Kyiv Graffiti: Production of Space in Post-Soviet City

By

Nadiya Parfan

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Supervisors: Vlad Naumescu
Andreas Dafinger

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Abstract

This paper examines Kyiv graffiti as a convergence of global and local, general and particular, structurally determined and structure-challenging. Each single piece of graffiti is linked with the outer world on many levels: it designates certain surface, street, neighborhood, city and region. Along these lines graffiti brings together concrete physical place and different types of bigger scale places and spaces. Standing on this initial point the paper explores how Kyiv graffiti is distributed in space and what social meaning this distribution contains. It also shows how urban space is perceived and challenged by graffiti and how graffiti itself has changed under the influence of recent spatial transformations.

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Introduction

There are over three million people living in modern Kyiv[1], the capital of Ukraine. Every day most of them walk, travel, ride and wander around the city. So do Kyiv graffiti makers, who are no different from their fellow citizens when seen from outside. What makes them special is hidden in their bags, where one would normally find a waterproof marker pen if not a colorful spray can with a pair of working gloves. Those are invisible for the majority of Kyiv inhabitants – just like the numerous signs on the walls, fences, light boxes and garbage cans. Taking notice of people who leave their incomprehensible nicknames on the city surface they would be wondering why is somebody doing that and what they are trying to say. New-Yorkers, especially if they recall the early 1970s subway trains heavily covered with graffiti tags, would not be surprised with such things: a while ago it was their city in which graffiti writing had bloomed, before it travelled overseas – to Western Europe and further east. Ukrainian graffiti subculture, which dates back to the late 1990s, might be considered as the adherent of the "New-York School", but what has happened to graffiti with the change of space and time is too striking to pass unnoticed.

By definition, the type of graffiti I am dealing with here[2] occurs on urban surface, which is why it is inevitably sensitive to any given city. The list of paradigmatic graffiti domains includes New York, San Paulo, London, Amsterdam, Paris and Berlin. Kyiv, with its rich between-East-and-West past and post-socialist present, is hard to relate to any of them. On the

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[1] In current English language the toponym "Kiev" is used more often than "Kyiv". The first comes from Russian language transcription of the city name, which was internationally promoted in Soviet times. However, in 1990s Ukrainian officials agreed on "Kyiv" as the one which better resembles Ukrainian language sounding and proclaimed it the only official transliteration in Roman letters. The latest version is slowly gaining popular acceptance among foreign language speakers and, I assume, will sooner or later replace "Kiev". More information on the issue: *Resolution of the Ukrainian Commission for Legal Terminology.* October 14, 1995. Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://www.uazone.net/Kiev_Kyiv.html)

[2] The most common term for it would be "subcultural graffiti", but many parallel forms are also used (New York graffiti, subway graffiti, hip hop graffiti). I avoid the latter because of the irrelevant etymological time-place connotations

one hand, it stands on the periphery of the graffiti world. Paradoxically, this is exactly the reason to consider Kyiv an attractive case for research. I assume that periphery can be more telling in a global perspective: some global trends are easier to recognize from this position. On the other hand, historical "delay" in Kyiv's graffiti career is compensated by the intensive dynamics. It results in the qualitative variety of graffiti within the relatively small quantity: different types and forms, which would elsewhere refer to different stages of time, are present here at once. So, Kyiv is also important as a regional centre, one of the trend-setters in post-Soviet graffiti.

Certainly, the phenomenon of graffiti is not a thing-in-itself and it does not stand apart from the broader social context. I argue that Kyiv graffiti primarily indicates the ongoing process of post-socialist urban transformation. The city has experienced a tremendous change in recent years. The former pillar of Soviet socialism is now being stuffed with huge shopping malls, business centres, parkings and omnipresent advertisements. Urban landscape is changing so harshly that sensual and mental shocks have become a daily norm for city dwellers. Not only graffiti comes with the "all-included" set of urban novelties, it is also used as a form of response to the process of transformation. In my work Kyiv graffiti should be understood as a convergence of global and local, general and particular, structurally determined and structure-challenging. In fact, each single piece of graffiti is linked with the outer world on many levels: it designates certain surface, street, neighborhood, city and region. Along these lines graffiti brings together concrete physical place and different types of bigger scale places and spaces. Standing on this initial point I will further explore how Kyiv graffiti is distributed in space and what social meaning this distribution contains. In doing so I will show how urban space is perceived and challenged by graffiti and how graffiti itself has changed under the influence of recent spatial transformations.

Present study accedes to the larger field of urban sociology and anthropology dealing with post-socialist cities. Yet, it is important to take into account the deeper impact of Soviet socialism and the short run transformation process, which make post-Soviet cities similar but distinct of what they usually mean under "post-socialism". As Judith Bodnar argues (2001:14), "conflating comparative dimensions is a strategy that has led to very real misconceptions in both lay and scholarly discourses and has not died with the removal of the qualifier socialist from the denotation of the region". In order to avoid the misleading generalizations I construct new theoretical framework and historical contextualization, which respond to my case. Apart from this my contribution also consists in some broader scale inferences, which rest on bilateral linkage between the unique (local, urban, post-Soviet) and the universal (global logic of graffiti production).

The following chapter starts with the literature review on graffiti. Of the numerous publications I select several studies, which are relevant for integrating my research within the existing scholarly discourse. These either relate to my case geographically or through the same angle of problematization. From the latter I move to the major theoretical framework, which I construct from the ground up. Here I use the sociology of space by Henri Lefebvre (1974) and reinterpret Jean Baudrillard's (1976) conceptualization of graffiti with its help. Further, I supplement the main theoretical skeleton with theoretical perspectives derived from Michel de Certeau's (1984) notion of spatial practice, theory of subcultures (Hall, Jefferson, 1975), Pierre Bourdieau's (1983) theory of the field and Arjun Appadurai's (1990) concepts of globalization and mediascape. In the next chapter I introduce my methodology – participant observation with some cartographic aspects and visual analysis.

In the following parts my ethnographic findings are presented and analyzed. The way they are structured is based on the actual division of space and my main theoretical concept – the spatial triad. At first, I view Kyiv graffiti as the spatial practice inherent in the particular

urban space – the post-Soviet city neighborhood. Here I problematize the connection between young people's involvement with graffiti subculture and their position in the relations of production. After this I move to the inner city, which I consider as the potential representational space. To discuss the conditions under which this representation is possible I juxtapose graffiti distribution with the natural and historical landscape and the social profile of this part of the city. Also, I analyze how graffiti's claim for the conceived space is articulated. Finally, I reach the space of cultural institutions and media, where the conceived and the perceived spaces go side by side. I identify the position of graffiti in the relations of cultural production and investigate how it is appropriated by the dominant cultural economy. This brings me to the media space, where graffiti's representational failures in the urban space are substituted by the progressing mediatization and integration into global networks. At the end I make some concluding remarks about my study and point out its limitations.

Chapter 1: Framing the Context

1.1 Critical Literature Review

The disciplinary scale of Anglophone scholarship on graffiti comprises psychology, criminology, linguistics, arts history and sociology. It varies in methodology and theoretical background, as well as in time-place delimitation of subject matter. In social science the latter is dominated by 1970s-1980s US graffiti – namely New York and, to a lesser degree, Philadelphia. Another important historical reference is May 1968 graffiti in Paris, which is often related to European region. The two are accompanied by different paradigms: US graffiti research usually deals with ethnicity, ghettoes and youth subcultures (Lachmann, 1988; Austin, 2001; Macdonald, 2001; Dickinson, 2008), whereas the 1968 is thought of in terms of direct political action and urban uprising (Millon, Nochlin, 1978; Moissac, 1998; Feenberg, Freedman, 2001). Each of these vocabularies has its own merits, but neither separate nor in conjunction do they provide comprehensive reasoning for modern graffiti research. For in the 21st century there is a lot of graffiti with no first-hand ethnic or activist origins – such as graffiti in Kyiv. It calls for the more general understanding of the phenomenon, which has not been sensibly elaborated.

East-Central Europe, especially Soviet and post-Soviet countries, were rarely considered by graffiti scholars. The major reference in the literature on this region is John Bushnell's *Moscow Graffiti: Language and Subculture*. It is primarily based on the author's observations in mid 1980s Moscow, but Kyiv (Kiev) also appears throughout the book. Bushnell draws a lot on the continuity between medieval graffities of Kyivan Rus and the late 20th century folklore. He argues that Moscow subcultural graffities are rooted in the tradition of 11th century orthodox graffities on the walls of Saint Sophia's cathedral in Kyiv. Bushnell not only provides a lot of interesting historical data, but he also makes a classification of 1980s graffities according to their linguistic characteristics and subcultural content. However,

I find his conclusions initially doubtful in how they resemble Moscow graffiti's social profile. In my opinion, Bushnell confuses graffiti subculture and graffities produced by (different) subcultures. While his intention is to investigate one more or less homogenous graffiti subculture, he is actually dealing with different social groups. Consequently, "Moscow graffiti" turns out to be a social hybrid of soccer fans, countercultural movements and Bulgakov's[3] worshipers. It happens because Bushnell thinks that "subculture is a very elusive and elastic concept" (Bushnell, 1990:216) and limits himself to a single linguistic theory of subcultures by Dawid Mauer (Mauer, 1981). This use of the concept and titling of the book seem especially unjustified given the extensive discussion on subcultures in 1970s social science (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, Roberts, 1975; Hebdige, 1979).

Those few Ukrainian and Russian scholars who touch upon modern graffiti resemble Bushnell in many ways (Bazhkova, Lurie, Shumov, 2004; Golovakha, 2004). They focus on deep historical perspective, grand classifications, linguistic/semiotic determinism and random use of social concepts, if at all. Thus, Inna Golovakha in her sociological article about Kyiv graffiti *The Social Meaning of Asocial Graffities* refers to Lotman, Barthes, Jung, Lebon, and none of the existing social theories and researches.

So, neither the classical studies nor scholarly literature "around the case" could be used to extract satisfactory theoretical optics for my research. A new theoretical framework has to be synthesized for dealing with Kyiv graffiti. In this respect I find it reasonable to appeal to sociology of space. Association with space is the most fundamental characteristic of any graffiti, though it has been often dismissed by researchers. Many would call their subject "urban graffiti" taking the category of urban for granted. Needless to say, graffiti is not a rural phenomenon, but its connection with urban space should be problematized and reflected.

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[3] Mikhail Bulgakov – Kyiv-born Russian and Ukrainian writer and playwriter, who was banned by Stalin during his lifetime and gained popularity only in late Soviet times, several decades after his death.

There were some promising attempts to explore graffiti's relation to physical and social body of the city, which did not attain further elaboration in due course. The first such try unsurprisingly comes from geography. It is one of the earliest publications on modern graffiti by urban geographers David Ley and Roman Cybriwsky, who investigated the 1970s graffiti in Philadelphia. Their study seems to be an outstanding example of graffiti research in many aspects including different dimensions of how graffiti bears upon space. Ley and Cybriwsky viewed graffities as territorial markers and distinguished between them according to their location in spatial structure of the city. They identified the inner city as playground for small amount of graffiti celebrities, "the self-proclaimed kings of the walls" (Ley, Cybriwsky, 1974:492). In this case graffiti distribution followed the main transportation arteries. Kings competed for the most exotic and inaccessible places and, in a lesser degree, for maximal publicity. Other graffities in Philadelphia were strongly localized on the basis of neighborhoods and their ethnic subdivision. It was the mapping technique that helped Ley and Cybriwsky lend credibility to positive dependence between ethnic profile of the blocks and graffiti distribution. According to their observations, territorial origins of the graffiti gangs reproduced ethnic division of housing space. Locations of the graffities often functioned as border signs informing the danger of transgression. To explain these spatialized social tensions the authors refer to housing policy and the real estate market.

Unfortunately, geographical approach to graffiti gained little credence in further scholarship, which makes it difficult to apply in current context. Besides, in regard to East-Central Europe mapping method is even more problematic due to the abundance of socialist housing, which partly downplays spatial expressions of urban social structure. Yet, there were some other attempts to position this region's graffiti in space – such as the recent comparative study of Warsaw and Montreal by Ella Chmielewska. Chmielewska departs from linguistic and semiotic approach to "signature graffiti" (tags), in which it is expectably treated as "simultaneously a visual sign and a textual trademark" (Chmielewska, 2007:149).

Fortunately, unlike other linguists and semiologists she claims that this framing is not sufficient and tries to extend it by questioning graffiti's locality and linkage with urban context. According to Chmielewska, graffiti's appearance is strongly defined by city surface. Thus, in the centre of Montreal graffiti gets bold, large and persistent to be visibly tangible and compatible with its surrounding – a very dense visual landscape – whereas the "linguo-centric" inner Warsaw is dominated by small offhand stencils, throw-ups or tags and the more elaborate pieces are concentrated along the suburban stretches. Chmielewska argues that graffiti is a site-specific phenomenon and should not be viewed in itself, but "in situ". Yet, what she refers to is rather urban iconosphere and linguistic milieu and much less of an actual physical space and its social meaning. In my research I would prefer to start from the latter and view imagery and language just inasmuch as they are related to space.

One more case I find worth mentioning is Ljiljana Radošević's study of graffiti in the New Belgrade district of the capital city of Serbia. She describes the emergence of New-York style graffiti in the context of Milošević era urban process. The first graffiti appeared in Block 45 – "certainly because it was the first block to be built in the area" (Radošević, 2009:162), which gave it a very important position in the hierarchy of new district's blocks. Besides, the physical environment (nearby river and quay, a lot of greenery, on the one hand, and a lot of concrete, on the other) seemed very appealing for graffiti writers from all around the city. According to Radošević, New Belgrade walls became a channel for alternative communication and self-expression in the time when regular media were appropriated by autocratic political power. This also brings to light the fact that local inhabitants were very loyal towards graffiti. Although Radošević provides all these details as the background for further discussion about subcultural dynamics of Belgrade graffiti, I believe that her tribute to space, place and locality is very valuable: it shows the inseparability of graffiti and urban context.

1.2 The Production of Space

Graffiti scholarship did not move much in the direction of space because space is a vulnerable place of social theory. According to Henri Lefebvre (1974), space as an analytical category has long been appropriated by philosophers and mathematicians. This brought to certain epistemological consequences and further inability to create "the science of space". Abstract transparent mathematical space, mental space and actual physical space were confused and misplaced far too many times. What has been thought of as "space" turns to be a random multitude of phenomena with different epistemological statuses. Lefebvre goes so far as to accusing arguably the most important "spatialist" Michel Foucault of undertheorizing space:

> Thus, Michel Foucault can calmly assert that 'knowledge [savoir] is also the space in which the subject may take up a position and speak of the objects with which he deals in his discourse'. Foucault never explains what space it is that he is referring to, nor how it bridges the gap between the theoretical (epistemological) realm and the practical one, between mental and social, between the space of philosophers and the space of people who deal with material things (Lefebvre, [1974]1991:4).

It is not surprising that Lefebvre's criticism is just a preface to his own project of science of space, which I am going to take a closer look at for approaching graffiti. I focus here on *Production of Space*, the main work by Lefebvre written in 1974 and translated into English in 1991. It has become one of the most important books in Anglophone human geography and urban theory wing to David Harvey, Fredric Jameson and some other scholars, who used it in their works (Merrifield, 2004:69). Lefebvre's starting point is the idea of social space as a social product. This claim has several implications. Firstly, the natural space is disappearing – as the objective reality and the subject of human thought. Secondly, each society, meaning, each mode of production, produces its own social space. Social space represents social relations of reproduction (relations between different sexes, age groups, family organization) and relations of production (division of labor, power relations). Thirdly, if space is a product, the knowledge of space should expound the process of production.

Basically, space is equal to the production of space for "production process and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideas" (Lefebvre, [1974]1991:37). Fourthly, every space has its history – the moment of creation and the point of exhaustion. The Western history of space lies in the process abstraction from which the abstract space comes to power.

Stressing the dynamic nature of social space Lefebvre cancels any possibility of absolute terms: space is a process. This makes it not so easy to grasp analytically, but the new science of space offers a theoretical tool for this purpose. It is the spatial triad consisting of spatial practice (lived space), representations of space (conceived space) and representational spaces (perceived space). The dialectical relation between three elements in the model aims to avoid the abstract dualistic "straitjackets" of Descartes' and Kant's understanding of space. Spatial practices are the use of space in everyday life, routine reality. Spatial practices must be continuous and cohesive, which does not necessarily imply that they are logically coherent. Representations of space refer to conceptualized spaces of scientists, planners, urbanists and social engineers. They are tied to the relations of production and tend to be expressed in the form of knowledge, verbal signs and codes, which have certain practical impact. Representational spaces are linked to the underground side of social life or arts and, therefore, not necessarily coded. Representational space is the dominated space which imagination seeks to change and appropriate.

Lefebvre has been referred to in the study of 2000s graffities in the US, UK and Australia by Victoria Carrington (2009). But the author only briefly mentions him before her full-fledged textual analysis of graffiti and does not elaborate her position in how graffiti relates with space. This is why its place in the spatial triad still has to be identified. On the one hand, contemporary graffiti can be viewed as an attribute of certain youth subculture. This makes it possible to think about graffiti as the representation of relations of reproduction.

"Representations of the relations of reproduction are sexual symbols of male and female, sometimes accompanied, sometimes not, by symbols of age – of youth and of old age" (Lefebvre [1974]1991:32). On the other hand, graffiti embraces production and reproduction in everyday practice. By relations of production here I mean young people's leisure, which is the basic precondition for practicing graffiti. As a time-consuming activity it is structurally ascribed to those social groups which are not (yet) involved in the relations of production. Graffiti is not produced by full time workers or lower middle class people, but by their descendants, whom they provide with the means of living.

Also, in those specific contexts, where graffiti goes beyond the insider communication between writers and taggers, it can be considered the representational space. This is the case for street artists and political graffities. Representational space produced by this type of graffiti "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs" (Lefebvre [1974]1991:39).

Representational spaces created by graffiti are distanced from the conceived space because they are much less institutionalized and have weaker coding, if at all. Even though graffiti expresses an ambition to redefine space and create some alternative representation its intelligible verbalization is usually problematic. Since the language of representation is appropriated by the conceivers, representational spaces including graffiti have small practical impact in comparison to the representations of space.

The issue of graffiti coding was nicely described by Jean Baudrillard – one of the first theorists to take graffiti "seriously". He viewed 1970s New York tags as a form of protest although their content was "neither political nor pornographic" (Baudrillard, [1976]1993:76). For Baudrillard, young Blacks and Puerto Ricans who covered suburban trains with their meaningless graffities made the symbolic intervention of ghetto into the city. Baudrillard's

understanding of the city resembles Lefebvre's notion of the conceived space in a sense that it is not just the site for production, class struggle and exploitation, but the system of sign exchange ruled by the dominant symbolic code.

> We see this urban scenario materialized in the new cities which directly result from the operational analysis of needs and sign-functions, and in which everything is conceived, projected and realized on the basis of an analytic definition: environment, transport, labour, leisure, play and culture become so many commutable terms on the chessboard of the city, a homogenous space defined as a total environment (Baudrillard, [1976]1993:77).

The most fundamental discrepancy between Baudrillard and Lefebvre consists in their political impulses. Lefebvre, being a diehard socialist, calls for social change: to change life is to change space and to change space is to change life. This is the main impulse of *The Urban Revolution*, written after the 1960s urban revolts in Paris, Tokyo, Mexico, Detroit (Lefebvre, [1970]2003). For Baudrillard, Marx's preoccupation with the relations of production went out of date and should give its place to the analysis of symbolic systems and sign exchange. "The factory, as the model of socialization through space, has not disappeared today, but, in line with the general strategy, has been replaced by the entire city as the space of the code. The urban matrix no longer realizes a power (labour power) but a difference (the operation of the sign): mettalurgy has become semiurgy" (Baudrillard, [1976]1993:77).

Nevertheless, I think this contradiction led to the use of different vocabularies, whereas the actual analytical inferences by Baudrillard supplement Lefebvre's ideas – at least, in regard to graffiti. Given the fact that *Production of Space* was first published at the moment Baudrillard had already made his observations in the US the absence of the potential linkage is understandable. Interestingly (and very much in a manner of 20th century French intellectuals), together with Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu, Lefebvre was a member of dissertation committee for Baudrillard's doctoral thesis in sociology. I find it reasonable to take into account Baudrillard's time-place specific analysis of graffiti in order to clear up the position of graffiti in spatial triad.

In Baudrillard's view, "ghetto" graffities differ symbolically not only from the dominant city code but from the savage, spontaneous frescoes and murals on ghetto walls. With their revolutionary messages of solidarity and unity between the oppressed they are politically similar to tags. But since they respect architecture and care about "the wall" these murals become decorative, not rebellious. They are too beautiful to be radical.

In Lefebvre's terms this means that ghetto graffities reproduce the conceived space and support the dominant conception on the level of the dominated. What Baudrillard calls the "riot of signs" is not as meaningless as he puts it when translated to spatial terms: the revolt is expressed through the position in space. Tags "forget" the architecture and run from one building to another, from the window to the door and to the subway. This is how they create a new representational space. On the contrary, murals and frescoes do not argue for their own perception because they agree on the conceived space. So, from what has been described by Baudrillard, I conclude that graffiti's position in the production of space shuffles between the conceived and the perceived.

1.3 The Consumption of Space

The third element of Lefebvre's spatial triad, spatial practice, also has something to do with graffiti – and this is graffiti's relation to the consumption of space. In this respect I would like to extend Lefebvre's ideas with the notion of spatial practice by Michel de Certeau (1984). He considers practices (tactics) an opposition to strategies – forms of behavior forced by power institutions. Similar to poetry, which makes its own use of the common language, practices make it possible for the dominated to reappropriate what is assigned to them from above. Unlike traditional social scientists, who treat consumers as passive and marginal actors in the production process, de Certeau argues for positive creative sense of consumption and everyday life.

The notion of strategy refers exactly to what has already been described as the conceived in spatial triad, but the idea of tactics is useful because it brings new light to Lefebvre's spatial practice. De Certeau speaks more specifically about the order of the city as the spatial language, which leaves possibility for "pedestrian speech acts" (de Certeau, 1984:97). I read this as following: not only representational spaces create some alternative to the dominant representation of space, but also daily routines go somewhere beyond the conception of space. In his poetical manner, de Certeau claims that people walking on the streets write the city text – graffiti producers call themselves precisely *writers*, too. This is how graffiti can also be viewed as the creative consumption, the reappropriation of space. At this point de Certeau's approach is concordant with subcultural dimension of graffiti, as it was described by the British theorists of youth subcultures. They also stress on young people's reappropriation of dominant culture through signs and rituals.

> Subcultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their 'parent' culture. They must be focused around certain activities, values, certain use of material artifacts, territorial spaces, etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture. But, since they are sub-sets, there must also be significant things which bind and articulate them with the 'parent' culture (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, Roberts, 1975:13-14).

Subcultural graffiti makes its claim for space on a mere symbolical level contrary to countercultural graffities, in which symbolism is supplied with political meaning. Moreover, through the course of time this type of "creative consumption" has become inversely linked to the production process: the spatial practice of graffiti is being converted into commodity. It is consumed within the subculture as long as graffiti makers pay for spray cans, painting equipment and specialized magazines. Also, graffiti is commodified from "outside" by being included in the relations of cultural production. I find it promising to use Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production to explain how this is possible. But in the beginning, it must be acknowledged that, for Bourdieu, the field as a pure positionality, which does not have spatial implications. This means that Bourdieu would deny treating the field as a space. However, Lefebvrian understanding of space as a social product (not just the physical space)

makes it reasonable to treat the field of cultural production as space. Just like any other sort of production, cultural production constitutes its own social space, where the relations of production take place. Not only graffiti produced in this field has different social meaning, but it also changes its location: it evidently moves from the public space of the streets to the space of cultural institutions. From this perspective the field of cultural production could be viewed as a social space and the location of graffiti could be explained in terms of its positionality within the field.

Bourdieu defines cultural production as "the economic world reversed" (Bourdieu, [1983]1993, showing the particular connection between culture and economy: cultural production is only a relatively autonomous field defined by power relations and economic production, in the final round. At any moment of time every position in the field is dependent on other positions and general hierarchy. The field generates its specific form of capital (prestige, recognition), which can be converted into the economic capital. Thus, it is structured by two conflicting principles of hierarchisation: the heteronomous success and the autonomous, degree specific consecration ("recognition accorded by those who recognize no other criterion of legitimacy than recognition by those whom they recognize" (Bourdieu, [1983]1993:38). The field of cultural production (#3 in Fig.1) occupies the dominated position in the power field (#2 in Fig.1), where it is situated at the negative (left lower) pole, but still stands at the dominant pole of class relation (#1 in Fig.1). Graffiti must be positioned as the subfield within the field of cultural production. According to the main rule of the field, actors here show "an interest in disinterestedness" (Bourdieu, [1983]1993:40). The biggest prestige is given to the ones with high symbolic capital and no economic benefits, whose recognition derives from their peers and other producers in the subfield (on the top left of the field #3 in Fig.1). These are the representatives of the autonomous graffiti subculture, who do not relate to the artistic world explicitly.

Figure 1: The field of cultural production
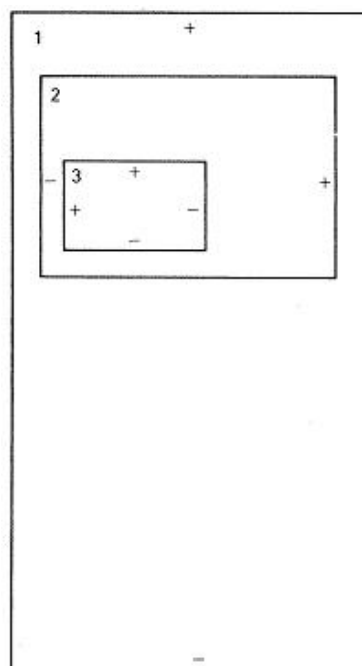
Source: Bourdieu, Pierre. [1983] 1993:38.

Yet, as it has been nicely described by Richard Lachmann, who studied the New York graffitists' evolution from the subculture to gallery world, through the course of time graffiti has become inclined in the process of artistic production. The final desirable stage of graffiti career is moving from the street to the gallery (Lachmann, 1988). Galleries are situated on the side of conceivers in the spatial triad. Inner spatial organization of cultural institutions and especially their location in the city is defined by the empowered actors – urban planners, city government and developers, who can use "culture" to maintain their power or gain economic benefits. Thus, after its move to this space graffiti is not a spatial practice anymore, but a part of the representation of space.

Finally, there is one more significant dimension of graffiti – a media space. The evanescence of the physical body of graffiti pushed the rapid growth of graffiti media, which substitute the urban space. Photography, films, printed media and internet serve to prolong the life of graffiti, which is usually unprotected and short due to graffiti removal policies of the city conceivers. Moreover, this space, which I would call a mediascape, transcended the pure means of documentation – it has a big impact on graffiti as such. Some aspects of media

influence were discussed by Gregory Snyder (2006), who points out on the decriminalization of the illegal subculture by placing it in the legal media space. But in case of Kyiv the role of media is much more than that – it is a crucial factor for establishing the domestic graffiti network and connecting it to the global graffiti web. Kyiv graffiti is primarily a product of globalized culture, unlike others mentioned above. According to Arjun Appadurai, mediascapes cross different levels of territorial boundaries and create possibility for global cultural flows. They make local and global spaces merge, intersect and redefine each other. "Mediascapes refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, film production studios, etc.), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world; and to the images of the world created by these media" (Appadurai, 1990:53). One of such flows brought graffiti to Kyiv and integrated it into the global cultural economy on its way back.

Chaper 2: Methodology and Sources of Evidence

Having read the literature on graffiti I was considering cartographic method as a convenient tool for my study. Specifically, David Ley's and Roman Cybriwsky's investigation of 1970s graffiti in Philadelphia (Ley, Cybriwsky, 1974) drew my attention to mapping. Research of the same scale would not be feasible in my time frame, but I put hopes upon the intensive personal observation and walking interviews with my key informants. I was going to ask them for a "guided tour" in which they would show me their graffities, other graffities they like or consider important and places they find attractive for making graffiti. The outcome of this would be several routes, which I planned to put together on the city map and analyze.

At the stage of the first interview I realized that my initial plan would have to change. The first reason for this was the scheduling of my fieldwork. I arrived at Kyiv in early April 2010, right after unprecedented big city cleaning. To my great disappointment, not only seasonal garbage but many of recent graffities in public space had just been removed. The ones left were somewhat "less public" and, therefore, less valuable for my research. Many would say that the cleaning campaign had been caused by the recent inauguration of the new President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych, who gave a corresponding order to the city major after his passage to the capital. Yet, there was no official notice to get prepared for such state of things. The other reason for the failure of my initial cartographic project was not so random. The majority of my informants did not articulate the elaborate vision of their spatial preferences. They would usually niggardly refer to few common places in the city and, to a lesser degree, to their own neighborhood. Most of the walking trajectories seemed to be partial and sometimes arbitrary. Not least of all, this was influenced by the time-consuming nature of "guided tours" – both in terms of preparation and actual realization. Thus, some of my informants never had time for such a walk and instead preferred to converse in the more

conventional circumstances. So, after the fortnightly fieldwork I ended up with nine semi-structured interviews. Some of them were accompanied by participant observation: the actual graffities were produced during our walks. This is how the field converted my cartographic conception into an interview-based research with some mapping aspects.

To my knowledge, Kyiv graffiti subculture numbers over a hundred people. The overwhelming majority are male. In fact, the only female I met said she was an exceptional case. Their age ranges between teens and thirties, but the greater part is in their twenties. The elders are often mentoring youngsters, so that there is some generational continuity within the subculture. In choosing informants I aimed to cover the variety of geographical origins and time of involvement with graffiti. I also tried to include both marginal writers and the graffiti elite. Some of the last ones I never managed to meet due to their surprisingly tight schedule, on the one hand, and my time limitations, on the other. A few significant personalities were introduced to me at the last minute, so that I never managed to talk to them live. My youngest informant was twenty; the oldest was 31. Two interviews were conducted in Russian language, the rest – in Ukrainian. Language was decided by the interviewees, most of whom were bilingual. Contingently, it might be said that all the interviewees have upper lower class or lower middle class origins.

Together with the interviews the major source of my evidence was visual aids. Part of my fieldwork consisted in the intensive photo documentation of what I observed. Taking pictures I tried to grasp both graffities and urban landscape. I also browsed many popular graffiti blogs paying special attention to the ones run by my informants. These data have later been processed in visual analysis with the special focus on spatial syntax – the way graffities are juxtaposed with architecture, advertisements and other elements of urban surface.

Chapter 3: Kyiv Graffiti. Places and Spaces

3.1 In da Hood: The Dialectics of Doing Nothing

> In da hood
>
> We ain't spelling good
>
> Tons of spray cans're on da walls[4]

The majority of Kyiv graffiti writers are working in groups of three to four people that are mainly established on the basis of neighborhood. However, they call themselves "teams" (*команди*), "crews" or "clans". In graffiti slang this connotes an emphasis on stylistic unity rather than common territorial origin – contrary to gang graffiti, which is believed to be the mere territory marking.[5] As Kiot from Kyiv graffiti team Psia Krew explained, "it is technically easier to work in groups and, besides, it is always pleasant that somebody shares your style." Neighborhood is far not the only playground for graffiti making – many prefer the so-called "legal walls", "galleries" or "walls of fame", which I will speak about later. But there is a solid layer of neighborhood-based graffiti in Kyiv. Its producers are similar to the early US graffiti gangs in a sense that their graffities are territorial markers (Ley, Cybriwsky, 1974). Yet, they have nothing to do with ghettoes and ethnic division of space. I am arguing that their territorial identity is rooted in special socio-economical background of Kyiv neighborhoods.

Since 2001 Kyiv is officially divided into ten administrative districts (rayons) of different demographic and territorial size. Except for two old central districts, Podil and Pechersk, and partly Shevchenkivskyi (Shevchenko) district, they emerged as a result of

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[4] "У нас на районе / Не звонят, а звóнят / Стены все в баллоне" (translation by author) – the opening lines of a popular hip-hop song *На районе* (*In da Hood)* by Kyiv-based duo Potap and Nastia Kamenskikh. The music video captures the Old Darnytsia neighborhood in Kyiv: Music Motors. 2008. "На районе" (In da Hood). Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNJfSmm8eT4).

[5] More information about the difference between gangs and crews is available at the popular international graffiti forum: http://www.bombingscience.com/graffitiforum/showthread.php?t=1819

intensive Soviet urbanization (Fig.2). The peak of Kyiv's urban growth was the post-War period: the flow of rural dwellers, who came to work at the new-built factories and industrial plants, nearly doubled the population (Harris, 1970). At that time the major concept of Soviet urban planning was microdistrict (microrayon) – a densely populated residential block with concrete or panel multistoried buildings for 8,000 to 12,000 inhabitants (Bater, 1980). These were joined into bigger residential units – rayons (districts) of 10,000 to 30,000 inhabitants or even bigger masyvs (massives). Each microrayon provided its dwellers with the facilities needed on a daily basis including kindergartens and schools – the centres for youth socialization.

Figure 2: Kyiv districts

Source: *Wikimedia Commons.* Retrieved June 1, 2010
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subdivisions_of_Kiev)

After the collapse of Soviet Union microdistricts became the core of new distinguished urban subculture usually referred to as gopniks. A typical gopnik would be male and young; behave aggressively when hanging out with his mates in public; dress up in leather and sports

clothes; have extremely short hair, if at all, and wear a peak cap and consume a lot of alcohol, cigarettes and sunflower seeds.[6] Gopniks inherited a lot from the criminal subculture, which made microdistricts dangerous place to stay: street robbery, though highly ritualized, was a casual gopnik activity. In the late 1990s, under the influence of the "imported" hip hop subculture gopniks' self-expression was partly converted into the more symbolic forms. Gopnik lifestyle accommodated basic elements of hip-hop (breakdancing, MCing, DJing and graffiti writing) and gave birth to a new local hybrid of the worldwide subculture, which could be called "na rayonie" (in da hood). "Na rayonie" is a meaningful, frequently used word combination, which does not exist in the literary Ukrainian or Russian language. It means "at/on top of rayon", whereas the proper word form would be "in rayon". "Na" here noteworthy connotes belonging to the physical surface of rayon, its territorial body.

Kyiv districts and neighborhoods (microdistricts), both of which are confusingly called "rayons" in common use, gave rise to many graffiti crews. Those currently active include New Original Kingdom (NOK) in the Novobilychi neighborhood (Sviatoshynskyi rayon), MetroStroy Clan (MSC) in the Vidradnyi neighborhood (Solomyanskyi rayon), intercrew team RUNS in the Solomyanskyi rayon, BCS in the Obolonskyi rayon, NBK and HDSH in the Kharkivskyi masyv. The first two are rayon-based teams par excellence: not only are they established on the basis of common territorial origin, but neighborhood is their exclusive graffiti-making site. Interestingly, one of my informants noted that this type of graffiti is a declining 1990s leftover, whereas the other had totally opposite observations: rayon-based graffiti is now in bloom.

Vidranyi, the playground of MSC, is one of the first post-War Kyiv neighborhoods. The crew is named after one of its street – MetroStroy (MetroBuild), where all of the members

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[6] The feature story about gopniks: "Meet The Gopniks: An Exile Safari". 2007. *The Exile.* Retrieved June 1. 2010 (http://www.exile.ru/articles/detail.php?ARTICLE_ID=8589)

live. In fact, the name – together with graphic style and location – is the major means of representing oneself through graffiti. This is why I find the name of MetroBuild Clan very telling: it signifies strong territorial identity of the team. Instead of choosing the usual English language word combination or some recognizable popular culture pattern MSC tagged themselves through the spatial reference. Moreover, MetroBuild nicely designates the social background of its members and economic profile of the neighborhood they live in. The latter was settled in the time of Kyiv underground system construction, with the residential blocks for the construction workers erected here.

Three of four members of MSC were born in Vidradyi in the early 1980s. The peak of their adolescence came in the late 1990s – the time of a big nationwide economic depression. Their parental generation was the most vulnerable social strata in the early post-Soviet Ukrainian society: the collapse of industrial sector brought to the massive unemployment and social marginalization of working class. Thus, it is understandable why none of MSC members has higher education. Formerly, three oldest ones were running their own taxi company, but in the end their small business failed. Esh, the youngest member of MSC, who joined the crew in 2005, is now twenty. He is living in Vidradnyi with his brother and uncle – separately from his mother and stepfather, who live abroad. Kiot, the member of Kyiv Psia Krew team, also lives in Vidradnyi and has his mother and stepfather abroad. He argues that "missing father" (usually an alcoholic) and "absent parents" (migrant workers in wealthy countries) are representative for Kyiv graffiti-makers. "A kid finds a use of himself when the parents cannot make use of him – seems logical and obvious".

When I asked the youngest of MSC what he was doing, he replied: "I'm just enjoying my life". Esh had been expelled from the lyceum, where he was supposed to get a qualification of construction electrician. He now amuses himself making graffiti, rap-music and drawing – very much in a manner of "dialectics of doing nothing", which was typical of

post-War working class youth in Great Britain, according to Paul Corrigan (1975). But unlike Brits, the ones "na rayonie" are something I would call the "post working class youth". In Soviet times, when their parents were involved in proletarian labor, youth socialization was credited to the state. Children's and youth' activities were highly institutionalized and served economical and ideological efficiency (Meek, 1957; Novak-Deker, 1959). On the contrary, subcultural "doing nothing" by the neighborhood youth appears to be the reminiscence of the post-communist idlesse of their parents, who did not take any new stand in the transitional economy. This is accordant with the idea of "double articulation" of youth subcultures in post-War Britain: subcultures are identified in relation to "parent culture", on the one hand, and "dominant culture", on the other. The first, generational substance is prior to that of position within broader social structure, in which both the parent culture and the sub-culture are dominated. "Members of a sub-culture may walk, talk, act, look 'different' from their parents and some of their peers: but they belong to the same families, go to the same schools, work at much the same jobs, live down the same 'mean streets' as their parents and peers" (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, Roberts, [1976] 1993:14). This seems to be exactly the case for Vidradnyi graffiti makers, who face the same economic problems as their parents in their subcultural activities.

The main graffiti-location in the Vidradnyi rayon is "rezinka" (rubber). It is named after the rubber cover of the sports playground of the Airspace Lyceum of the National Aviation University, where Esh used to study. All the walls around the playground are densely covered with graffities. Simplistic tags and throwups prevail (on the left in Fig.3), but there are several multicolored pieces as well (on the right in Fig.4).[7] The latter require some technical mastery, which can only be gained with experience and long time involvement. Yet, most of Kyiv

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[7] Tag, throwup and piece are the basic genres of subcultural graffiti. For more see: *The Words: A Graffiti Glossary.* Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://www.graffiti.org/faq/graffiti.glossary.html)

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graffiti writing is ephemeral – new teams emerge and decline every day. Different reasons for such state of things could be named, but I consider economical factors the most important.

Figure 3: "Rezinka" (The Airspace Lyceum of the National Aviation University)

Photographs by author

According to Esh, the most spectacular piece at "rezinka" was a made-to-order-job: Pear, Esh's mate from MSC, was given the paint and paid for the work (on the right in Fig.4). Most of my informants said they would be happy to get orders like that. And they do – time to time: during the political election campaigns "graffiti job offers" appear at specialized forums. Only few of the people I talked to expressed some political considerations, which would make them consider political candidates before accepting job offers from them. My general impression was that any paid opportunity would make them happy – producing graffiti is somewhat a luxury, which they always lack. Beavis, the graffiti maker from the Holosiyiv district, told me a remarkable fact: graffiti makers are like New York taxi drivers in a sense that they never have change – meaning they never give back the rest of the paint to the ordering person.

"Rezinka" is the popular place for "hanging out" among Vidradnyi youth for there is no single café, bar or club around. The majority of graffities here is by MSC and other locals, but there are also some works by Kyiv graffiti elite – such as Psia Krew team. Its member Kiot has been living in Vidradnyi since early age, and his mate Lodek used to be the resident of a

student dormitory situated nearby. More than that, one or two years ago the spectacular piece by the famous graffiti crew CAP from Prague was also made here. This shows that despite its deep rootedness in local social context Vidradnyi is still integrated into the international graffiti network. Therefore Esh, who cannot really speak English and hardly Ukrainian, but only Russian, so undisturbedly uses English letters in his graffities, which makes them intelligible for all the graffiti community around the world.

Walls of the panel blocks around "rezinka" are randomly tagged (Fig.4). The next place densely covered with graffiti is the nearest underground walkway leading to the tram stop, where some graffities could also be seen on the tram cars (Fig.5).

Figure 4: Graffities on the walls of residential buildings in Vidradnyi neighborhood

Photographs by author

Esh told me that they used to make more graffiti on the cars, but he could not explain why this is not so anymore. What he spoke about, instead, was that he can hardly afford any spray can today. I assume this is also the reason why the multilayered "rezinka" is still preferable to other places: in the conditions of limited resources this place grants longer existence of the graffiti – contrary to the facades and especially trams, which are being regularly cleaned. At the same time, bombing the cars still finds its place because it resurrects the "golden age" of subculture and ensures some continuity and belonging to the 1970s New York City graffiti tradition. All together, this leads to the conclusion that unlike the content of

Vidradnyi graffiti, which is determined by the universal global context, its spatial distribution is sensitive to the specific environment.

Figure 5: Graffities on the underground walkway and tram car in Vidradnyi neighborhood

Photographs by author

Two decades after the disintegration of the USSR Vidradnyi rayon still leaves a strong visual impression of the Soviet representation of residential space. Its architectural monotony and functionality exemplify the rash standardized urban planning of the post-War period, and in doing so exemplifies the long run consequences of social space being embedded in the relations of production (Lefebvre, 1974). The conception of microrayon was put into effect by omnipotent centralized housing policy of the USSR and left untouched with the change of political system. Except for the tables with Ukrainian language names of the streets (on the right in Fig.4) little stands for specific locality of the neighborhood: it could be taken for any other Soviet city. Nevertheless, for people who live here, Vidrandyi is much more than the embodiment of the urban planning concept. One and the same "text" of neighborhood is constantly "rewritten" by residents' spatial practices (de Certeau, 1984). It contains their daily experience, thousands of little routines – always local and very personal. This is why they

would say: "There are thousands, if not a million, of yards like this in the world, but I will never confuse my own rayon"[8].

As long as young people are not involved in the labor relations they are particularly sensitive to the everyday life of the neighborhood. Children are basically left face to face with the streets and facades of the panel blocks they inhabit while their parents gain daily bread elsewhere – in different part of the city at best, in different county at worst. This social soil turned to be fruitful for graffiti making, which came to Vidradnyi with the flow of globalized hip hop. The street offers young people a number of possibilities, of which they prefer the most self-performing, creative and relatively safe. They cannot afford a different place to live, but they can choose how to use the place ascribed to them from above. Vidradnyi graffiti is the specific spatial practice which might be viewed as the response to the change in the relations of production (post-Soviet economy) and representation of space (Soviet microrayon). In their spatial practice graffiti makers duplicate and extend what has been conceived as the place for youth in the representation of space. At this very local level, graffiti makes its claim for space: the dominant designation of the lyceum as the controlled disciplinary space is undermined. But poor economic condition does not let Vidradnyi graffiti makers expose themselves further neither in quantity, nor in quality, nor in spatial distribution. So, neighborhood graffiti is bounded to a local spatial practice with no ambition to redefine the space as a whole.

3.2 After the Tram: Inner City

In terms of transportation Vidradnyi is tied to the centre through the tram line 14, which connects "old new neighborhoods" to the oldest part of the city – the centre of Podil district (Fig.6). I find this tram route remarkable in how it maneuvers between two Kyiv graffiti

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[8] "Таких дворов на свете тыщи, а то миллион, но я ни с чем не спутаю родной район" (translation by author) - the quote from the popular hip-hop song *На районе* (*In da Hood)* by Kyiv-based duo Potap and Nastia Kamenskikh. Music Motors. 2008. Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNJfSmm8eT4).

zones: it gradually moves from the marginal rayon-based graffiti-writing to street art and bohemian graffiti. According to my informants, street art is a more sophisticated, surface sensitive type of graffiti. The transition between the two is tangible in between the districts, in the old part of Shevchenkivskyi rayon, which the tram passes by (Lukyanivska and Tatarka neighborhoods). This part of the city is very mixed: one could find here late 19th century buildings, old and late Soviet times residential blocks, industrial objects and the expanding residential and business sectors, which have appeared in recent decades. The south-eastern outskirts of Podil district are being intensively gentrified (Fig.2).

Figure 6: Tram route 14

Adapted from: GoogleMaps. *Kyiv, Ukraine.* Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://maps.google.com/)
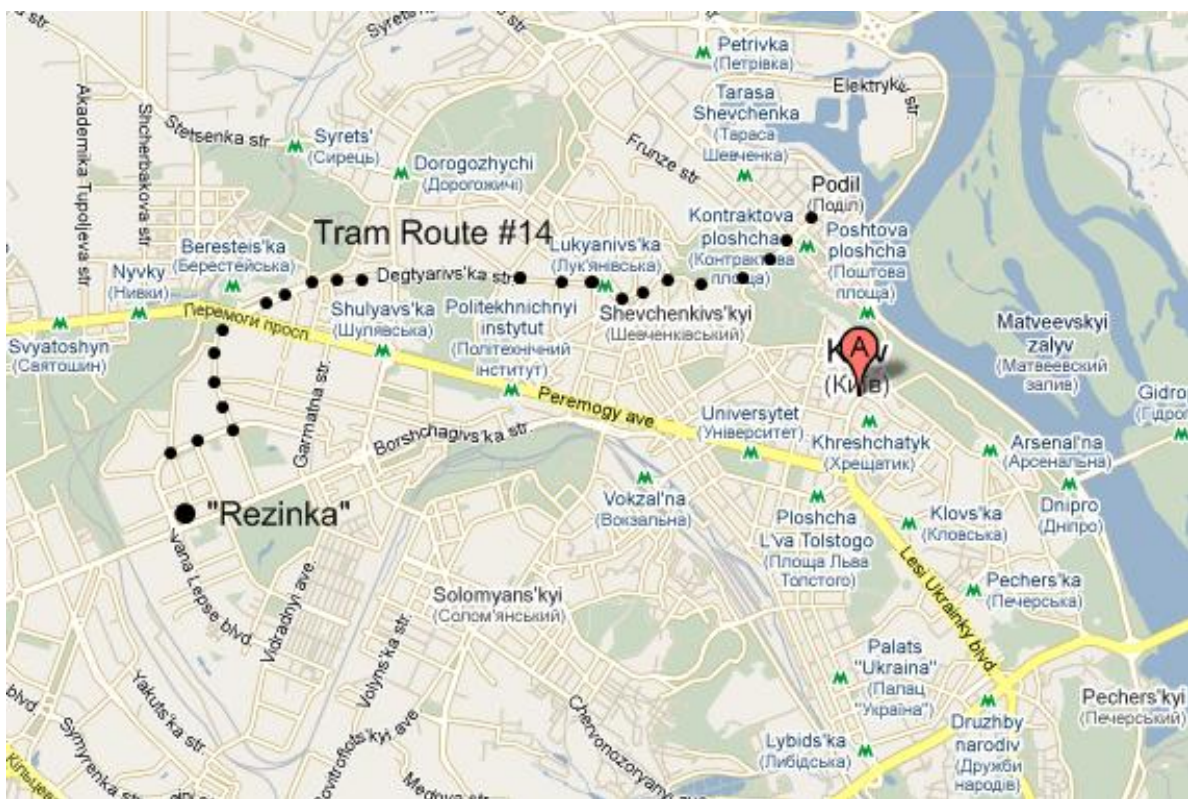
Starting at Lukyanivska and Tatarka (#1 in Fig.7) the density of graffiti increases and reaches its peak on Smirnova-Lastochkina street (#2 in Fig.7), which the tram passes by at the end. This street houses the main building of the National Academy of Fine Art and Architecture and a number of abandoned old houses. It is one of the several Kyiv "uzvizes" (descents), which connect Podil to the so-called "upper city" – the administrative, business and cultural

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centre of Kyiv (#3 in Fig.7). In medieval times the upper centre used to house knyaz's (royal nobility's) throne and the grandiose orthodox sanctuaries, whereas Podil functioned as the trade and crafts centre. The territorial division between the two was initially determined by the natural landscape – the chain of Kyiv hills. Nowadays uzvizes and pathways cutting through woody slopes are the heartland of Kyiv bohemian and subcultural life. Andriyivskyi uzviz is the most famous of Kyiv downhills: several museums, architectural and sculptural monuments, art galleries, cafes, restaurants and big souvenir market are situated here (#4 in Fig.7).

Figure 7: Inner City

Adapted from: GoogleMaps. *Kyiv, Ukraine.* Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://maps.google.com/)
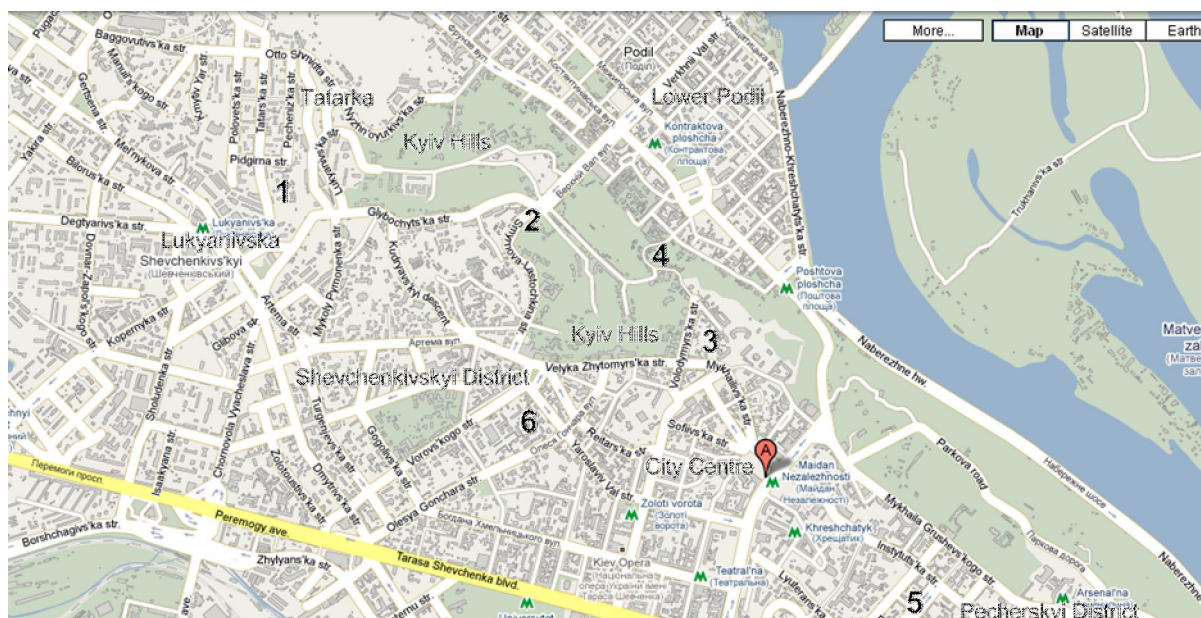
As expected, there is much more graffiti in downhill and lower Podil than in any other district. It is particularly concentrated on the walls of abandoned and half-abandoned buildings. Graffiti is represented mainly by small/middle size tags, stickers, pieces, stencils and street-art. Political stencils (feminist, antisexist, antihomophobic, pornographic, ecological, vegetarian, rightwing) could always be found here, though there are not many.

People who make their graffiti in Podil come here from all over Kyiv. As a rule they are anonymous, which is why it is hard to identify their social background. One of the most active

graffiti groups working in this district is Psia Krew[9]. Founded in the late 1990s, this is the most famous Ukrainian team – both at home and abroad. One could find here different tags by all the four members (Lodek, Ura, Kiot and Homer), often accompanied by the collective tag "PSKR" and/or an image of a dog. Homer's tag – written in Cyrillic letters and pseudo-runic font – is definitely the most repetitive and memorable graffiti piece in Kyiv (Fig.8). The other hallmark of the team is Ura's "alligator" – the schematic geometric image of a crocodile with an open mouth (Fig.9).

Figure 8: Tag by Homer, Psia Krew

Photographs by author

Before a series of recent city cleanings "alligator" occurred at all possible Podil surfaces (walls, fences, light boxes, kiosks, garbage cans, sewers), including the most inaccessible ones (Fig. 9). This sign can also be found in all biggest Ukrainian cities – each having few big size pieces in the selected observable places. Psia Krew members live outside Podil, but two of them used to study in the universities here. Moreover, this part of the city could be considered as their habitat because they are closely involved in different cultural activities, which take place here. As Kiot from Psia Krew explained "I make graffiti in those parts of

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[9] Psia Krew is the old-fashioned Polish curse, which literary means "dog's blood". It was sometimes used in reference to Ukrainians – the ethnic minority in Poland and Austrian-ruled province Galicia, where Lodek comes from

Kyiv, where I usually stay and where I feel comfortable to stay. This is the north-western centre".

Figure 9: "Alligator" by Ura, Psia Krew

The explicit meaning of Psia Krew graffiti can be reduced to the remarkable use of the visual language. They primarily strike for graphic originality and minimalism, which is rarely recognized by the commons. This is why alligator and runic letters are highly appreciated by Kyiv graffiti subculture or people involved in design and visual arts, but hardly ever they have been taken into account by the general public. Nevertheless, Psia Krew implicitly targets on the city community as a whole. Lodek, the unofficial "spokesman" of the group, gave me the following comment: "By making graffiti we symbolically regain the space for ourselves and those who are with us. It is important to understand the role of graffiti in modern Ukrainian city. Against the background of the prevailing ham advertisement and completely degraded culture of the external design, against the background of bad visual taste, graffiti and street art are saying: we are here and we are scornfully ruining your visual comfort for idiots".

Another remarkable, though very recent, Podil-and-vicinity graffiti maker is Lenda. She is producing tags, stickers, signs, pieces and especially street art, which is absolutely understandable in the light of her educational background. Lenda lives in Tatarka, in the student dormitory of the National Academy of Fine Art and Architecture, where she studies arts history. This also explains why many of her graffities are located at Smirnova-

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Lastochkina street (#2 in Fig.7). She also makes graffiti in Tatarka because "it is nice to pass it every day and see your own piece – like saying "hi" to yourself". Lenda is the author of a distinguished feminine graffiti sign – a pair of crossed female legs, sometimes accompanied by the inscription "Lick my legs" or just "Lick" (Fig.10). She interprets it as the representation of feminity in the male world – particularly, the male community of Kyiv graffiti makers. Lenda says that it was a challenge for her to enter the subculture: even though she has friendly relationships with some male graffiti makers Lenda stands apart from the community.

Figure 10: Graffiti signs by Lenda

Photographs by author

Many mates did not understand her "legs" and took the sign for "some snots". Lenda's imperative "lick" should be understood in reference to the oppressed female sexuality, which is especially tangible in Ukraine. The conservative heritage of an old Orthodox country was reinforced here by Soviet puritanism[10]. Bright pink stickers with Lenda's sign and slogan were pasted to many light boxes with political advertisement during the election campaign in winter 2010. Some of them surprisingly survived till the spring in the very political centre of the city, at Grushevskogo street, in front of the Cabinet of ministers and near the Parlament (#5 in Fig.7) – even the one on top of new President's face. In this position Lenda's work

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[10] Soviet sexuality can be summarized by the famous phrase "There is no sex in the USSR" born during the US-USSR space bridge "Women Talk to Women" in 1986

leaves very strong impression of social criticism, but Lenda herself denies the fact of being political: "No, I am not engaged in the politics. I have nothing to do with political parties and politicians".

One more important Podil-based street-artist is Byelov, who specializes in big stickers with refined graphic portraits. In 2009-2010 he made a series of street art projects responding to the intensification of moral censorship in Ukraine (Fig.11).[11]

Figure 11: "Why/How much is Morals?" (2009) by Byelov

Source: *Anatoly Belov*. Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://byelov.livejournal.com/)

Unlike the others, Byelov is not involved in subcultural forms of graffiti – he came to the street from the arts. Being the resident of the left bank Kyiv he also favors Andriyivskyi uzviz, Smirnova-Lastochkina street and abandoned Podil buildings. His reasoning for choosing these places is quite common: "These are the places where I often stay. My experience shows that it's better to paste the works on abandoned buildings, fences and places, which are not patrolled by street-cleaners, so that the work could remain as long as

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[11] In 2009-2010 some trials have been taking place with Ukrainian artists, writers and cultural institutions being accused of producing or promoting pornography. Several large exhibitions were closed, a book was withdrawn from circulation. Mere on the issue: *Media organizations call for disbanding of Morality Commission.* Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://helsinki.org.ua/en/index.php?id=1274199959)

possible". Some of Byelov's pieces were removed faster than the street-cleaners noticed them – especially the ones where nude bodies were depicted together with Christian symbols. This means that his graffiti is noticed and recognized, though negatively, by the general public.

When Podil slips into the "upper city" the density of graffiti sharply decreases – until it reaches the "sterile" centre of the city, the eastern part of Pechersk district (#5 at Fig.7). This is the most policed, surveyed and cleaned area, full of offices, administrative buildings, boutiques and expensive restaurants. Following the logic of my informants, I can explain the absence of graffiti here by two factors. On the one hand, graffiti producers themselves do not spend much time in the very centre. On the other hand, they are distracted by the high probability of quick removal and administrative punishment for spoiling someone's private property. Nonetheless, this is not exactly the case for that part of the centre, which is the northeastern part of Shevchenkivskyi district (#6 at Fig.7). It is primarily famous for being the "embassy" neighborhood with a lot of early 20th century architectural monuments. Together with diplomatic establishments it also houses many upscale hotels, foreign law firms, notary offices and upper middle class residential buildings. An interesting logic of graffiti distribution works in this area: graffiti is mainly concentrated in inner yards of the so-called prerevolutionary[12] houses, whereas the outer, public surfaces don't give away their potential presence. So, these graffities are somewhat quasi-public – they are hidden from the eyes of regular passers-by and are observable either for the insiders or for the residents of the neighborhood.

Psia Krew's graffities can be found in the area too. But it must be said that their best days have passed – in a sense that nowadays they tend to work solo. The "embassy" neighborhood is especially favored by Homer. He used to make some provocative pornographic pieces here and he still keeps writing his well-known tag time to time. But

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[12] The 1917 October Revolution is meant here

recently Homer got fully into the new type of street activity, which he calls post-graffiti. He produces the big size abstract conceptual pieces on the inner walls of residential blocks (Fig.12). Some of them are the commentary to the ironical messages to/about the graffiti subculture, something I would call the "meta-graffiti" because it tries to reflect on the history and functions of graffiti (Fig.13). They all look very bright and eye-catching, but their message is problematic, especially without author's comment or background information.

Figure 12: Homer's Post-Graffiti

Photograph by author

One of my informants, who seemed familiar with the historical and subcultural context of graffiti, said "I don't get why he is doing that and what he is trying to say". Homer's spatial preferences are part of his "demanding" strategy towards the viewer: he likes to work in the centre because he thinks that the most reflexive part of Kyiv population lives here. "They won't understand why I'm doing this, but at least, they will be able to interpret it in their own ways". Yet another type of Homer's post-graffities deals with "buffs" – the signs of removed or graffities. They can be read as the wordplay with city cleaners: Homer attracts them by making the "regular" graffities, which are then painted out, and repeatedly uses the 'buffs' to create his conceptual pieces (Fig. 14).

Figure 13: "Meta-graffiti" by Homer

Source: *Homer.* Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://magicsideburns.blogspot.com/)

Figure 14: "Buff-graffiti" by Homer

Source: *Homer.* Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://magicsideburns.blogspot.com/)

The type of graffiti I have described above can be viewed as the Lefebvrian representational space. Podil graffiti makers attempt to redefine the conceived space – each in their own way. Different discourses and visual rhetorics are intersected in the particular set of locations – those parts of the city centre, where the dominant representation of space is interrupted by natural and historical landscape. Abandoned buildings, hardly accessible places or woody hills rupture the conceived space providing some opportunity for the alternative use of the city. Still, these places are chosen by a small number of Kyiv graffiti makers, whereas the majority deals with the so-called "legal walls" – mainly, the graffiti "gallery" on the quays of the Lybid' river. Although geographically it is close to the city centre (the northeastern part of the Holosiyivskyi district in Fig.2) its representational potential is low: unlike in Podil, where graffities can be observed by the public, the only visitors of the "gallery" are graffiti makers themselves. This is why graffiti here is not the representational space, but rather the

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collective spatial practice – though different from the rayon-based graffiti making. What seems exactly the opposite is Homer's use of the inner yards in the central residential buildings. His spatial gesture is really appropriative: he intervenes to the private space and converts it into the representational space. Thus, the private becomes the public – but not controlled by municipality.

It might be inferred that the overall representational space of Kyiv graffiti is quite humble, dispersed and not agreed. Graffiti makers primarily perceive urban landscape through textures and surfaces, which makes their perception highly aestheticized. Nevertheless, they face power and authority in the face of the street cleaners, who do not recognize graffiti treating it as ordinary urban dirt. Therefore, unlike in many other world cities, Kyiv officials do not raise the issue of graffiti removals expenses although the removals are taking place all the time. Graffiti's response to the dominant discourse of "urban dirt" is hiding in the structurally "dirty" places. In this respect, Homer's buff-graffities are very unique: what he does could be called the double-appropriation, direct confrontation of the conceivers' authority. Unlike my other informants, Homer articulated the clear political stand – he considers himself an anarchist. His games with the city cleaners are part of the bigger struggle against the "enemy" – advertisements and consumerism. This brings some light to his spatial positionality, but not the elusive content of his graffities. On the contrary, people like Lenda and Byelov convey some explicit political messages, but do not associate themselves with the politics. To produce its own representational space Kyiv graffiti would have to be more reflexive, politically conscious and mobilized and express its position towards the dominant space both through content and positionality.

3.2 Out of the Street: Culture, Media, Globalization

The fact that they always liked to draw turned to be the most common thing about all the graffiti makers I talked to. It is due to specific life circumstances that they ended up on

the street, while, in fact, everyone is attracted to other forms of visual creativity – painting, photography, graphics or fashion. Some have succeeded in them more than the others: notably, most of the famous Kyiv graffiti makers are involved in professional design. "In the daytime I create advertisements, in the evening I paint them out with my graffities. This is how I try to keep balance between the good and the evil", – said Homer. Furthermore, despite its short presence in Kyiv, graffiti itself has already become some sort of profession – in a sense that it has been gradually integrated into the field of cultural production. In last five years Kyiv graffiti made a passage from the marginal subcultural practice to the trendy feature of urban culture and popular media phenomenon. In this respect I find Psia Krew's case especially indicative.

As early as in the beginning of 2000s there were some Kyiv street festivals, where graffiti was produced under special, governable conditions – differently from the spontaneous street creativity. These were often connected with the promotion of hip hop culture, which proved to be a good marketing tool for many big companies – such as *Snickers Urbania*[13]. There were also several arts exhibitions involving graffiti in some independent galleries, most of which do not exist anymore. Psia Krew participated in different projects like that: street festival *The Colors of Protest* at Shuliavskyi bridge (2003), *Graffiti in Focus* in the Centre for Contemporary Art (2006), *Street Baboons* in Totoro Garden Gallery (2006) and some others. These could be considered representational spaces because they provided a platform for certain alternative self-expression. But it is also important to understand that they prepared the ground for further graffiti's involvement with the commercial culture. What I mean here is that from the independent and, to some extent, marginal exhibitory spaces Psia Krew moved directly to the core of art-market. In 2007 their works were presented at Art-Moscow, the biggest art-fair in the region. In 2008, together with Paris street artist Honet and Belgian

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[13] *Sinckers Urbania* festival is named after the world famous candy bar produced by the US-based company Mars, Incorporated

group INXS Psia Krew participated in *Strange But Cool* project by KyivFineArt Gallery. KyivFineArt works with the most expensive contemporary artists of Ukraine – such as Maksym Mamsikov, Arsen Savadov and Vasily Tsaholov. Psia Krew is now listed among these and others, whose works can be purchased from the gallery collection. The commercial profile of this institution is openly declared as following: "The concept of KyivFineArt presupposes that artworks, apart from artistic value, should have the value of the art market product, and the artistic value should define the market value" (KyivFineArt Gallery, 2007).

Explaining Psia Krew's attitude toward this kind of activity Lodek insists on distinguishing between graffiti and artistic production. "As regards the gallery projects, we don't copy our street activity in any case. Our principle is not to paint the walls in the galleries. If the gallery invites us we show our static graphics, which isn't graffiti – although it can be etymologically deduced from our street activity for it [street activity] substituted our art education". It is very important for him to position these two types of graffiti as different. In doing so he follows what Bourdieu defined as the logic of the field of cultural production: symbolic capital of graffiti is converted into economical benefits on the basis graffiti's relative autonomy from the art-market. This is why Lodek and his peers try to stress the "non-graffitedness" of their non-street projects. Not only they change wall for canvas, but, more importantly, they also invent new and new names in which they symbolically reidentify themselves. Thus, for their 2008 exhibition in Saint-Petersburg Psia Krew was rebranded into Kiev Dandys; in the framework of the annual festival ILOVEKIEV in Lavra Gallery they curate the street art project called Street Baboons; their silk-screening design studio is named La Petite Porcherie etc. At the same time, it is always stressed that what is made comes from the genuine graffiti makers. La Petite Porcherie fashion story by Lodek and Ura published in

the popular magazine TOP-10[14] was titled *TOP2BOTTOM* – in reference to the international graffiti slang term for the train car painted from top to bottom[15]. More than that, one of the online sales advertisements about their t-shorts was accompanied by the following call: "Buying the stuff of LPP [La Petite Porcherie] you are supporting the local Kyiv "punk-graffiti" scene" (Dzon, 2009).

Their ambiguous strategy, in which belonging to graffiti subculture is either emphasized or softened, allows Psia Krew to hold flexible position within the field of cultural production – for it is both "the field of positions" and "the field of position-taking" (Bourdieu, [1983]1993). They try to satisfy the principle of degree specific consecration (recognition by graffiti makers and, to a lesser extent, the independent art-scene) and still be successful. Certainly, orientation for success is never expressed explicitly – the "interest in disinterestedness" is declared instead. The best proof for this is Homer's comment about *Strange But Cool* exhibition in KyivFineArt: "Those works were worthless. Nothing good came to hand – because the gallery is for the bourgeois. Graffiti maker is only alive in the city, he is the street worm". This last Homer's point brings the discussion back to Lefebvre's spatial triad: the field of cultural production represents the conceived space, and the reason for Kyiv graffiti to move to this space is the lack of alternative, representational space. "The aim was not to act out some artists, but to show that graffiti makers are more than some marginals who defecate on the wall. Unfortunately, this cannot be done on the street, there is no dialogue. People might get interested, but they don't get the point", – said Homer. So, together with (subconscious) self-interest it is also the structural underdevelopment of

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[14] Both ILOVEKIEV festival and TOP-10 magazine are run by Kyiv Media Holding, whose header Kazbek Bektursunov is the counselor of Kyiv city major Leonid Chernovetskyi, which also proves graffiti's intention to involve with the dominant space

[15] Fashion story available at: Lodek. 2010. *Top2Bottom*. Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://lodek.livejournal.com/132509.html); interview with the authors available at: Lodek. 2010. Interview for TOP-10. Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://lodek.livejournal.com/133590.html#cutid1)

representational space that pushes Kyiv graffiti makers to the involvement with the institutions of power and domination.

In expressing their unsatisfaction with what I call here representational space graffiti makers often compare Kyiv to other cities. "I haven't seen this much of visual garbage in any other country. Maybe only in Warsaw", – said Homer. He and his peers praise Berlin and Paris, where, as they consider, there are much better opportunities for graffiti to be what it has to be. In my opinion, this nicely shows that globalization challenges distance by jointing remote places in one global space through retaining their unevenness. Being thoroughly integrated into global cultural economy Kyiv graffiti is influenced by global processes just like the other forms of production do. First of all, its "underdevelopment" opens an attractive profit-making opportunity for foreign capital. Specifically, Psia Krew's member Kiot is a Ukrainian representative of Motip Dupli Droup – German-based international company manufacturing Montana Cans (popular graffiti spray paints)[16]. Apart from spray distribution Kiot it actively involved in the organization of graffiti festivals, which are sponsored by the company. By promoting graffiti subculture in Ukraine foreign paint suppliers aim to expand their sales outlet. At the same time, current state of Kyiv graffiti leads to some sort of "labor migration". Local graffiti makers are increasingly engaged in graffiti production abroad. Notably, Lodek's biggest mural was made not in Kyiv, but in Wroclaw, when in May 2010 he participated in Polish graffiti festival *Breaking the Wall*[17]. At a time when neighboring countries go as far as to invite Kyiv graffiti makers to paint their walls, it is almost impossible to make any mural at home. The best illustration for this is Interesni Kazky (Interesting Tales) – Kyiv graffiti team, which made it through tagging to sophisticated surrealistic muralism.

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[16] More on the issue: *Motip Dupli Group.* Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://www.motipdupli.com/)

[17] The scale of the murals is nicely shown in the following photo and video-report (Lodek's mural at the bottom of the page): *Out of Something – Breaking the Wall. April 25, 2010.* Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://just.ekosystem.org/BLOG/?p=409)

There are over twenty murals by Interesni Kazky (IK) throughout the city. Their quantity is not likely to increase much in the nearest time – to the great disappointment of Kyivers, who have already glorified IK. Apart from considerable financial expenses, every new IK piece means a struggle with municipal bureaucracy. The procedure of agreeing the mural with the city administration might take several months and involve all possible bureaucratic institutions (Abo, 2009). Therefore, it is no strange that IK gladly agreed to participate in Valencia mural festival in (Spain, 2009) or to decorate the art-café façade in Lyon (France, 2010) (*Interesni Kazky Blog,* 2010). In Baudrillardian terms, IK's relationship with city government could be called conformist: their graffities do not riot against symbolic domination because they are painted on big panoramic surfaces, which they, hence, beautify. Same is true about their content: although one might recognize mass society and alienation among the main problems they raise, IK's murals can hardly be called political – everyone praises them for the style and aesthetics. Consequently, in autumn of 2009 IK painted the walls of *Bilshovyk* – one of the biggest Kyiv shopping malls (Fig.15).

Figure 15: Interesni Kazky's Murals in the Shopping Mall *Bilshovyk*

Source: Photograph by author

In this case, graffiti was fully appropriated by the commercial space for the sake of attracting consumers – nothing was left from the prior representational impulse. Nevertheless, I think that IK murals in the city do not serve the dominant conception of space but, on the contrary, contradict it and attempt to redefine it – by now unsuccessfully. It is important to

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note that when speaking about New York graffiti Baudrillard means the "ideal" capitalist city, which Kyiv is not: instead of "beautifying" urban landscape and converting symbolic capital into economic benefits Kyiv municipality puts it on the market somewhat "directly". In other words, the city is treated more as the base than as the superstructure. This "pragmatic" approach was inherited from the functionalistic urban planning of Soviet times. In Soviet Kyiv numerous urban murals and especially mosaics were made to serve didactic and propagandist purposes (Fig.16). "Plain" beautifying has not yet been involved in the dominant post-Soviet city conception, which IK are challenging with their murals – though not really acquiring the alternative representation of space.

Figure 16: Soviet Mosaic at Darnytskyi Boulvard, Kyiv

Source: Pan_grunia. 2010. *Olimpiada-80*. Retrieved June 1, 2010
(http://community.livejournal.com/stina_ua/10932.html?mode=reply)

In the light of these circumstances the more profound representational space of Kyiv graffiti turns to be mediascape. Paradoxically, it is precisely the local context that pushes Kyiv scene to be "more global": media allow for integration into global network in circumvention of economic expenses, urban governing and removal policies. Kyiv graffities, which seem so few in the city, are multiplied through different blog platforms, social

networks, printed media and TV. There are a lot of general media dealing with graffiti once in a while and different levels of specialized media reproducing it on a regular basis. Among the latter the most important is *Element* magazine published and distributed by Kyiv graffiti maker Neakone. Due to their decentralized architecture and low-price appeal new media are used even more actively. Thus, an average Kyiv graffiti maker is running several blogs and social networks. The most common one is the international photo blog website *Fotolog*. Interestingly, it has twelve language versions, but none in Cyrillic alphabet – in spite of the fact that Russian is in the top-10 the languages used in the internet (Internet World Statistics, 2009). I find this remarkable in how it demonstrates the globalizational nature of Kyiv graffiti, whose local identity is, hence, much less tangible than in cases like New York or San Paulo. What originated in Kyiv is a new type of graffiti, which changed its traditional spatial domain (urban landscape) for the media. This new graffiti is made in the city in order to be instantly mediated and reproduced in the virtual space. Basically, if it is not documented (usually photographed) – graffiti does not exist. Belonging to virtual space defines it no less than the actual urban space, which can be illustrated by yet another kind of Homer's post-graffiti.

Homer makes paper stickers, on which user's comments from popular social networks are printed, and pastes them beneath random graffities on city walls (Fig. 17). In fact, it is media being extended to physical space here – but not vice versa: "real" graffiti is turned into a blog entry, a Facebook post, and then once again published online. In this multiple mediation graffiti looms between the physical and the virtual, the local and the global. After Appadurai, the type of space graffiti produces this way might be called one of the many "uncertain landscapes", which emerged as a result of the radical disjuncture between global cultural economy and local politics. "The consumer has been transformed, through commodity flows (and mediascapes, especially of advertising, that accompany them) into a sign … Global advertising is the key technology for the world-wide dissemination of a

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plethora of creative, and culturally well-chosen ideas for consumer agency" (Appadurai, 1990:229). Indeed, media-graffiti is full of "creative" consumer agency which does not land on the actual city surface but hovers in some uncertain landscape between the wall and the computer screen.

Figure 17: "Facebook" and "Livejournal" graffities by Homer
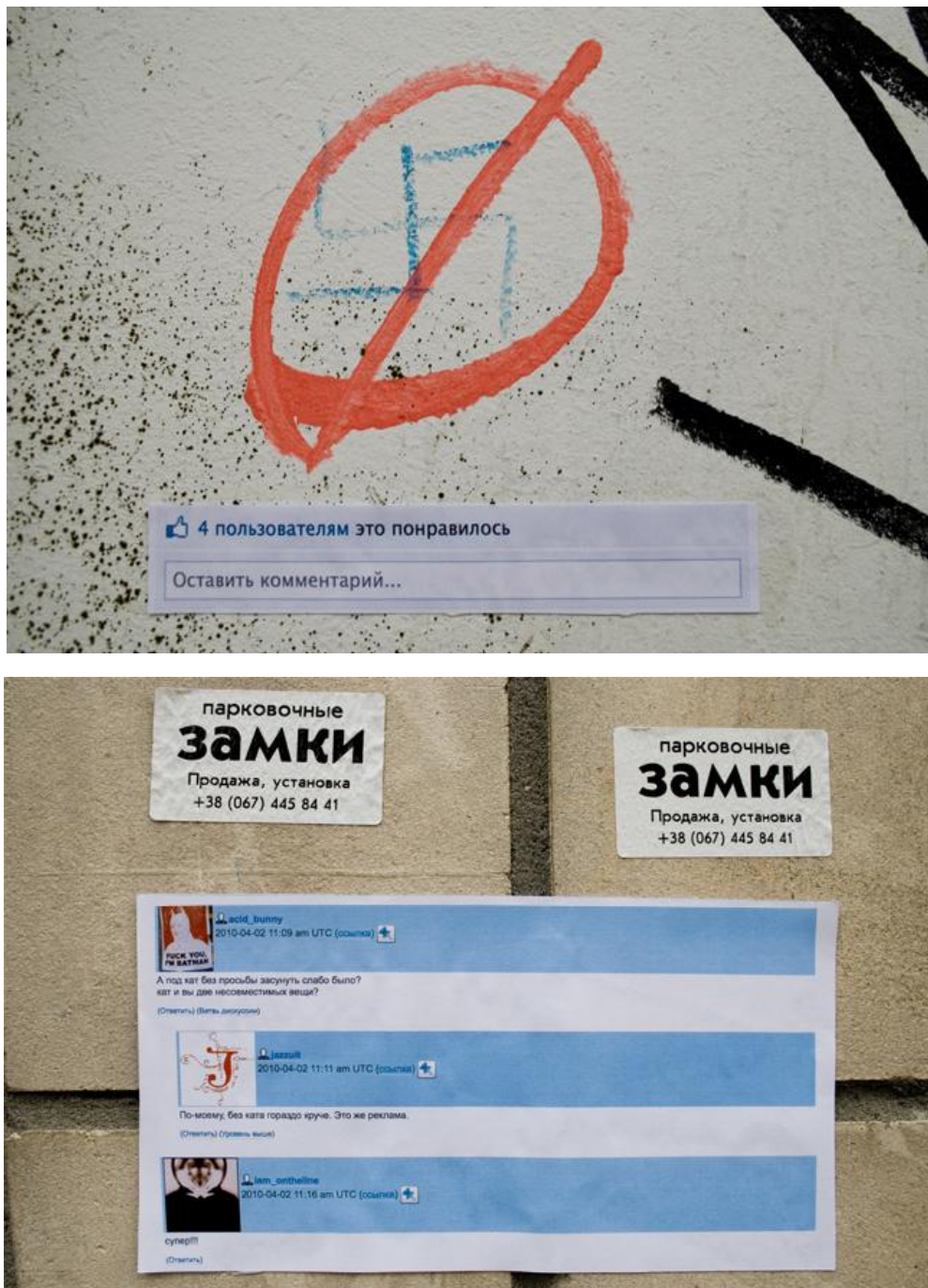
Source: *Gomer1*. Retrieved June 1, 2010 (http://gomer1.livejournal.com/)

Concluding Remarks

When overlaying numerous urban landscapes graffiti exposes different social spaces which they embody. Some copies of New York subway graffities occur in modern Kyiv, but they would never be placed on the cars and instead on the surfaces which might not even exist in New York. This is why graffiti provides a unique clue to understanding urban space. Neither municipality, nor developers, nor even architecture and history could substitute the way graffiti guides its viewer in the city, because it joins them all in a single weighty urban story. In case of my thesis it has been the story of post-Soviet urban transformation, local cultural economy and its involvement with global spaces.

Based on my ethnography, I have defined two types of graffiti domains in Kyiv urban space – the neighborhood and the city centre. The third domain I have dealt with is not resided at urban space by itself but at its conjuncture with the network of cultural economy institutions and media. In case of Vidradnyi neighborhood, which I have explored, graffiti exemplifies the type of spatial practice, in which Lefebvre's and de Certeau's understandings of practice are loaded with the economic condition of post-Soviet working class youth. Graffiti is exercised in the former proletarian neighborhood, which strongly influences its content, quantity and distribution. This has brought me to the conclusion that in their spatial practice local graffiti makers reproduce the social structure of space they inhabit. Unlike Vidradnyi, the inner city provides some opportunities for transcending the dominant structure. The conception of space here is ruptured by the natural and historical landscape, which attracts more ambitious graffiti makers. This is why I have assumed that performing spatial practice outside their living space graffiti makers produce the contesting representation of their city. Those few who really do so reject consumerism, advertising, oppression of personal freedom and sexuality and some other premises of the conceived space. Despite the fact that their alternative representation is very humble it has been immediately appropriated by the

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dominant space. I have interpreted graffiti's involvement with the commercial institutions and city government as a result of the personal interest-oriented agency, on the one hand, and structural problem, on the other.

My major ethnographic finding is the discovery of the fact that what I have dealt with in Kyiv represents the qualitatively new type of graffiti. Its crucial difference from the previous paradigms of graffiti making – such as ethnic ghetto in the US and political activism in Western Europe – consists in the substantiality of global agenda. This, however, does not imply that local context is not important for graffiti production anymore. On the contrary, it is precisely the specificity of the local that decides graffiti's position in global economical and informational networks. The place is important inasmuch as it stands in the versatile relation to the multitude of other places. Kyiv graffiti maintains its local social identity even outside the original context – in foreign urban spaces, cultural economy institutions or new media, which it tends to reside more and more. The theoretical question which needs to be answered in this respect is how to include the decentralized global networks in the theory of the production of space, where space is viewed as dynamic in time but not in locality. In other words, what is the position of global space in the spatial triad and how can we accommodate the flows and disjunctions described by Appadurai to Lefebvre's sociology of space?

The theoretical problem stated above explains some drawbacks of my study – especially that of the sharp shift from urban space to cultural economy and media. Another set of significant limitations comes from my methodology: the quantity of my informants and the time I spent for observations in the city is not enough for making sufficient generalizations. It is especially regrettable due to the number of Kyiv graffiti makers, which is finite and relatively small – thus, very convenient for small scale ethnographic research. Still, in my situation the scale was too small, and I ended up with the collection of individual stories each being a case in itself. Since Kyiv graffiti as a very dynamic phenomenon, which has only

approved itself recently, it is also important to make observations in the extended time frame. Finally, the possibilities of cartography were not discovered in due course. Present study would definitely benefit from the innovative mapping methods offered by contemporary social geography.

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