

## Historical dissemination of graffiti art

**David Novak**

University of Malaya, Cultural Centre,  
Level 2, Old Canseleri Building, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
graffitiartmalaysia@yahoo.com

### Abstract

Historical analysis is performed on the five decades old urban phenomenon represented in “graffiti art”. The article first traces the dissemination of graffiti art from New York City to the Western world in the 1980s. Individual dissemination channels represented in gallery exhibitions, cultural media and interpersonal contact are highlighted. Further, the dissemination of graffiti art in the 1990s to Central and Eastern Europe is demonstrated on the case of Czechoslovakia. Finally, the article summarises information on the dissemination of graffiti art to the rest of the world. It is argued that the production of graffiti art works on exteriors of trains became an orthodox tradition of the graffiti art culture in the 1970s and disseminated together with graffiti art forms average scales to other areas of the world. A diagram representing the Origins, Dissemination Channels and Other Conditions relating to the spread of graffiti art is presented.

**Keywords:** History; Graffiti Art; Dissemination; New York; Milestones; Train

### 1. Introduction

The technical term “graffiti art” refers to graffiti practice, which produces four visual forms (genres): tags, pieces, characters and throw-ups. There is a need to approach graffiti art history through academic research to transfer knowledge about this global form of public expression. The present article attempts to provide an overview of the available information on this topic from various resources and provides additional analysis. This might be needed in order to understand the fine nuances of this current global practice.

The article first states the origins of graffiti art and subsequently introduces the main channels responsible for the dissemination of graffiti art from New York City to the Western world in the first half of the 1980s. The article further continues to trace the transmission of graffiti art until the late 1980s and a case study shows the spread of graffiti art to Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s. Further, the mobility of young people is discussed as an informal channel responsible for the spread of graffiti art to new territories. The final section of the article introduces graffiti art as a worldwide phenomenon in other global territories and discusses the traditional, orthodox practice of production of graffiti art works on the exteriors of trains as a by-product of the dissemination of graffiti art from New York City.

The article uses available literary sources on the topic of historical dissemination of graffiti art. Additionally fieldwork was conducted in various countries. Data were collected directly from local graffiti artists in the field or virtually through the internet with the method of personal interviews. The resulting synthesis of data is presented in seven sections. The paper examines partially the historical development of graffiti art in some internationally underexposed countries such as Czechoslovakia, Turkey, Singapore and Malaysia.

### 2. Origins of graffiti art

The birthplace of graffiti art is Philadelphia of the year 1967 (Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974; Reiss, 2007). However, as was shown in full detail by the first and probably most outstanding graffiti art historian, artist, and teacher Jack Stewart (1926–2005) (Duncan, 2010), the four forms representing graffiti art – tag, piece, character, throw-up – fully developed on the sides of subway trains in New York City of the 1970s (Stewart, 1989; Stewart, 2009). In the first half of the 1980s – around 1983 – graffiti art started expanding within the USA and graffiti art started crossing continents to Western Europe and Oceania (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987; Ferrell, 1996: 30-37; Jacobson, 2001: 40).

### 3. The 1980s

Graffiti art was introduced to the world, outside of New York City, through three main channels: gallery exhibitions, cultural media (Kramer, 2009: 93-118) and interpersonal contact (see section 5 below). The Swedish art historian Staffan Jacobson (born 1948) created in the World Wide Web a freely accessible dictionary of graffiti, *The International Dictionary of Aerosol Art*, where he lists 12 graffiti art exhibitions of New Yorker graffiti artists in Western Europe. These gallery exhibitions took place in the period 1979–1985 in Roma, Kassel, Rotterdam, Groningen, Bologna, Munich, Amsterdam, Basel, Humlebæk, Otterlo, London and Stockholm (Jacobson, 2001: 53) (see Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> These gallery exhibitions had a noteworthy impact on the dissemination of graffiti art in Western Europe (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987: 7-8; Writing in München 1983-1995: Graffiti Art #3, 1995: 4; Austin, 2001: 262). Margo Thompson, an art historian and author of the book *American Graffiti*, excellently examined graffiti art gallery exhibitions which took place in the 1980s in the USA and Western Europe (Thompson, 2009).

An even more significant impact on the diffusion of graffiti art on a worldwide scale was a product of the movies *Wild Style* (1982), *Beat Street* (1984) and the film documentary *Style Wars* (1983), which were broadcasted on television around the world in the 1980s (Ahearn, 1982; Chalfant and Silver, 1983; Lathan, 1984). The book *Subway Art* (1984), which reproduced Martha Cooper's (born 1943) and Henry Chalfant's (born 1940) colour photographs of graffiti art works on subway trains from early 1980s New York City also had an enormous impact on the spread of graffiti art in the world. This publication was also accompanied with supplementary explanatory texts about graffiti art culture (Cooper & Chalfant, 1984). The book sold until the present day over 500,000 copies (Cooper & Chalfant, 2009). These three reflections of the graffiti art culture from New York City – gallery exhibitions, movies and the book *Subway Art* – had in the 1980s an everlasting influence on certain, creative segments of youth around the world (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987: 8; Munich S-Trains, 1991: 11; Miller, 1994: 181-182; Writing in München 1983-1995: Graffiti Art #3, 1995: 4; Schluttenhafner & Klaußenborg, 1995: 8; Wiese, 1996:13; Austin, 2001: 262-263; Mai & Remke, 2003: 2; Ganz, 2004: 126-128). As a result, a few adolescents around the globe started imitating the colourful graffiti art works they have seen in the gallery exhibitions, movies and the book (see further

section 5 below). The three movies – *Wildstyle*, *Beat Street*, *Style Wars* – were especially attractive to younger audiences as they introduced graffiti art as a part of a wider hip-hop movement from New York City. Hip-hop is considered as a culture consisting of four elements: graffiti art, break dancing, disk jockeying and rapping. Consequently, graffiti art was also labelled as hip-hop graffiti, because of its close connection to hip-hop (Ferrell, 1996; Phillips, 1996), which is nevertheless rather constructed. Scholars showed that this connection is not adequate as, besides others, not all graffiti artists were and are favouring the hip-hop culture or rap (hip-hop) music respectively (Kramer, 2009: 107-110; Snyder, 2009: 26-30). Nonetheless, the hip-hop culture helped transmit graffiti art around the globe (Ferrell, 1996: 9). By 1987 (Fig. 2), *Spraycan Art* documented graffiti art works already in ten countries: USA, England, Netherlands, France, Spain, West Germany, Austria, Denmark, Australia and New Zealand (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987).

Based on academic and popular literature, it is possible to reconstruct a historical diffusion timeline of the graffiti art culture outside of the USA. By late 1982 (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987) graffiti art was established, for instance, in Sydney, Australia and by 1983 in West Berlin, Dortmund, Hamburg and Munich in West Germany (Writing in München 1983-1995: Graffiti Art #3, 1995; Schluttenhafner & Klaußenborg, 1995: 8-10; Wiese, 1996: 13; Hamburgcitygraffiti, 2003; Mai & Remke, 2003: 2). Further, based on publications we can establish that trains were painted in Amsterdam, Holland in 1983 (DELTA, 1992) and that graffiti art occurred in 1983 in Denmark, Croatia, and in 1984 in Canada and South Africa (Ganz, 2004: 126, 18, 128, 328). This information is generally based on oral history of the graffiti art culture. The usage of qualitative research methods for the gathering of such data is common practice in graffiti art research (Castleman, 1980; Lachmann, 1988; Stewart, 1989; Miller, 1992; Ferrell, 1996; Austin, 2001; Kramer, 2009; Snyder, 2009). Susan Alice Lundy (born 1975) conducted research in Oakland, USA and during her research she observed that oral history is very important to graffiti artists. Lundy stated that she was struck by her “participant’s commitment to the integrity of his or her stories” (Lundy, 2008: 67). This comes as no surprise, as the graffiti art culture is only loosely organised and oral history is one of its only ways to preserve histories and events.<sup>2</sup>

Photographical documentation is to graffiti artists similarly important as oral history. Photographs of graffiti art works from New York City were already used in the 1980s for launch of the first graffiti art fanzine called *International Graffiti Times* (latter renamed *International Get-Hip Times*) (Schmidlapp), which already in 1986 featured international graffiti art works from Venice and London (Austin, 2001: 250, 263). Many other magazines followed *International Graffiti Times*, including the international magazines from the late 1980s: *Bomber Magazine* (Holland), *14 K Magazine* (Switzerland), *Aerosol Art Magazine* (England) and *Hype Magazine* (Australia) (Ferrell, 1996: 10). Such magazine featured interviews, articles and reprinted photographs of graffiti art works. These magazines made graffiti art works accessible to wider insider audiences. Another mode of circulation of graffiti art works started by 1989 as video magazines such as *VideoGraf* featured moving footage, including interviews and productions of graffiti art works (Austin, 2001: 257).

These above highlighted events are providing only a partial overview of the events relating to the dissemination of the graffiti art culture from its place of origin in Philadelphia of the late 1960s to other areas in the 1980s. However, these accounts listed above demonstrated that graffiti art gained since the late 1960s on dynamics and this urban phenomenon spread until the end of the 1980s from North America to parts of Oceania, Africa and Europe. The dissemination was accompanied in the 1980s with the production of subcultural media (magazines) authored by graffiti artists.

#### 4. Case study: Czechoslovakia in early 1990s

Central and Eastern Europe was largely untouched by the dissemination of graffiti art until late 1989. The ideology within the Eastern Bloc back then prohibited and censored all Western influences in countries controlled by the Soviet Union (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Eastern Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania), including the free flow of information and the free movement of people from the East to the West. Therefore, the knowledge of a graffiti art culture among the Central and Eastern European youth was nearly zero. However, this rapidly changed after the collapse of Communist regimes in late 1989 and the subsequent democratization process within the Eastern Bloc. In 1990 West German graffiti artists quickly introduced graffiti art to the Berlin subway system in former Eastern Germany (Mai & Remke, 2003: 9). In addition, other cities in Central

and Eastern European countries started to be confronted with graffiti art. Graffiti art entered these countries along with other Western influences and Czechoslovakia can be used here as a case in point (Vladimir518&Collective, 2016; Wohlmuth, 2012: 10). Manifestations of Western culture and consumerism were in early 1990s welcomed in Czechoslovakia. The cities of Czechoslovakia were after four decades of communist rule (1948–1989) dominated with various shades of grey (Overstreet, 2006; Snopek, 2005).

Around 1990, several Czechoslovak youngsters decided to change the uniform appearance of the cities and once they discovered graffiti art, they knew that graffiti art was the right “tool” to bring colour to the grey cities. They learned about graffiti art in the very early 1990s from magazines, skateboarding magazines, and from trips to Western Europe (which was in the previous decade during the communist rule impossible). These young Czechoslovaks encountered graffiti art during their travels in Western Europe for the first time in their lives. For example MIRA2 (born 1978) got inspired by visuals of graffiti art in skateboarding magazines and by real life graffiti art works seen during a train trip to Helsinki, Finland in 1990 (Vladimir518, 2016: 330). POIS (born 1975) was in 1990 for a short time visiting a school in Frankfurt, Germany and encountered graffiti art there in the streets and he started to do first sketches on paper (POIS, 2009). Both MIRA2 and POIS started by tagging first with markers around 1991 (POIS, 2009; Vladimir518, 2016: 327). In addition, a French graffiti artist, POPAY (born 1971), visited Prague by 1990, and created tags and throw-ups in the Czechoslovak capital (Vladimir518, 2016: 308; Snopek, 2005: 17). Also German graffiti artists from Dortmund and Düsseldorf painted graffiti art works in Prague in the early 1990s (Overstreet, 2006: 21). As a result, it comes as not a big surprise that the scholar Jeff Ferrell reported that he photographed during the summer of 1991 already “scattered examples of hip hop graffiti in Prague” (Ferrell, 1996: 17) the capital of former Czechoslovakia.

#### 5. Informal channels: Mobility of young people

At this point, I would like to turn the attention back once more towards the dissemination channels of the graffiti art culture from New York to other territories around the world as was discussed above in section 3. *New York City: The global writing capital* is the name of a very interesting chapter in the book *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban*

*Crisis in New York City*, by the scholar Joe Austin (Austin, 2001: 261-266). Austin describes on six pages the diffusion of graffiti art from New York City to other locations of the world. Austin highlights the importance of informal channels on the dissemination of graffiti art. Austin suggested that an important informal channel responsible for the dissemination of graffiti art was represented in the 1980s in the circulation “of young people and photographs” between New York and other cities in the USA. This suggests that young people who moved out from New York to other cities, introduced graffiti art through personal contact themselves or through photographs to other peers in new territories (Austin, 2001: 262). As was highlighted above in section 4, informal channels were important also in the dissemination of graffiti art into former communist countries in Central Europe around 1990 (Eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia). In Southeast Asia, the situation was similar. Graffiti art spread to Malaysia due to internet accessibility around the year 1999, skateboarding, and due to Singaporean graffiti artists who introduced graffiti art to local Malaysian youngsters through the internet and in person (Novak, 2011: 98-107; Novak, 2012: 108 - see section 6.2 below).

## **6. Present day: Graffiti art as a worldwide phenomenon**

After historically tracing the transmission of graffiti art in the first half of the 1980s to West Europe, Australia and in the late 1980s-early 1990s to Central and Eastern Europe the attention is now directed to the rest of the world. Nowadays one of the oldest and most visited graffiti websites, *ArtCrimes*, features graffiti from 450 cities worldwide (*About us: What we're doing and why*).

Austin reported in 2001 that graffiti art expanded to “Latin America, eastern and southern Europe, and the Caribbean” in the 1990s (Austin, 2001: 262). This correlates also with the information contained in the book *Graffiti World: Street Art from Five Continents*, published in 2004.<sup>3</sup> However, in 2013 in *The World Atlas of Street Art and Graffiti* the anthropologist and curator Rafael Schacter specified that graffiti art arrived in Mexico City and São Paulo in the 1980s, pushing the dissemination date of graffiti art in Latin America into the 1980s (Schacter, 2013: 98, 112). In addition, I would like to talk about two sources, which present graffiti art as a global phenomenon. Firstly, the in 2007 released film documentary *Bomb It*, which introduced graffiti artists from the following cities: Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco,

Tijuana, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Hamburg, Berlin, Cape Town, São Paulo and Tokyo (Reiss, 2007). Secondly, the scholar, Gregory J. Snyder, reported in 2009 the presence of graffiti artists in the cities of “New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington D.C., Paris, Berlin, Stuttgart, Amsterdam, Tokyo, Sao Paulo, and Santiago” (Snyder, 2009: 2). The four above highlighted reports from the 2000s did not – besides Japan and Singapore (Ganz, 2004) – draw much attention to the presence of graffiti art in Asia. Therefore, at this point I would like to focus on yet not much explored other global territories.

### **6.1 Turkey, Middle East and Maghreb**

Graffiti art, according to the popular book *Turkish Graffiti*, started developing in Turkey in the 1980s (Dindaş, 2009: 5). It seems, however, that the Turkish scene actually started developing rather in the late 1990s or early 2000s. Especially after examining the photographs published in one of earliest Turkish graffiti magazines *GRAFFTURK: Turkish graffiti magazine* it seems more probable that the development of the Turkish graffiti art movement dates into the 1990s. The known Turkish graffiti artist FUNK (born 1983) can be mentioned as a case in point,. FUNK started with graffiti art in Istanbul around the year 1998 (FUNK, 2014). Further, I conducted in Istanbul a group interview with one of the most important Turkish graffiti art crews: BOK (BAD OF KINGS). The crew had 7 members, counting PUNCH, MR.HURE, HERO, REPUS and others (BOK, 2014). The BOK crew was established around 2004 and its members started painting graffiti art around the year 2000. The BOK crew stated:

“Türkiyede graffitinin özgeçmiş 10, 15 yıllık bir şey. Çok eski deil.

[*The resume of graffiti [art] in Turkey is something around 10, 15 years. Not too old.*]

There are no direct indications for the early transmission of graffiti art from Germany to Turkey, but I assume that the dissemination of graffiti art into Turkey may strongly relate to Germany, as a significant number of the early German graffiti artists were of Turkish descent and they might have introduced graffiti art into Turken in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

Nowadays graffiti art is widely spread and can be located in countries such as Tunisia (Georgeon, 2012), Iraq (Novak

and Javanmiri, 2015) and many other countries not directly discussed in this present paper. For research papers on street and graffiti art from the Arab world refer to the volume XV of the *Romano-Arabica* journal: *Graffiti, Writing and Street Art in the Arab World* (2015).

## 6.2 Southeast and East Asia

Finally, attention is drawn to the region of Southeast and East Asia. For the dissemination of graffiti art into this region of the world were partially responsible, besides others, new media – the internet. The free flow of information over the internet in combination with pop culture influenced several youngsters to explore the graffiti art culture and the internet helped some to find other like-minded individuals (on this regional case see Novak, 2011: 93, 99, 103, 107 ). The first graffiti art magazine featuring reports from Asia was the Japanese *HSMagazine*. The international graffiti art magazine *Graphotism* featured in issue #43 a special report on several regional countries (JIROE, 2006). The region of Southeast and East Asia was later focused on by the magazine *INVASIAN* (Asia Graffiti Magazine, 2008) in its first issue published in Summer 2008.

In Southeast Asia graffiti art was probably first present in the Philippines in 1990 (Sanada & Hassan, 2010: 69; FLIP1, 2013) and then in Singapore in 1994 (Sanada & Hassan, 2010: 100; Novak, 2011: 90). The Singaporean graffiti artist SCOPE [aka FLAYME02 and HYBRID] (born 1976) started in 1994 the Singaporean/international crew OAC (OPERATION ART CORE). SCOPE discovered his passion for graffiti art after watching the movie *Beatstreet* (SCOPE, 2009). In Thailand graffiti art started probably developing in the early 1990s (Sanada & Hassan, 2010: 86, 90), as graffiti art was already present in the city of Chiang Mai by 1994. In South Korea graffiti art began to grow in the late 1990s (Sanada & Hassan, 2010: 39), similarly as in Taipei, Taiwan (Sanada & Hassan, 2010: 62) and Indonesia (Sanada & Hassan, 2010: 112). Among the first graffiti artists in Indonesia was BABAM (in short BAM), who started with graffiti art in Jakarta by 1997 (BABAM, 2009). Graffiti art was introduced to the east coast of China through Hong Kong and appeared for the first time in the 1990s in Guangzhou,<sup>5</sup> and in 2002 in Wuhan. However, the first time graffiti art was “introduced” to Hong Kong was in May 1982 (Witten & White, 2001: 160-161). Nevertheless, the Chinese graffiti artist TOUCH suggested that graffiti art in Guangzhou, China was present already in the beginning

of the 1990s and from there it spread to larger cities as Shanghai and Beijing (TOUCH, 2012). The Myanmar graffiti artist ZBIRN started performing graffiti art in mid-2011 in Singapore, but he did sketches in 2010 while staying in the state of Sabah, in Malaysia (ZBIRN, 2013). ZBIRN reported that in Myanmar the graffiti art culture started around the year 2009. However, the Malaysian graffiti artist SNOZZE (born 1988) reported, after a visit to Myanmar, that graffiti art started developing in Myanmar around the year 2002 (SNOZZE, 2012). In Vietnam CRAZ (born 1988) started doing graffiti art around Ho-Chi-Minh City by 2004 (CRAZ, 2009). In Brunei, according to CYDE02, the first graffiti artist was TYCAL in the year 2002 (CYDE02, 2009).

Historical development of the graffiti art culture in Malaysia dates back to the years 1999-2000 (Novak, 2011; Novak, 2012). The initial two locations of origin were the areas of Batu Pahat and Greater Kuala Lumpur on the Malaysian peninsula.<sup>6</sup> Graffiti art in peninsular Malaysia started developing in these two locations in parallel. In Batu Pahat the graffiti artist PHOBIA (born 1983) started doing graffiti art in the very late 1990s.<sup>7</sup> PHOBIA was first introduced to graffiti art through Singaporean breakdancers in an internet chat room (PHOBIA, 2008). The Singaporean graffiti art scene had significant influence on the development of the Malaysian graffiti art scene. For instance, the Singaporean graffiti artist SCOPE produced around the year 2000 a graffiti art piece for the Malaysian hip-hop music video *Jezzebelle*, by the group TOO PHAT (SCOPE, 2009; Flizow, 2012), which was exactly at the time when hip-hop started to attract more and more interest among Malaysian youth. By the end of the 1990s hip-hop culture in Malaysia had just started to become very popular (SAINT, 2009). Other Malaysian graffiti art pioneers as NENOK (born 1983), SUBWAY, VDS212 (born 1985), DREW (born 1983), MIST149 (born 1985), SAINT (born 1985) or KIOUE (born 1984) got introduced to graffiti art through hip-hop, skateboarding or by traveling abroad (Novak, 2011; Novak, 2012).

## 6.3 Reasons for the dissemination

In Fig. 3, I present a diagram suggesting possible relations between the Origins, Dissemination channels and Other Conditions relating to the spread of graffiti art around the globe. The diagram is based on the present article and on research conducted by other researchers and authors (Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974; Castleman, 1982; Chalfant & Silver, 1983;

Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987; Stewart, 1989; Miller, 1992; Ferrell, 1996; Austin, 2001; Macdonald, 2001; Ganz, 2004; Lundy, 2008; Kramer, 2009; Snyder, 2009; Stewart, 2009; Thompson, 2009; Sanada & Hassan, 2010; Novak, 2011; Novak, 2014a; Novak & Javanmiri, 2015). In the present paper, I will pay attention to “Painting on Trains” and “Establishing of Forms and their Sizes.”

### 6.3.1 Graffiti art on exterior sides of trains

It is of interest to point out that in the 1980s graffiti artists in new territories also created graffiti art works on the exterior sides of trains, as was originally the case in New York City (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987: 8, 86; Munich S-Trains, 1991: 1-3; Wiese, 1996: 14-17; Mai & Remke, 2003: 4-9). In 1987, the publication *Spraycan Art* reported that trains were painted in the cities of Vienna, Düsseldorf, Munich, Copenhagen, Paris, London and Sydney (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987: 8). However, graffiti art works were not always produced only on exterior sides of subway trains, but on all variations of transportation rail-vehicles available (Austin, 2001: 265). To produce graffiti art works on the exteriors of rail-vehicles became an orthodox tradition of the graffiti art culture until present day. Graffiti art is also often produced on the exterior sides of freight trains (see Fig. 4) (Ferrell, 1998; Austin, 2001: 247-249).

Especially in the Western world, graffiti art works produced on the exterior sides of trains are still highly prized. This is an important point. The production of graffiti art works on the exterior sides of trains, besides the USA, took place in the 1980s and 1990s in Europe, Australia and in other countries. The graffiti art writers in new territories copied the expressive styles, designs and importantly also the behavioural patterns of their role models from New York City of the 1970s and 1980s. One of these conducts was the creative production of graffiti art works on exterior sides of public transportation rail-vehicles.<sup>8</sup> This influenced the overall direction of the global graffiti art culture and anchored this urban subcultural activity on the edge between vandalism and art. Still to the present day graffiti art works created on the exterior sides of trains are regarded, by Western graffiti artists especially, as an authentic continuation of the New York type of graffiti art from the 1970s (see Figs. 5-6).<sup>9</sup>

### 6.3.2 Graffiti art on exterior sides of trains in Asia

In the 2000s graffiti art works were being created on exterior sides of trains in Hong Kong, Thailand and Indonesia (Sanada & Hassan, 2010: 36-37, 81, 109-110). It is often the Western “graffiti art tourists” who paint trains in Asia, as it is desirable from the Western graffiti art cultural perspective (see Fig. 7). In Southeast Asian Malaysia, the local graffiti artists usually do not paint graffiti art works on train exteriors (Novak, 2014a: 39). However, the American graffiti art personalities UTAH and ETHER produced for example in the year 2016 a whole train (double whole car in this case) in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur and in other Asian cities (Grifters, 26 April 2016; Tay, 2016). Further, in May 2010 a Swiss and a British graffiti artist (Singapore sentences Swiss man to caning for spraying graffiti on subway car, 2010; Writer, 2010) created two multicolored graffiti art work (ongyouyuan1907, 18 May 2010) panel pieces, on the exterior of a Singaporean MRT subway train. This caused an enormous stir in the Singaporean media. One of the graffiti artists fled the country and a “warrant of arrest was issued on June 8 [2010] and INTERPOL member countries were alerted” (Suparto, 2010). The other graffiti artist was arrested in Singapore and sentenced in June 2010 (Singapore sentences Swiss man to caning for spraying graffiti on subway car, 2010; Writer, 2010).

Due to Singapore’s strict legislation this is a very different response to graffiti art vandalism, as the exteriors of trains are being painted in Western countries on a regular daily basis (Art Crimes: Trains Art Crimes: Trains; TOPxGRAFFITI, 16 June 2013) but Singapore’s tough stance on any sort of crime in general is known.<sup>10</sup> However, it is quite unheard of to issue an Interpol warrant for a graffiti art work – even though it was illegally produced on a public transportation rail-vehicle exterior. Especially, if we take into account that “Singapore’s subway operator, SMRT Corp., didn’t report the incident to police for two days because staff thought the brightly colored graffiti [art work] was an advertisement” (Singapore sentences Swiss man to caning for spraying graffiti on subway car, 2010). Pieces on exterior sides of trains can be considered to represent to graffiti artists a sort of trophy in the form of the photograph of the work.

There is another interesting feature relating to the graffiti art cultural folklore of painting graffiti art works on the exteriors of trains – the sizes of graffiti art works. Once graffiti art

was disseminated into other global locations, local graffiti artists in new territories copied not only the behavioural codes of their admired role models, but the graffiti artists also unconsciously “copied” the scale of graffiti art works established in New York City of the 1970s.

### 6.3.3 Scale of graffiti art works

Anthropometrical limitations dramatically determine the scale of graffiti art works (Novak, 2014b). However, I see also a historical reasoning behind the determined average size of the graffiti art form “piece.” Early evolutionary stages of graffiti art took place in New York City, especially on the New York City Transit Authorities’ (MTA) subway cars. New York subway cars have a length of approximately 15m and a door height of 2m. “Pieces” first appeared on these trains around 1971–1972 (Stewart, 2009: 60-63), and they were commonly placed on the “panels” beneath the subway cars’ windows and in between the doors (see as well the photos in: Schmidlapp and PHASE2, 1996). The distance between two doors was around 5 m,<sup>12</sup> which indicates that the approximate size of the earliest “pieces” ever produced was around 5m in width and 1.2m in height.<sup>13</sup> In 1972 graffiti artists in New York City started painting larger “pieces” on the sides of subway cars: “top-to-bottoms”. To fill up the over 15m width exterior side of a subway car graffiti artists producing “top-to-bottom pieces” often teamed up with one or two other graffiti artists.<sup>14</sup> This teaming up leads to the conclusion that the early “top-to-bottom pieces” were around 5m of width and 2m height, if three graffiti artists teamed up.

Novak reported the exact average size of a “piece” in Malaysia in 2011–2012 to have been 4.73m by 1.94m (Novak, 2014b). What does this say about the current sizes of graffiti art works more than 40 years later? It seems that the scale of graffiti art works established in the 1970s on the exterior sides of subway cars in New York City – 5m by 2m – and from there these scale indications disseminated in the 1980s around the globe and remained ever since the same, even on walls.

## 7. Conclusion

The present article briefly demonstrated that graffiti art was/ is especially appealing through its visual attractiveness to younger adolescent audiences around the world (see on

this point as well the paper by Novak and Yousof, 2014: 8). The followers of this urban practice appropriate established cultural norms common in the graffiti art culture. Channels such as free flow of information and mobility of young people were responsible for the transmission of graffiti art on a worldwide scale. It is necessary to state that there is a need to expand significantly our knowledge about the history and specific qualities and conditions of graffiti art through academic research to understand graffiti art more precisely.



Fig. 1. Dissemination of the graffiti art culture from New York City to Western Europe in early 1980s. Gallery exhibitions of New Yorker graffiti artists in Western Europe, a printed publication and motion pictures about graffiti art as part of a wider hip-hop culture played major roles in the transnational dissemination.



Fig. 2. In 1987 the publication *Spraycan Art* featured graffiti art works from the following cities: New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburg/Cleveland, Chicago, San Francisco/Bay Area, Los Angeles, London, Bristol, Wolverhampton, Amsterdam, Eindhoven, Paris, Barcelona, [West] Berlin, Brühl, Vienna, Copenhagen, Sydney and Auckland.

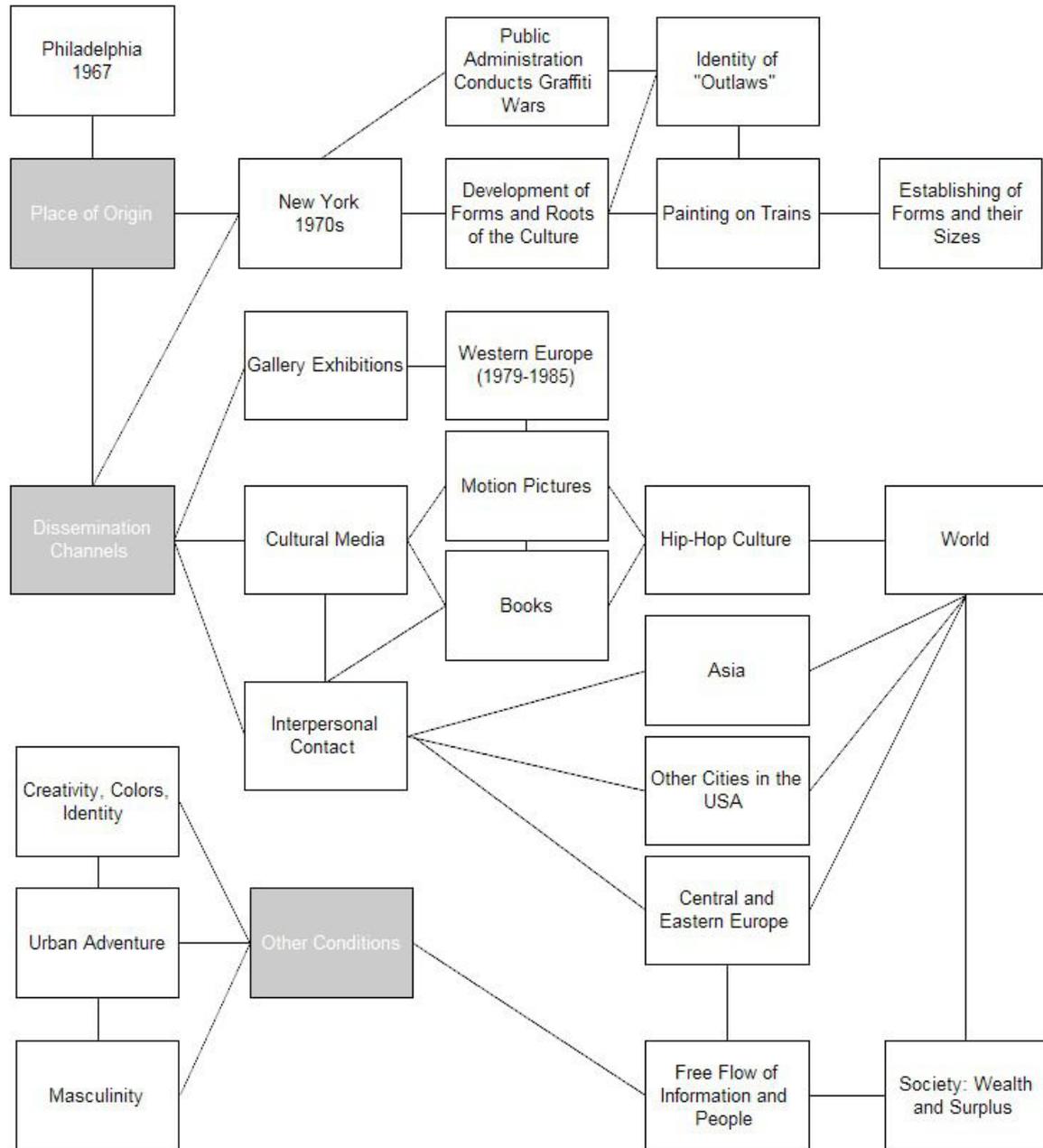


Fig. 3. Diagram representing the Origins, Dissemination Channels and Other Conditions relating to the spread of graffiti art around the world.



Fig. 4: A cargo train with graffiti art in Prague, Czech Republic.

Photo: 09 June 2017, Prague Main Railway Station. Google Maps: 50.084272, 14.436547.



Fig. 5: An operational public transportation train with graffiti art in Berlin, Germany.

Photo: 16 July 2016, Friedrichstrasse train station. Google Maps: 52.520374, 13.387092.



Fig. 6: An operational intercity train with graffiti art in Sofia, Bulgaria.  
 Photo: 04 June 2016, Sofia Cenral Station. Google Maps: 42.712871, 23.319797.



Fig. 7: Not operational public transportation trains with graffiti art in Istanbul, Turkey.  
 From left: STUR, MERDE, BLOW. On the right pieces by the Americans UTAH & ETHER.  
 Photo: 28 April 2014, Hayderpaşa train station. Google Maps: 40.997026, 29.021919.

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## Notes

1. On some of these gallery exhibitions see: Witten & White (2001); Thompson (2009).

2. Stories are according to Steven Powers (born 1968) one of the most interesting facets of graffiti art: 'What makes graffiti [art] so great and the attending graffiti [art] magazines so weak are the stories'. (Powers, 1999: 82).

3. The book (Ganz, 2004) has three main chapters – Americas (107 pages), Europe (202 pages) and the Rest of the world (43 pages). Rest of the world is represented with: Japan (Hiroshima, Tokyo), Australia (Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Prospect and Sydney), South Africa (Cape Town, Johannesburg) and Singapore. There is as well a photo from Czech Republic (Prague) and Mongolia.

4. For example the in the 1980s and 1990s, very active graffiti artist COWBOY69 is of Turkish descent. For COWBOY69's works see: Writing in München 1983-1995 (1995).

5. DEZIO suggested the date 1998 in Sanada and Hassan, (2010: 14).

6. The Story of PHOBIA in Teh (2012); Novak (2011).

7. Back then, PHOBIA wrote the tag names BEE and SPARKLING.

8. Jeff Ferrell and Robert D. Weide defined in the *Spot theory*, the production of graffiti art works on trains in relation to "liquid spots" (Ferrell & Weide, 2010). This implicates that "the spot at which graffiti [art] is written is not necessarily the spot at which it will be viewed" (ibid. p. 57), as graffiti art works are produced on exteriors of trains in train yards, but the works are viewed in other locations as in train stations.

9. The Czech, but internationally well-known graffiti artist CAKES/POINT answered in the following way the question why he thinks that graffiti artists paint on trains until today: "*It is folklore. Part of the tradition*". CAKES. (2009, 01 September). *Email Interview*.

10. As the author of this present article, I am in no way supporting or glorifying the defacement, modification of any private or public property!

11. The New York City subway train type R-33 was identified on the web site NYCSUBWAY ([www.nycsubway.org/perl/caption.pl?/img/cars/sheet-r33.jpg](http://www.nycsubway.org/perl/caption.pl?/img/cars/sheet-r33.jpg)) based up on comparison with photographic evidence from Jack Stewart's publication *Graffiti Kings*; photographs of the "red" trains on pages 40-63. The width of the car R-33 is 49'7-7/8" feet and the height of the door is 6'2-1/2" feet: *NYC Subway resources: R-33*. (2013).

12. The distance between two doors on a R-33 car was 17'1" feet: ibid.

13. This conclusion is based on photographic evidence provided in Stewart (2009: 60-61; 62; 65; 67; 70-73).

14. Historical evidence is provided again in photographs: ibid: 68-69; 80-81; 136; 13.