIDEO B

- Search word (in the website homepage): 'Banksy Slave Labor'
- Published: 22 February 2013; Last updated: at 6.00
- Source: BBC (ww.bbc.co.uk)
- URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-21543487>
- Length: 1min 46sec
- Last date accessed: 28th July

SLIDESHOW - Evening Standard - S.SHOW

- Search word: "Banksy Slave Labour"
- Published: 24 February 2013
- Source: Reuters
- URL: <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/now-bring-back-banksy-boy-slave-labour-mural-withdrawn-from-auction-at-last-minute-8508403.html?action=gallery&ino=6>
- Last date accessed: 29th July 2013

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