

“MAKING THE STONES SPEAK”

Exploring the motivations of queer street artists in the United States

Student number: [REDACTED]

Supervisor: [REDACTED]

*Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Politics (International)*

POLIS

May 2020

Word count:

10,994

'The birth of creativity is taking the other path... We've have always drawn the sky blue. It is the person who decides that it is going to be green that makes us go, 'huh, I haven't looked at the sky in a long time''

- **BluDog100003**



Abstract

*A burgeoning, global movement of queer street artists create queer imagery on the streets, challenging homophobia and encouraging LGBTQ+ pride. The primary purpose of this study is to decipher the motivations driving queer street artists, focusing on queer street art in the United States. Building on existing literature it asks two central questions: 1) **to what extent is the queer street art movement an internally focused exploration of identity?** and 2) **to what extent is the queer street art movement an externally focused form of resistance?***

The study operationalises James Scott's theory of infrapolitics, which explores the resistant acts of marginalised groups. Through an analysis of interviews with queer street artists, it aims to decipher the 'hidden transcript' of the artists and investigate how their motivations compare with previously interviewed street artists. It provides an additional dimension to infrapolitics, by investigating it in a peacetime context, where the relations between the dominant and marginalised groups are not overtly antagonistic. A key finding is that, in this context, resistance does not solely occur through overt opposition, but also through visibility and education, diverging from current studies on infrapolitics. It concludes that separating identity and resistance detrimentally disregards their interdependent nature; the artists' individual identities impact the forms of resistance that they engage with, whilst resistance forms a key part of queer identities. Thus, the overall findings of this research present little doubt as to the significant role that both identity and resistance play in the queer street art movement.

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to say a massive thank you to my supervisor, [REDACTED], for your exceptional patience, guidance and, most of all, interest in my research. Your in-depth feedback and insights every step of the way have been invaluable and are much appreciated.

Next, I would like to express sincere gratitude to all of the artists who took the time to answer my questions in such detail. Thank you, not only for your involvement in this research, but also for the engaging, funny and important art that you continue to create. I have genuinely loved getting to know all of your individual styles and messages. I would also like to acknowledge the legacy of Keith Haring, whose significant and moving art inspired me to explore this topic. Below is one of his final creations, 'Once Upon a Time,' which he drew in the bathroom of an LGBT Community Center in New York City. His momentous role in raising awareness of the AIDS epidemic, and bringing LGBTQ+ imagery onto the street, is not forgotten.

Finally, I like to thank my family from the bottom of my heart for your unfaltering support in reading, re-reading, highlighting, and providing cups of coffee throughout the compilation of this dissertation. I am sure that you will be breathing a sigh of relief now that it is finished!



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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Legendary queer street artist, Keith Haring, once said, 'my contribution to the world is my ability to draw,' referencing his illustrious work in New York City which raised significant LGBTQ+ and AIDS awareness (Merritt Gallery 2017). Street art, an ancient method of 'making the stones speak', is used by artists to express themselves, interact with others and challenge authority (Peteeet 1996; 144). Therefore, it is an invaluable tool for social science scholars to gauge the historical evolutions of intricate relations and dialogues between, and within, communities (Marche 2012a). Imagining the world of street art in the United States (US) inevitably conjures up images of the heterosexual, cisgendered, males who dominate the scene (Lampert 2011). However, a burgeoning global movement of street artists create queer imagery on the streets, challenging homophobia and encouraging pride among those identifying as LGBTQ+ (Towers 2018). With queer artists rarely receiving commissions for public murals, or experiencing censorship when they do, the queer street art movement unapologetically claims public spaces, particularly in the progressive, urban centres of San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York City, where many are based (ibid). Queer street art is not a new phenomenon, evidenced by artists such as Haring, but recently queer street artists have gained increasing visibility and connectivity, aided by the Daniel Albanese's documentation of their work. Discussing his upcoming documentary on queer street art, Daniel (widely known as Dusty) questioned the lack of visibility of the 'rich history' of queer street artists (Lorimer n.d). He suggested that this could be attributed either to a lack of understanding within the 'dominant straight culture' about

the queer messages abundant in street art, or to a dearth of queer people self-documenting in a heterosexual, male-dominated artistic scene (ibid).

The primary purpose of this study is to decipher the motivations driving queer street artists, by interviewing artists who identify with the movement. Chapter 2 provides an initial review of existing societal impact literature, which displays two purposes of art; individual and collective identity exploration, and resistance. Thus, the study aims to investigate whether queer street artists are motivated by either of these. The review crucially explores the theory of infrapolitics, coined by Scott (1990). In this context, infrapolitics is regarded as resistant acts by a marginalised group which lie on the verge of the political, but 'below the threshold of what qualifies as such,' explained further in the literature review (Marche 2012; 79). Chapter 3 establishes the research methodology and design, justifying the use of interviews over quantitative methodologies, which draw more finite conclusions. The first research question, ***'to what extent is the queer street art movement an internally focused exploration of identity?'*** explores whether queer street artists use art as a tool of self-exploration, as was discovered in numerous scientific studies on arts education (Brewster 2014). The second research question, ***'to what extent is the queer street art movement an externally focused form of resistance?'*** relates to literature which places street art as a vehicle of resistance, exploring whether similar motivations drive queer street artists. Since the theory of infrapolitics stresses the significance of elements of resistance, like street art, this contribution seeks to develop an understanding of the 'hidden transcript' of the queer street artists. Hence, Chapter 4 presents and analyses the results of interviews with street artists, emphasising the relevance of infrapolitics to the movement. This study makes several contributions to existing academia

regarding the purposes of street art. Its theoretical contribution lies in the additional dimension that it attributes to Scott's theory of infrapolitics, by applying it to the queer street art movement. Whilst previous scholars link infrapolitics with street art, few explore its use during peacetime, instead focusing on military conflicts and revolutions (Marche 2012a; Taş 2017). Its empirical contribution lies in the research methodology; interviewing the artists enables an in-depth understanding of their motivations, based on first-hand accounts as opposed to the sole application of a theory or personal interpretations of their art. This methodology has been utilised in other studies on street art but has not yet been applied to the queer street art movement in social science academia. The significance of this study is outlined in Scott's statement that 'for a social science attuned to the relatively open politics of liberal democracies and to loud, headline-grabbing protests... the circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups is, like infrared rays, beyond the visible end of the spectrum' (1992; 183). Thus, understanding the 'hidden transcript' of the queer community is vital for gauging the continuous scene of underlying political struggle. Whilst the movement is global, this study focuses on queer street art in the US. This attention is both opportunistic, due to the availability of copious material on Instagram since Dusty is based there, and pertinent to this study, due to the recent tumultuous polarisation of the political scene and consequential challenges to LGBTQ+ rights (Fadulu 2019). The central finding of this research is that viewing motivations relating to identity and resistance as binary, in this context, disregards their interdependent nature. The artists' identities impact the forms of resistance that they engage with, whilst resistance is simultaneously a key part of their identity. Consequently, Scott's theory of infrapolitics can be aptly applied to the movement due to its dual focus on identity and resistance.

1.2 Central terminology

Regarding central terminology, two terms must be clarified and justified. Firstly, the term 'queer' is used in relation to the community of street artists self-identifying as LGBTQ+. Formerly a homophobic slur, the term was reclaimed by the community nearly three decades ago and, whilst it continues to be pejorative in specific contexts, its re-appropriation represents empowerment to many who identify as LGBTQ+ (Levy and Johnson 2011). Whilst gender is socially constructed, 'the process of categorisation is itself an exercise of power' (Crenshaw 1991; 1297). Consequently, subverting lexical associations with the word 'queer' removes it of its negative command, and provides the queer community with identities which fall outside society's binary and heteronormative expectations (Panfil and Miller 2015). Notably, whilst those interviewed fall under this moniker, the term 'queer' is characteristically ambiguous, with 'no generally acceptable definition' (Jagose 1996). For the purpose of this study, the term is used to refer primarily to the LGBTQ+ community (Levy and Johnson 2011). Postmodernist feminist accounts stress the multiple ways of being female and, similarly, there is an abundance of identities and perspectives amongst those who identify as 'queer' (Cassar 2015; 423). Thus, whilst every street artist is considered unique, they are collectively referred to as queer street artists acknowledging that 'as soon as there is language, generality has entered the scene' (Derrida 1995; 199). This collective identification is for coherence and does not intend to 'obliterate the individual differences' that exist within the movement (Cassar 2015; 423).

Secondly, whilst the differences between street art and graffiti are acknowledged by this study (and are comprehensively discussed by Weisberg (2012)), scholarly

literature exploring the use of graffiti is applied periodically to the queer street art movement. This is due to the similarities between the two art forms, including the illegal nature of much of the artists' work, and its public setting. Since the purpose of this study is not to investigate which aspects of the movement constitute street art or graffiti, 'street art' is utilised to describe the work of the artists interviewed, due to its common description as a street art movement (Towers 2018).



Chapter 2. Literature Review

Whilst the lack of 'hard' evidence makes it difficult to draw direct links between the arts and societal impacts, scholars draw various conclusions based on both qualitative and quantitative results (Jermyn 2001). Two persuasive strands of thinking address: 1) the impact of art as an internally focused exploration of identity and consequential community-building, and 2) the use of street art as an externally focused form of resistance (ibid). This literature review engages with each perspective.

The role of art in *individuals' explorations of identity* is evident in prison studies, which highlight arts education as a key factor for improving inmates' productivity (Peaker & Vincent 1990). A survey study by Brewster (2014) concluded that freedom in creation instilled prisoners' confidence that they could positively impact their lives. Whilst the study was short-term, and conducted on exclusively male participants, its conclusions are echoed in similar prison studies (Clements 2004; Johnson 2007; Cohen 2009). Furthermore, studies outside prisons reached similar conclusions, including William's study on the impact of community-based art on individual identity (1997). She observed similar correlations between art and the improvement of life-effectiveness skills creativity (1997; 23). An abundance of studies explore how art is similarly used by those who suffer restrictions relating to poverty and mental health (Eisner 1992; Matarasso 1997; Hacking et al. 2006). For example, Matarasso demonstrated how art helps people within poorer areas in England to critically question their own experiences, empowering disillusioned members of society (1997; 88). Relating to mental health, studies have suggested that, whilst there is no evidence to show that art directly reduces anxiety and depression, it improves self-confidence, facilitates self-realisation, providing a 'safe space' for identity exploration (Eisner 1992;

Hacking et al. 2006; Hill and Moriarty 2001). Hence, studies exploring effects on individual identity frequently reference improvements in self-realisation, self-confidence, self-discovery and emotional control, despite their varying contexts. Many utilise quantitative methods, primarily surveys, to gather data (Brewster 2014; Peaker and Vincent 1990; Matarasso 1997). Whilst this facilitates ease of results evaluation, Hacking et al. (2006) note the value of qualitative methods, such as interviews. They observe how this would be useful in 'exploring participants' experiences and perceptions of their involvement in artistic work', highlighting an area for expansion within current literature (Hacking et al. 2006; 126).

Scholars also explore the ***positive impact of community art on affirming a collective identity and facilitating social cohesion***. Williams (1997) discusses how community art encourages the celebration of multiple perceptions, and sensitivity to others' experiences, positively impacting cultural gaps between Western and Indigenous peoples in Australia. Similarly, research by Mohatt et al. (2013) discovered how a community used art as a form of collective healing in response to a suicide, reducing the stigma around suicide, allowing a dialogue to form within the community. Social cohesion is also observed in the reduction in disciplinary reports in prison following arts education, widely attributed to the provision of creative outlets for the therapeutic release of tensions (Williams 1997; Brewster 2014). This sense of communal self-determination is particularly effective in encouraging participation from communities that feel socially excluded (Landry et al. 1996; Stevenson Ltd. 2000). A study by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport discovered that community art in poorer neighbourhoods improved residents' perceptions of their area, helping communities to embrace their collective identity (DCMSS 1999). This encourages

individuals to participate more in community development (Norris et al. 2008). Gude (2009) notes how encouraging community participation can be beneficial to democracy, giving citizens an 'awareness of the potential to act and interact with the world'. This emboldens disadvantaged communities to tackle social issues, and hold authorities to account, preventing lies or misinformation becoming 'factual truths' through their reinforcement in the dominant political realm (Matarasso 1997; Arendt 1967). Within existing literature on the effects of art on communities, many scholars who specifically study street art find that it is also utilised for community involvement (MacDonald 2001; Schneider 2006). For example, interviews with New York graffiti artists showed how artists 'became part of a larger community and engaged in a public 'conversation' with peers throughout their city' (Schneider 2006; 121). The public nature of street art intensifies the impact of sharing stories and experiences, as it is an 'open invitation for anyone to interact, consider, and discuss' (2014; 208). Street artists are empowered to create social commentaries about the subjectivity of establishment laws and politics, providing audiences with alternative discourses to the dominant told by those in power (Cocke 2004; Olivero 2014).

Regarding identity, numerous studies address the ***beneficial impacts of art on individual explorations of gender and sexuality*** (Stanley 2007; Pelton-Sweet and Sherry 2008). Many discuss how art can be used to challenge the dominance of heteronormativity, particularly within schools where heterosexuality dominates sexual education (Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford 2003; Robinson 2012; McNeill 2013). This reinforces heterosexual dominance and legitimates homophobia within schools by stigmatising and marginalising LGBTQ+ youths, evident in the way that LGBTQ+ youths are twice as likely to be physically assaulted at school than their peers

(Robinson 2012; McNeill 2013; Human Rights Campaign 2019). However, creative expression allows LGBTQ+ students to 'try on' different identities (Pelton-Sweet and Sherry 2008). The 'oppressive impact' of heteronormative school culture also constrains those who do not identify as LGBTQ+, limiting their gender or sexual exploration (Ward and Schneider 2009; 435). With sexual education in schools lacking, students search for alternative methods of gender and sexual enlightenment (Kehily 2002; Robinson 2012; Cassar 2015). Cassar's (2007) study explores the use of graffiti by female students in a Maltese school bathroom, to resist their school's lack of sexuality education and to undermine authoritative hierarchies of power. Themes of resistance and self-expression are evident in this work, with the girls discussing topics such as sexuality, erotic pleasure, and abortion (Cassar 2007). In the context of progressive political developments in Malta, Cassar's later study (2015) focuses specifically on 'gay' graffiti. The writing 'what do you think about lesbians?' illustrates the students' attempts to generate visibility and conversation transgressing heteronormative boundaries (Cassar 2015). Whilst acknowledging the limitations of deciphering the meaning of another's writing, she presents a convincing analysis of the way students present their views through bathroom graffiti (Cassar 2015). Kehily (2002) similarly highlights how student peer groups play a vital role in knowledge and policing of sexuality. Studies also explore how the LGBTQ+ community can aid societal education through art, evident in Stanley's (2007) discussion of the tendency of human and civil rights movements to reduce marginalised peoples into homogeneous groups. He highlights how lesbian and gay art can exhibit individuality and provide perspectives outside of the mainstream, thus tackling homophobia (ibid). A limitation of this text is his focus on gay and lesbian sexualities, failing to

acknowledge the potential of other identities within the LGBTQ+ community, to provide even wider perspectives.

Studies on street art dispute its uses, with some arguing that artists use it to ***provide a counter-narrative regarding their identities, thereby educating wider society.***

The benefit of art in granting agency to marginalised individuals was exhibited in the Painted Stories mural in Canada, created by LGBTQ+ refugees, (Fobear 2017). Monarch butterflies represented the participants, since both are forced to journey long distances and migrate across borders in search of safety (ibid). Writing messages on the butterflies enabled participants to provide a counter-narrative to their depictions in the media (ibid). The potentially oppressive impact of dominant discourses is presented by a study showing that 68% of LGBTQ+ youth participants reported hearing negative messages about their identities from elected leaders, highlighting the necessity of providing visibility to LGBTQ+ counter-narratives (Human Rights Campaign 2019). Fobear highlights how the mural differed from other paintings of its kind, which have easy-to-decipher political messages, instead depicting a complex, symbolic, but still political message (ibid). She responds to criticism from LGBTQ+ activists that it was not political enough, contending that, whilst queer history involves persecution, 'it is also a history of resiliency, of everyday survival, and of love, creativity, passion, and laughter' (Fobear 2017; 59). Chimamande Adichie's (2009) TED talk reflects the importance of granting agency to individuals within marginalised communities, emphasising the dangers of condensing complex human experiences into a single story, thereby reducing other members to 'passive observers.'

Contrasting reflections view street art as a way of ***collectively identifying against mainstream society and excluding 'outsiders'*** (Macdonald 2001; 378). Hebdige's exploration of subcultures supports this, referring to their origins as a 'crime against the natural order' that represents 'a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer' (1979; 3). Street artists appropriate commodities and spaces for their own purposes in a symbolic communication of resistance, challenging authorities and questioning the ownership of spaces within cities (Hebdige 1979; Pinder 2008). Muggleton et al. (n.d.) identify three levels of resistance enacted by subcultures. Micro-level resistance involves personal acts 'against stereotypes and stigmas that are systemic of cultural hegemony,' such as the adoption of gothic styles. Meso-level entails challenges to norms within a subculture group, without reaching out to 'outsiders' (ibid). Finally, macro-level occurs where a subculture member organises a group to collectively resist 'a common societal ideology' together' (ibid). All three levels imply exclusivity and resistance against those outside of the subculture. The rejection of norms governing mainstream society by street artists is echoed by Ferrell, who actively participated in graffiti writing instead of interviewing subjects from outside the community, providing invaluable insight into the internal dialogue of the community (1996). He argues that the criminalisation and demonization of graffiti in America is an attempt to 'distort public debates', further marginalising certain groups (Ferrell 1996). Thus, he believes that street art is a tool used by 'the invisible to make themselves seen and to assert... their right to the city' (Schneider 2006; 121). Whilst this is similar to Arendt (1967) and Cocks (2004), his reflections place graffiti more as a tool of resistance *against* the mainstream political realm, instead of an opportunity to become more involved *within* it. Muggleton et al. (n.d.) discuss how subculture participants engage in either 'active resistance', an 'intentional attempt to disrupt the status quo'

such as protests, or 'passive resistance', where they 'engage in a deviant lifestyle without intending to change the larger system'. Focusing almost exclusively on male youths, Twiddle explored how graffiti is used as a 'rite of passage', to 'affirm one's masculinity' (Twiddle 2003; 378). This theme of masculinity is also evident in studies of lavatory graffiti, which observe how most graffiti in men's bathrooms are 'presence identifying' (Matthews, Speers and Ball 2012; Fisher and Radtke 2014). Fisher's and Radtke's (2014) reference to evolutionary psychology suggests that tagging is used to mark one's territory, thus affirming one's masculinity. Clearly, it is not firmly established by scholars whether graffiti is used as a tool of public discussion, identity exploration, or resistance. However, whilst few of the scholars categorically express it, the interrelated nature of identity and resistance is subtly present in much of their work.

Collective identity cultivation as a form of resistance by subordinate groups is particularly prominent within scholarly work exploring *the place of street art in 'infrapolitics'* (Marche 2012b; Peteet 1996; Taş 2017). Infrapolitics refers to a 'third realm' of discourse, between the 'hidden transcript' of subordinate groups (conversations and 'grumbings' that they share with others within their group) and outward political protest (ibid; 18). He refers to this as 'a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in the public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of actors', now known as 'coding' (ibid). Scott highlights how the dominant group controls the public stage, enabling them to 'create an appearance that approximates what, ideally, they would want the subordinates to see' (ibid; 50). This reflects previously mentioned accounts which stress the importance of art in empowering people to voice their identities and opinions and thus, contribute to societal conversations and democracy (Arendt 1967; Cocke 2004; Olivero 2014).

Thus, the theory observes an 'unobtrusive realm of political struggle' (Scott 1992; 183). The theory of infrapolitics exposes the limitations of Muggleton et al.'s (n.d.) binary discussion of passive and active resistance, as it exhibits how participants can seek systemic change without engaging in active protests. Infrapolitics takes a central role in studies exploring street art as a 'vehicle of resistance' (Marche 2012a; Marche 2012b; 78). Most focus on street art within the context of conflict, such as Marche (2012a) who explores resistance to the War on Terror, and Taş (2017) who studies resistance during the 2011 Tahrir Revolution and the 2013 Gezi protests. Both scholars highlight the importance of street art when conventional oppositional political acts are not an option for subordinate groups. Marche states that, 'with protest graffiti, the medium *is* the message,' highlighting how street art does not involve exchanges of money or commissions, expressing dissent by the artists from the 'consumer society' (2012a; 84). He focuses on examples of images which he perceives to be political but does note how 'graffiti often tend toward pure hedonistic gratification rather than political contestation,' particularly in the cases of street art which is not created to be understood (ibid; 82). Whilst resistance and resilience are often treated as binary by International Relations scholars, Bourbeau and Ryan (2017) examine the relationship between the two, under the rubric of infrapolitics. They focus on poor farmers during the Green Revolution, describing how the subordinate groups can be both resilient, adapting to rapidly changing economies and environments, whilst simultaneously resistant 'by challenging the social legitimacy of the village rich' (ibid). Thus, whilst the farmers adapted to changes, this did not imply agreement or complacency, highlighted in acts such as pilfering and slander (ibid). However, scholars seldom delve into the crucial role of identity present within Scott's theory, thus failing to comprehend its importance in infrapolitical resistance. Whilst Scott

(1992) discusses how infrapolitics shields the identity of actors, their identities are nonetheless significant as they are utilised to form or depict collective resistance against a dominant group. This is evident in Scott's regular references to commonality and a collective 'spirit of resistance' amongst subordinate groups, for example in his discussion of the oral tradition of telling tales which glorify 'tricksters' who defeats the powerful group (ibid; 162). Marche develops on this, emphasising the role of humour in infrapolitical street art, stating that 'pleasure creates empowerment' (2012a; 88). It is clear in the work of other scholars who do not directly reference infrapolitics that they share similar views of the potential of street art as a depicting and mobilising resistance. For example, its visibility in protests sweeping the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 garnered widespread attention by scholars seeking to explore it as a tool of political resistance (Vivienne and Burgess 2013; Tufekci 2014; MacDowall and de Souza 2017). However, this was not the first time that street art had been used to cultivate resistance, evident in Peteet's analysis of street art in the West Bank during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (1996). Far from merely sending messages or representing defiance, she discusses how the work reflected the silent narrative of the subordinate group, inviting an 'active response' from readers (Peteet 1996). She states that the street art was painted over, supporting Ferrell's reflections that dominant groups criminalise and censor street art, due to its potential for creating a dialogue of resistance. Smith's (2015) statement that 'nowhere is the role of art within the field of political relations more apparent than where art engages with the public space,' highlights its significant role in instigating public debate, leading to the political upheaval in Egypt since 2011 (2015). Differing from Marche and Peteet, however, Smith views art as a 'diagnostic' lens through which previously invisible social dynamics become visible, and can be debated, as opposed to actively transforming

politics (Smith 2015; 25). Thus, infrapolitical street art is crucial in two senses. Firstly, it builds a community of resistance within the audience, connecting like-minded individuals whilst maintaining their safety and anonymity, often conducted in a way that utilises humour to undermine the dominant group (Scott 1992; Marche 2012a). Secondly, the act of street art empowers the individual artists, allowing them the opportunity to voice their perceptions of power imbalances, instigating public debate over their views (ibid).

Despite increasing academic attention paid to street art, it is an area with potential for further exploration. Most current research analyses the *perceived effects* of street art, instead of gaining insight from artists themselves about the *intended effect* of the work. Thus, further research would benefit from exploring the intended effect of areas that have not previously been studied, such as queer street art, to assess whether these intentions align with other forms of street art. Most research on its role in political protest focuses predominantly on contexts of active revolution or protest (Peteet 1996; Marche 2012a; Marche 2012b; Taş 2017). This reflects safety-valve theories which assume that 'systemic subordination generates pressure of some kind from below' and that if such pressure is not relieved, it explodes in the form of outward revolution or protest (Scott 1992; 186). Whilst these occurrences are important, Scott stresses the significance of resistance that is not always evident; this resistance can occur every day and may never become outward protest (ibid). Thus, whilst street art is clearly a powerful infrapolitical tool in revolutions, it would be interesting to explore its use by groups seemingly not oppressed by society's laws or norms, but still marginalised. Whilst there is no conflictual power 'struggle' between the queer community and the cisgender-heterosexual society, there is still undeniable

dominance of the latter in political and societal realms (Chung 2009). Finally, the varying conclusions surrounding the intentions and impacts of street art, and references to graffiti as an assertion of 'masculinity' are particularly intriguing in relation to queer street artists. The term 'queer' inherently disregards rigid, 'normalised' gender-roles. Thus, it is clear that more insight needs to be gathered into how, and if, identity impacts street art.



Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Methodological design

The literature review highlights key questions surrounding the motivations of queer street artists in the US. Many studies researching infrapolitical street art focus on the *effect* of the art on its audiences (Marche 2012). Thus, the researcher is unable to decipher with confidence the hidden transcript of artists, highlighting a conceptual gap in this form of study (Cassar 2015; 422). This research therefore explores the artists' *intended effects* and motivations.

The study is based around two research questions:

RQ1: To what extent is the queer street art movement an internally focused exploration of identity?

Building on studies into the role of art in facilitating identity exploration, this research aims to explore the extent to which queer street artists use their art as a way to discover and share their own identities. This is salient for people within the queer community because, as highlighted in the literature review, many may have experienced difficulties in discovering 'self-referential lexicon' to describe their own gender or sexual identities, since their identities lie outside the binaries of a heteronormative society (Panfil and Miller 2015; 39).

RQ2: To what extent is the queer street art movement an externally focused form of resistance?

Despite research exploring the potential of street art as infrapolitical resistance, there is presently no academic work combining this with the queer street art movement. The domination of heterosexuality is less overt compared to contexts of war and military conflict within other studies of resistance street art. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether the artists intend for their art to be a vehicle of resistance, and if so, which methods they use to disseminate their messages.

Many studies investigating the societal impacts of the arts use quantitative data collection methods, enabling researchers to reach measurable evaluations of the effects of the independent variables (such as arts education) on participants. Whilst surveys facilitate normative conclusions, this research aims not to draw a specific conclusion, but to investigate the multiple themes and motivations behind queer street art based on an in-depth exploration of a variety of perspectives. An alternative method is to collect and analyse street art samples, based on an informed understanding of the context, exploring their effects (Marche 2012a) and the motivations and messages behind them (Cassar 2015). However, as Cassar (2015; 422) highlights, a limitation of this method is the potential for misinterpretation of the art, resulting in discrepancies between perceived messages and reality. This makes it ineffective for the present study investigating queer street art in relation to infrapolitics, as it fails to decipher with certainty the hidden transcripts of the artists. Thus, following an assessment of alternative methodologies, the present study utilised semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, providing discursive guidance to the participants on themes

relevant to the research, whilst facilitating flexibility to discuss their responses in-depth (Gill et al. 2008; 291). This method enables divergence from planned questions to pursue a response in more detail (ibid). A flexible, qualitative research method is more logical, since queer approaches view subjects and subjectivities as 'fluid, unstable and perpetually becoming', meaning that data collected is 'only momentarily fixed and certain' (Browne and Nash 2010; 1). This is particularly relevant due to different perceptions of 'queerness', making it impossible to reach objective conclusions to the research questions. The value of this method is its facilitation of the exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions (Hacking et al. 2006). This approach did not diverge significantly from other studies exploring the motivations behind street art and hence, its key innovation lies in the specific focus on queer street art (Schneider 2006; Smith 2015).

3.2 Research overview

Seven street artist interviews were conducted aiming to represent as many identities as possible within the movement. Six of the artists are based in the US, whilst Paul Harfleet lives in England but often works in the US. All of the participants were discovered on Dusty's 'Queer Street Art' Instagram page. Dusty was also interviewed due to the insight he could bring following his research into the queer street art movement for his upcoming documentary. In total, twenty-one artists were approached over Instagram, and the participants were all those who agreed to be interviewed. Of the eight participants, seven were involved in the 'The Streets are Queer' in 2019, a 'first-of-its-kind' group show for North American street artists who identify as queer (Stern 2019). Due to the location of the participants, the interviews were conducted primarily over Facetime and telephone, lasting between twenty-seven

and forty-nine minutes. One interview was conducted over email due to the participant's request for further anonymity. Following participant consent, the audio interviews were audio recorded and transcribed ad verbatim for the purpose of analysis. Full interview transcripts can be found in appendices one to eight. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the theme of gender and sexuality experiences, all participants were informed at the beginning of their interviews that they were free to terminate or pause the interview at any point, or to move onto a different question.

In terms of the scope of this research, the small-scale sample of interviews necessarily forgoes insights that a larger sample of participants could offer in potentially retrieving less prevalent themes within responses (Weller et al. 2018). A conceivable shortcoming of this research, for example, is that no transgendered persons agreed to be interviewed. Whilst further studies could expand this research by interviewing a broader range of artists, however, researchers should be wary of reaching broad conclusions (such as the experiences of all transgendered persons) even on a large-scale sample of participants (Panfil and Miller 2015; 37). The extensive variation in queer subjects' experiences and perceptions means that, whilst broad themes and theories can be drawn from interviews, to view these experiences as 'queer experiences' would be reductive and ineffective. Therefore, for the purpose of understanding different motivations behind the queer street art movement, whilst thematic saturation could never be reached, the in-depth analysis of a smaller sample of interviews can still produce reliable results. A key limitation of this research design, however, is that it does not include participants without a social media presence. Due to the anonymous nature of street art, it would be difficult to find and interview such artists, and there would inevitably be ethical questions surrounding the use of their

work without consent. However, further research would undoubtedly benefit from exploring whether the motivations of artists who do not document their work on social media differs from those who do.

3.3 Artist introductions

Daniel Albanese (TheDustyRebel)

Dusty, a photographer and filmmaker based in New York City, gained a worldwide following of his documentation of queer street art. He also creates politically and socially active street art, such as the 'Resistance is Queer' ad takeover, featuring photographs of queer activists [Figure 1]. As part of his ongoing production of a documentary on queer street art, he has interviewed a vast array of queer street artists, making his insight into the motivations of street artists invaluable. Many of the participants interviewed for this study attributed the growing visibility of queer street art as a 'movement' to Daniel's extensive documentation of it.



Figure 1: TheDustyRebel. 18th June 2019. *Resistance is Queer*. [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/queerstreetart/>

Bludog10003

Based in New York City and Portland, Bludog creates socially active street art which previously included themes such as occupying Wall Street in the 2000s. Combining social activism with his queer self-identification, Bludog uses stickers, such as his iconic 'you are not alone' sticker [Figure 2], to react to events in queer present and past history. He also creates stickers that celebrate queer icons, such as Klaus Nomi [Figure 3].



Figure 2 (left): Bludog10003. 25th September 2019. *You are not alone*. [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/bludog10003/>

Figure 3 (right): Bludog10003. 11th December 2017. *#santaklausnomi #rip*. [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/bludog10003/>

Homo Riot

Curator of 'The Streets are Queer', Homo Riot is well-known for his overtly homoerotic style, such as the iconic depiction of two bearded men kissing [Figure 4]. He has been creating socially and politically active work under this moniker for over eleven years and is one of the most widely recognised figures within the queer street art community.



Figure 4: HomoRiot. 21st June 2019. *Silence Still = Death*. [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/homoriot/>

Jeremy Novy

Jeremy is an LA-based stencil artist, prominent within the queer street art movement, known for his stencils of koi fish on pavements which he has been creating for thirteen years [Figure 5]. Queer history also features in his work, such as his depictions of Divine, a famous drag queen who died in 1988 [Figure 6]. In his self-curated exhibition 'A History of Queer Street Art', he also paid tribute to many of the 'unofficial founding members' of the queer street art movement, such as Keith Haring (Towers 2018).



Figure 5 (left): JeremyNovy. 7th November 2019. *Big Fish for the Big Apple*. [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/jeremynovy/>

Figure 6 (right): JeremyNovy. 5th January 2020. *How Divine*. [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/jeremynovy/>

Jilly Ballistic

Based primarily in New York City subway stations, Jilly uses her queer perspective to comment on an extensive range of social and political issues and is known for her printed images of nuclear war [Figure 7]. Her work features queer undertones, and her representation of women (both cis and trans) brings visibility to a ‘much smaller demographic within the street art world’ (Towers 2018).





Figure 7: JillyBallistic/Lifeafterdeathstreet. 21st July 2019. *This is happening*. [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/jillyballistic/>

Little Ricky

Little Ricky is best known for SHEEP, a series of pink stamps which he began in 2013, inspired by Alexander McQueen's self-reference as a 'pink sheep', a nod to McQueen's identity as a gay man [Figure 8]. Little Ricky's work is deliberately playful, featuring positive messages, such as 'E(we) are ALL queer' [Figure 9].



Figure 8 (left): LittleRicky. 2nd November 2019. *Ewe are faaabulous!*. [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/littlericky001/>

Figure 9: LittleRicky. 19th February 2020. *E(we) are all queer*. [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/littlericky001/>

Paul Harfleet

Paul is the creator of ‘The Pansy Project’, planting or painting pansies at sites of homophobic and transphobic abuse, with the goal of transforming its association. He documents the pansies on social media, entitling the image after the abuse to reveal the discriminatory reality faced by the LGBTQ+ community [Figure 10]. Whilst he is based in London, ‘The Pansy Project America’ has taken his work to US locations, including New York, Washington and Kansas.





Figure 10: ThePansyProject. March 2018. *“If you faggots are still here when I come back, I’m gonna shoot you.”* 700 11th St. NW. Washington D.C. [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <http://www.thepansyproject.com/international-plantings>

Wokeface

Wokeface is a project created by a Portland-based muralist, which uses recognisably bright colour pallets, and the signature image of a smiling face with an eye on the forehead [Figure 11].



Figure 11: WokeFace. 27th January 2020. *Keep Growing.* [Online]. [Accessed 6th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/wokeface/>



Chapter 4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

RQ1. How far is the queer street art movement an internal exploration of identity?

Relating to RQ1, two themes were identified: 1) the artists do not use street art for their own identity exploration and 2) the artists depict their identity through their art, in order to interact with the queer community.

Firstly, ***when asked about the personal impact that creating queer street art has, none of the artists referenced an internal exploration of their identities.*** However, all the artists discussed how their identities impact the art they create. Little Ricky discussed his journey of self-exploration, towards self-identifying as ‘queer’ as opposed to ‘gay’, following the 2016 Orlando shooting at a gay nightclub. Whilst this occurred independently of his art, it affected how he creates and views it; he stated that, ‘as the series evolved... they stop being these gay sheep... they became *queer* sheep’. Similarly, Jeremy Novy discussed how he ‘wasn’t able to be gay’ growing up, but how queer street art is ‘empowering, and shows... I exist.’ Likewise, when discussing what his art has meant to him personally, Homo Riot explained that, ‘for the first few years, it... gave me a powerful sense of... who I was and who I wanted to be in a public setting.’ Thus, all three accounts disclose how, whilst the artists do not use queer street art to explore their own identities, its public setting empowers them to re-affirm and embrace their identities. However, Homo Riot, Jilly Ballistic and Bludog warned against viewing queer street artists solely under the gendered, sexual moniker that ‘queer’ is commonly aligned with. Similarly, Wokeface highlighted how it is important to understand that ‘although we are queer, that does not solely define us,’

due to the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives amongst those who identify as queer. However, some likenesses were mentioned; Jilly Ballistic highlighted how she uses the unique perspective arising from queer identities, stating that, 'I think there's... an undertone of empathy... It's because we go through the world seeing things differently, we experience different things. And that does impact our art.' Similarly, Homo Riot referred to a shared 'ideology' amongst queer people, highlighting how 'speaking from a queer perspective about all kinds of social ills is... really important,' including issues that are not unique to the queer community, such as inequalities faced by People of Colour. Bludog also highlighted how his own socially active character of street art has not always been specifically 'queer', but that his queer identity means that issues affecting the queer community inevitably arise prominently through his work. Overall, these accounts highlight how the artists' individual identities affect the unique perspectives that they bring to their art, but that they do not significantly use their art to facilitate their own self-exploration.

The second theme relating to identity was that **artists use street art to interact with the wider queer community**, encouraging them to explore, or embrace, their own identities. When asked what motivated their street art, Wokeface stated that they aim to 'communicate a message of self-love and acceptance', particularly to those identifying as LGBTQ+. Similarly, Little Ricky explained his belief that everyone is queer, due to the fact that everyone is different, and that these differences are what connects all of society. Dusty highlighted the pursuit of visibility as a primary goal connecting all within the queer street art movement. Confirming this, every artist referred to visibility as a key motivating factor, enabling them to express solidarity with the queer community. A key focus is on communicating this message to queer youths,

with Jilly Ballistic hoping to reassure ‘younger generations [that] they’re not alone in the world.’ Similarly, Bludog discussed how his ‘you are not alone’ sticker was created in response to a young gentleman committing suicide as a result of bullying, to show acceptance and solidarity with the queer community. He described a response that he received from a gay couple who were inspired to come out after seeing the sticker. Homo Riot also explained how his street art, originally created in opposition to the straight community, is now aimed at communicating and building community with other queer people, following messages that he received from queer people saying that his art had helped them. This interaction with their LGBTQ+ audience also inspires the artists to bring joy to the community. For example, Bludog uses stickers because they are ‘fun’ even for adults, and Little Ricky and Wokeface both stated that they avoid political street art, preferring humorous and colourful art. Another way that the artists interact with the LGBTQ+ community is through their depictions of queer history. Queer iconography is key in the street art created by Bludog and Jeremy Novy, both of whom described their illustrations of famous queer figures, including Divine and Klaus Nomi. Bludog discussed how the depiction of queer icons can signal to other queer people, commonly known as coding, stating that ‘if you’re not aware of who Divine is, it brings you no... reaction. It’s just a sticker of a fat woman screaming.’ This highlights how the artists draw on their queer identities to find points of connectivity with their LGBTQ+ audience. More recent queer history is also prevalent in Paul Harfleet’s work, with his pansies placed in areas where homophobia has taken place. He explained how he aimed to change queer people’s associations with the location, using his art to reclaim the space. When discussing his documentation of queer street art, Dusty stated that ‘you can’t leave it to someone else to write your history, because

most likely they won't,' explaining why the artists use different aspects of queer history to communicate with, and encourage, the wider queer community.

RQ2. How far is the queer street art movement an external form of resistance?

Whilst Little Ricky and Wokeface avoid politically active art, Dusty's perception is that 'all queer expression is a... revolutionary act.' From the interviews, two forms of resistance were evident: 1) resistance to the dominance of heteronormativity through education and 2) resistance against hierarchical institutions and structures.

A common goal among the artists is to ***resist heteronormativity by providing a counter-narrative to the dominant societal discourse and beliefs***. Hence, the visibility sought by the artists aims to normalise queer imagery within the public sphere. Jeremy Novy stressed the importance of depicting queer history in the street where 'everyone sees it... [and is] forced to have queer visibility,' due to the dearth of queer visibility in school. However, it was clear that the artists do not exclude those who do not identify as queer, instead conducting resistance to heteronormativity through societal education, utilising their public setting to generate discussion surrounding queer issues. Paul Harfleet emphasised the importance of taking his work outside of queer spaces, to places with a 'heteronormative cultural centre', exhibiting the reality of homophobic and transphobic experiences to the straight community. All the artists referenced the importance of placing queer imagery in the streets, due to the large demographic that it reaches and impacts, evident in Little Ricky's statement that 'whether [the public] know its... queer or not doesn't matter, it's that they're seeing it.' When asked about censorship, the majority of responses mentioned how overtly 'queer' artwork is more likely to get removed or defaced. Homo Riot described how his

work can ‘trigger reaction,’ stating that the two bearded men kissing regularly gets scratched out [Figure 12]. Similarly, Jilly Ballistic described how her work promoting the LGBTQ+ community gets removed quickly ‘more often than not’. This resistance is also targeted at the street art community itself, which Bludog referred to as being a ‘boys’ club’ when he first started creating street art. Jeremy Novy and Homo Riot both discussed how, whilst they have not experienced direct homophobia from the heterosexual street art community, they had experienced censorship by other street artists. However, many of the artists explained the positive impact that defacement can have, due to its potential to generate discussion. For example, Bludog stated that, even if a reaction to his work is negative, ‘if they go to work and have a conversation about it, maybe it’ll change somebody’s mind.’ Homo Riot also discussed how the energy taken by someone to deface his art is, in many cases, ‘gratifying.’ Therefore, even when the reaction is negative, it is clear that the artists use queer street art to both normalise queer imagery, and to generate public discussions, to provide more visibility to their counter-narratives.

Whilst most dialogue focused on resistance through education, another form of resistance became evident; ***the artists’ resistance against the hierarchical institutions and structures that they hold responsible for discrimination and inequality.*** Jilly Ballistic, Bludog and Dusty referenced the illegal nature of most street art, stating that the medium is a key part of the message. Jilly Ballistic discussed how ‘bucking authority’ enables artists to use their voices without the need for permission. Bludog identified resistance as a main motivation for his work, noting how street art is an ideal medium because ‘you don’t need money, you don’t need access, you don’t need political power. You just have to have a voice and an opinion.’ He also expressed

the prospect that his work could inspire others to create art that expresses their own opinions as another key motivation. Similarly, Jeremy Novy highlighted the political messages inherent in a lot of queer street art, rendering it unlikely to be approved for galleries, or more likely to be censored by commissioners. In contrast, however, when asked about their experience as a muralist, Wokeface stated that they had never experienced censorship, but explained that this could be since they live in Portland, a 'relatively liberal city'. Bludog expressed his support for queer murals but disclosed that the reality is different in more conservative areas, stating that 'I'd love queer murals to show up... in Trump Country. That's not going to happen with murals, that *will* happen with street art'. Thus, the illegality of their art is important to many of the artists, due to the autonomy it provides. Every artist raised inequalities faced by the transsexual community as a key motivation, particularly following the global shift towards right-wing populism. For example, Bludog referenced the 2016 Presidential election as a point where his art became specifically focused on queer resistance. He explained how, whilst homophobia has always existed, its validation by the President and the lack of queer representation in the Senate, made queer resistance more crucial. Likewise, Jilly Ballistic discussed how the President's ability to pick 'extremely conservative' judges on a federal level puts the queer community in potential jeopardy. Whilst her work encompasses a variety of socially active themes, she stated that she felt a 'special responsibility' to represent the interests of gay women and the queer community; the freedom to respond immediately (and publicly) to Civil Rights infringements is her way of holding the administration to account. Similarly, Dusty and Jeremy Novy both discussed how they provide visibility for issues that 'gatekeepers', such as politicians and the media, ignore. This is not limited to LGBTQ+ issues but also other social injustices, such as poverty. A final common feature of the artists'

resistance to inequality was their opposition of capitalism, evident in Homo Riot's reference to his 'Eat the Rich' campaign. Similarly, Dusty's description of his 'Resistance is Queer' ad takeover, which replaced advertisements with photographs of queer activists, centred around his desire to reclaim spaces within the city that were previously reserved for corporations, reacting to the 'straight-washing' of Pride. When asked why she bases her work in the New York City Subway, Jilly Ballistic raised a similar point, stating that 'everything from architecture to advertisements, are something I can... manipulate and work with.' Thus, the artists resist multiple structural inequalities, through their defiance of the law and creation of counter-advertisement.



Figure 12: HomoRiot. 24th May 2019. *Isn't it crazy how homophobe haters just can't stand the kiss.* [Online]. [Accessed 24th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/homoriot/>

4.2 Discussion

The literature review highlighted scholarly contention over whether artists create street art for the purpose of identity exploration or resistance. Consequently, this study divided the factors into two research questions. However, whilst the context of creation clearly affects the artists' motivations and messages it is clear that, regarding the queer street art movement, the binary separations of these motivations obscures their interrelated nature. Resultantly, Scott's theory of infrapolitics, which combines aspects of identity and resistance, is central to an analysis of the interviews.

As mentioned previously, the potential impacts of infrapolitical street art are two-fold. Firstly, it ***engages with its audience, inspiring resistance by connecting like-minded individuals*** (Scott 1992). Whilst studies in the literature review explored individual and community impacts of art, many present identity without addressing resistance (Brewster 2014; Matarasso 1997). Instead, some presented art as a way to *reduce* resistance due to their contexts, studying prisons and disadvantaged communities (Williams 1997). However, Cassar's (2007; 2015) studies did link self-expression and resistance, showing how the students' discussions surrounding identity undermined authoritative hierarchies, a point supported by Dusty's statement that 'all queer expression is a... revolutionary act'. Fobear's (2017) account of the significance of resiliency in queer history aligns with Bourbeau and Ryan's (2017) relation of resilience and resistance, emphasising how the lack of overt protest by the queer community does not signify agreement with mainstream norms. Therefore, whilst queer street art differs from that created during military conflict or revolution, the artists' engagement with the wider queer community is itself a resistant act against another form of domination; heteronormativity. None of the artists posed self-

exploration as a motivation behind their work, potentially because street art is characteristically created for public consumption (Pinder 2008). Instead, the artists' individual identities impact the distinct types of art that they create. A central aspect of this involves empowering the wider queer community. Bludog and Jeremy Novy both touched on issues they faced growing up, illustrating how the artists' experiences questioning their identities incentivises them to assist others. This is also shown by Jilly Ballistic's stated focus on queer youths which concurs with the Human Rights Campaign report (2019) highlighting how LGBTQ+ youths experience a disproportionate level of assault in schools and from elected officials.

The artists emphasised how the public location of street art is crucial to the dissemination of their messages. Similarly, Cassar (2007; 2015) highlighted how the public forum of the girls' bathroom enabled them to resist heteronormativity by sharing their own identities. This could explain why the results of this research diverge from studies on arts education in prisons, where the inmates create art for personal use (Peaker and Vincent 1990). The artists use a variety of methods to empower the queer community, including the use of 'coding'. In his description of infrapolitics, Scott referred to a 'politics of disguise,' which engages with the desired community in public, whilst shielding the meaning of messages. Similarly, when discussing the depiction of queer icons in their work, Bludog and Jeremy Novy highlighted how the images signal to others within the queer community, whilst meaning little to those who do not engage with queer history. As Jeremy Novy stated, the aim is to create a 'visual safe space' for queer people, reiterated by Bludog in his reasoning behind the 'you are not alone' sticker. Again, the importance of the public setting was evident in Homo Riot's, Bludog's and Dusty's references to positive responses from other queer people

empowered by their work, as a key motivation. Whilst Little Ricky and Wokeface avoid political art, instead sharing messages of self-acceptance and humour, the Painted Stories mural highlights how art created by LGBTQ+ peoples can be political by nature, even without easily decipherable messages (Fobear 2017). Thus, depictions of humour and positive queer history are still political, displaying solidarity with the queer community. The artists' responses diverged from studies in the literature review focusing on the role of art in creating a collective identity for a geographically located community, such as a prison or neighbourhood. Due to the ambiguity of the term 'queer,' the artists did not reference creating collective identity as a motivation. Instead, Little Ricky highlighted how it is the differences within the community which connects it. Thus, a key finding of this research was that the artists' goals are not restricted to community building between those who identify as LGBTQ+ in a solely gendered or sexual sense. Instead, it creates solidarity and depicts acceptance of all identities, encouraging people to accept their individual identities. As Peteet (1996) argues, the artists are not only publicly depicting their own narratives but are also inviting an 'active response' from their audience, evident in Bludog's statement that he hopes to inspire others to create street art, empowering them to voice their own opinions. Whilst their messages of self-acceptance and inclusivity are intended to encourage the queer community to embrace their identities, an inevitable effect of this is the resistance to heteronormativity.

Secondly, infrapolitical street art ***grants the artists opportunities to voice, and instigate public debate surrounding, their opinions and identities*** (Cocke 2004; Olivero 2014). The use of street art to publicly embrace their identities was a recurrent theme throughout the interviews. Whilst the artists did not mention self-exploration of

identity, Homo Riot and Jeremy Novy discussed how street art reaffirms their identities, supporting Ferrell's argument that 'the invisible' use street art to 'make themselves seen' (Schneider 2006; 121). By incorporating their personal styles and messages into their work, they depict the plethora of identities and experiences that fall under the umbrella term of 'queer'. Wokeface's point that the term 'queer' does not define the artists supports the arguments of Stanley (2007), Adichie (2009) and Fobear (2017), who identified the importance of providing visibility to the vast array of perspectives within a group or movement. However, this affirmation of identity differs from the references to 'presence-identifying' graffiti within the literature review (Twiddle 2003; Fisher and Radtke 2014). Whilst those studies centred around affirmation of 'masculinity,' the intentions behind queer street art are directly opposed. An explanation for this was offered by Bludog, when he referenced how queer street artists differ from, and challenge, the heterosexual street art scene. Queer street art also provides artists with the opportunity to comment on social and political issues that affect themselves and the wider society. Noticeably, in most interviews, the artists stated that they create queer street art primarily as a reaction to events, structures or institutions that they perceive to perpetuate inequalities. Paul Harfleet and Bludog both discussed how they have used queer art to react to homophobic incidents and, similarly, Homo Riot explained how his art originated out of anger at the straight community. This empowers the artists to speak out against injustices that they, or other LGBTQ+ people, face. Aside from homophobic events, the artists' references to resisting capitalism were particularly interesting, since the theme is only briefly touched on by one scholar in the literature review, Marche (2012a). Dusty's 'Resistance is Queer' ad takeover, created in reaction to the 'straightwashing' of Pride highlights how, by appropriating areas that corporations usually dominate, the artists

question ownership of spaces and challenge corporatisation (Pinder 2008). Jilly Ballistic's use of advertisement spaces in the Subway supports Hebdige's (1979) reference to the appropriation of commodities by subcultures as a symbol of defiance. It is clear that the illegal medium of queer street art is a fundamental part of its message for these artists, as it signals defiance against structural inequality. The challenge to authority also exhibits opposition to the silencing of underrepresented groups in society. As Ferrell (1996) stated, the illegality of street art represents an overt defiance of the laws which silence or subordinate minority groups. Thus, whilst their resistance to heteronormativity within society focuses more on education, the artists depict a more hostile approach to the institutions that actively reinforce the domination of heteronormativity. However, one point of divergence from Scott's account of infrapolitics is that some of the artists, such as Dusty, Paul Harfleet and Jeremy Novy, do not maintain their anonymity, despite the illegality of some of their work. This could be because, whilst their work defies the law, they do not face the military enforcement that occurs in the contexts within the literature review, such as the West Bank, or the physical subordination of slave-master relationships analysed by Scott (1992). This affords the artists the opportunity to comment on issues that do not solely affect the queer community. Many of the artists discussed how they use their visibility to publicly comment on diverse issues affecting the wider society, such as Jilly Ballistic's recent focus on the administration's reaction to coronavirus [Figure 13]. This challenges the administration, holding it to account by providing alternative discourses, thus emphasising the democratic potential of street art (Cocke 2004; Olivero 2014). This point is emphasised by Bludog's references to the autonomy of creation afforded to street artists, since their work is not commissioned and does not require permission to be put up. His reference to the difficulties and censorship faced

by queer muralists in more conservative states, exhibits why the illegality of street art is necessary to allow the artists to effectively and freely share their messages. He further emphasised how street art is accessible to those who do not have money or power; thus, whilst there is no outward political protest by the queer community, the creation of street art enables them to constantly and publicly question and resist inequalities.

Finally, a crucial finding of this research was the artists' focus on inclusivity and education when they referenced resistance to the dominance of heteronormativity. This finding challenges the argument of Muggleton et al. (n.d.), which poses resistance at all levels as an act to collectively identify against, and exclude, those outside the subculture. A possible explanation for this is that, whilst the LGBTQ+ community are undoubtedly marginalised, the characteristic inclusivity of the group generates alternative motivations to subcultures who deliberately exclude those who do not identify with the group. Olivero's (2004) and Cocke's (2014) observations that street art empowers the artists to create a social commentary are supported by the artists' themselves, many of whom referenced a similar goal. This was especially clear in Paul Harfleet's explanation of the importance of taking his art outside of traditionally queer spaces, exhibiting a willingness to engage with the straight community and open dialogues surrounding the continuation of homophobia and transphobia. Schneider's (2006) analysis of interviews with street artists drew similar conclusions, highlighting how street art is an invitation for interaction and discussion. Thus, whilst Schneider's work focuses on all genres of street art, the fact that his research also utilised interviews suggests a commonality of intention amongst street artists who aim to involve themselves in public discussions. Whilst the artists sometimes use coded work

to communicate with other queer people, artists such as Homo Riot also use easily understood, and more overtly 'queer' messages, despite the fact that this work is more likely to get defaced. The importance of generating discussion in relation to sexuality, even if it is negative, is supported by Cassar's studies on schools (2007; 2015). Similar to Cassar's analysis, as Dusty stated, all of the artists aim to increase queer visibility on the streets, highlighting their goal of normalising 'queerness' to the public. The underlying theme from the interviews was that, in terms of the general public, the artists do not resist through defiance or exclusion, but through education. This diverges from the reflections by scholars such as Macdonald (2001) and Ferrell (1996) who argue that street art is used to collectively identify against mainstream society. This could be because the analyses of infrapolitics and street art in the literature review focused on divisions within contexts of more antagonistic conflicts, whereas the dominance of heterosexuality occurs daily, but in less overtly conflictual circumstances. Thus, unlike the artists on the West Bank or Egypt, queer street artists in the US face a more subtle, structural form of oppression and therefore are not in conflict with the heterosexual community itself, but instead resist the heteronormativity that underlies society. Overall, whilst Muggleton et al. (n.d.) perceive resistance to either be passive or active, these results expose an additional dimension to resistance, one which is significantly shaped by identity.



Figure 13: JillyBallistic. 10th April 2020. *They said it couldn't happen here.* [Online]. [Accessed 24th April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/jillyballistic/>

Chapter 5. Conclusion

5.1 Limitations and further research

The artists interviewed for this study have all been creating queer street art for many years and consequently, it was unlikely that the artists would observe any current self-exploration resulting from their art. Whilst there is scope to explore artists who have more recently begun creating queer street art, it is not certain that their interviews would draw different results. Little Ricky's journey of self-exploration highlights how the artists' identities have not all remained fixed whilst they have been creating their art. Whilst the artists' own identities may fluctuate, this occurs independently of, and is reflected through, their art. This observation is potentially due to fact that the artists are creating street art for public consumption rather than for their own self-exploration and thus, it is not guaranteed that interviewing 'newer' queer street artists would draw different responses. However, further research would certainly benefit from the inclusion of a broader demographic of artists, such as transsexual artists, as the artists' references to the current discrimination faced by the transsexual community highlights the valuable insight that they could bring. Additionally, whilst this study focused on the queer street art movement in the US, a comparison study of queer street artists under different political regimes would engage with alternative insights from those in countries where LGBTQ+ rights are further, or less, vulnerable. For example, interviewing Brazilian queer street artist Suriani would undoubtedly provide an interesting reflection of the nature of his work under Jair Bolsonaro, a 'self-described homophobe' (Gregory 2019).

Furthermore, the sampling method utilised in this study, approaching the artists via Instagram, necessarily forgoes the opportunity to gather information from queer street artists who do not document their work on social media. Further research would benefit from replicating Ferrell's methodological approach, situating himself within the community of street artists, but applying it to the more specific domain of the queer street art movement. This would allow insight into the motivations of artists who create street art for public consumption, but do not document it online, which could draw different responses regarding anonymity and motivations.

5.2 Concluding remarks

The primary aim of this research was to explore how far the artists use the queer street art movement either as an internal exploration of identity, or an external form of resistance. Whilst the research questions divided these factors into separate entities, the artists' responses exposed their interrelated nature. This provides an explanation for the variety of conclusions within the literature review regarding the societal impacts and motivations of art. The artists' individual identities significantly impact the forms of resistance that they engage with, resulting in the plethora of styles and messages within the movement; simultaneously, resistance forms a key part of queer identities. Identifying as queer in itself is a form of resistance, and many of the artists perceive resistance to be a key element of queer street art. Therefore, the pertinence of Scott's theory of infrapolitics in relation to the queer street art movement is clear; there is no overt protest by the queer community, but this does not indicate compliance with heteronormativity, or systemic and structural inequalities. Whilst scholars have drawn on infrapolitical street art in relation to active protests or revolutions, this research aimed to fill a theoretical gap, by focusing on a context where domination is not

militarily enforced. A key finding of this research is that a significant element of resistance by the queer street artists focuses on education and visibility of LGBTQ+ imagery. This differs from previous studies, where infrapolitical street art portrays explicit antagonism towards the dominant group, due to the contexts within which they are created. However, whilst the artists clearly challenge the structural dominance of heteronormativity through education and visibility, the antagonistic theme present in previously studied street art is also prevalent in the more politically and socially active street art. Many of the artists challenge the institutions and systems that they perceive to be responsible for inequality, by appropriating advertisement spaces and unapologetically claiming spaces within the city, symbolising active defiance against mainstream laws. This aligns more closely with the conclusions of previous scholars exploring infrapolitical street art (Taş 2017, Marche 2012a). However, a crucial implication of these findings is the contribution of an additional dimension to Scott's theory of infrapolitics, highlighting how infrapolitical resistance does not always take the form of hostility towards the dominant group, but can, in relative peacetime, also occur through alliances and dialogue. With right-wing populism burgeoning across the Western world, threatening the agency of marginalised communities, it has never been more crucial to explore alternative modes of political and social commentary. This is necessary to comprehend the nature of political struggle continuing beneath the visible surface of politics and society. The queer street art movement, which is gaining increasing traction due to ease of documentation and increasing connectivity between the artists, can provide a significant insight into the 'hidden transcript' of the queer community. The overall findings of this research present little doubt as to the significant role that both identity *and* resistance play in the queer street art movement.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Facetime interview with [REDACTED] (DustyRebel)

Interviewer: [REDACTED]

Interviewee: [REDACTED] (dustyrebel)

Date/time: 26/01/2020, 3pm (GMT)

[AD]

Let's get started! So, what would you sort of say is the essence of the Queer Street Art Movement, that sort of connects the artists together despite the messages and styles being so different?

[DA]

Let me think about that for a second. It's interesting, when I started talking to different artists, I think the one thing that is common between all the artists in terms of what their motivations are. A lot of it has to do with visibility. And so this idea of either being seen in the street or being seen by others who would recognize what you're creating. So there's a lot of visibility not just to perform for the straight world, but to have their existence seen by the world, but also by other queer people. A lot of them don't often, no one assumes that they're the only queer artists, but a lot of them don't know about other queer street artists. And so that to me is really interesting because they are, so when they're making this work it's not, you know, it's not because it's the 'hot cool' thing to make. There is a political, well, I would say there's always a political angle to any queer expression, because all queer expression is a political act and it is a revolutionary act. So by default, there's a political nature to the work.

But I think. What's interesting is the artists that I've documented all are doing, all doing, well not *all* doing, but there is you know, you have artists that are doing homoerotic work, you have artists that are doing more political work, you have artists that are, you know, it breaks into different things. But the core of it is about. I think at its core, it's about declaring your existence and being seen and being heard, taking public space. I mean, I would argue queer liberation from the start has been about taking public space. So queer street art is a natural extension of that.

[AD]

And just, sort of, on the topic in space. Do you think that, sort of, straight and heterosexual and cisgender 'allies' can be involved in the Queer Street Art movement, or do you think it's something that should be reserved specifically for, as a queer space for people who identify as queer?

[DA]

Oh, you opened a can of worms there! I'll say I'll say I'll say this. Last summer in New York we had the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, and 50 murals, at least 50 murals went up, that were supposed to celebrate pride. A vast majority of them were done by straight people. And to me, that is extremely problematic. It was minority. I mean, I could probably count on maybe both hands or less, how many queer identifying artists were involved in that, and for me, several years into this project exploring how come we don't know more about queer street artists? How come queer street artists don't get more murals and these these legal expressions? And then you have this festival that's like, OK, well, that's interesting, you're gonna celebrate a very important milestone in queer history, and it was mostly straight people. The murals, hardly, I mean, it's one thing for queer people to code our work to speak to each other with our own language. It's another thing for straight people to code or not even, you know, like, oh, well, it's an abstract rainbow somewhere in there, it's like, no. The point of this is you're

hiding the gayness so that it's not upsetting to the public. And that was really a problem. And, you know, you can pick up The New York Times article where the curator himself who says that it doesn't really matter if people are gay doing the murals. It was just very strange. So my point is what I tell straight friends of mine during pride last summer who wanted to do do work or were given a wall or they're like, oh, I was thinking of painting a private mural. And I was like, you know, if you really want to do something, give the wall over to a queer person. Like pride, an allies role in pride is to make space for queer people. That is your role. Your role is not to have five hundred of your employees from some bank take up a huge space in the parade that hides queer people like, you're, I always tell straight people that their job around pride is to give voice to queer people. So you know what, when my friend said that to me. I said, suppose you got a gay kid, right? Then write I love my gay kid, if you don't, I would give the wall up.

So I'm a little you know, I think my my view of these things are a little different, perhaps, because, at least in New York, muralism has very much eaten the street art scene. And muralism is a very different thing to street art. And I think that anyone who's looking at street art in general, I think it's very important to understand the difference between muralism and street art. Muralism is going to be curated. It's, there's a complicated relationship with gentrification. There's a, there's always going to be some sort of. Are often going to be some sort of censorship that occurs with the mural. Whereas street art is an artist's ability to take the streets uncensored. As they want, where they want. And so there's it's going to have a lot more room for, subversion, and and for anything. Because you literally are just going out there doing it. So muralism is a very complicated thing, it's very much eaten the street art scene. It's one of the things that motivated me to do this project because most of the artists, most queer street artists that I found do illegal work. You know, it's very rare that they're murals. I mean, there's gay muralists, but their work is not necessarily, the content isn't necessarily queer. And there's a very small handful of queer identified muralist who make queer work, like David Puck whose also from, he's from Wales. But his work is very clear and he's only a muralist. So that's it. Did I answer your question or did I go off?

[AD]

Yeah, no, you did, that's really interesting! And so obviously you've said that you've been documenting street art in general for a while, and sort queer street art for the last few years. Have you found that the movements changed or evolved in any way since you started documenting it all?

[DA]

Oh, yeah. I mean. I think social media has had a massive effect on street art. I mean, you could, it was almost like overnight. I mean, when Banksy came back to New York in 2013, I believe in 'Better out than In'. He came here for a month and he put up work. That was also around the time that Instagram started to come really big. And I think overnight it was as if people realized, you know, they're obviously chasing Banksy around New York City with their phones, that was Instagram. But overnight, there became like a thousand street art Instagram accounts that just didn't exist before that. And so Instagram as a platform for street art became really, really huge. And at least here in New York, but, you know, I'll say at least I noticed in other cities, London, for example, you know, they've become the hotspots. So all the street artists put on the hotspots because you know you're going to get Instagrammed. So, you go to Brick Lane because you know that you're going to, someone's going to Instagram your art. New York has the same thing. So so the change in street art I think becomes performing for social media.

And so what does that mean? If you're performing for social media it means that maybe you're making work that is more clickbait-ish, so you see a lot of street art that relies on celebrity. And there's a kind of vapidness that is kind of encroached into street art or, it's like, OK, so it's a picture of Prince or David Bowie. But like why? What's the purpose? When you literally just

took someone's photo and you maybe had a little color to it, but there's a vapidness to it that I don't really like in terms of that evolution in street art. And I think that, so when you have performing for social media and then on top of it, you have social media platforms censoring queer artists and queer art. There becomes this thing where the street art than then even as the illegal street art becoming censoring itself more to make sure it can be put on Instagram. And a lot of artists are being censored on social media platform. So it's it's like this kind of, it's a very it's really interesting to me and something I've been exploring a lot because I think that there's a very important relationship there. And I think that the censorship, but at the same time, it's how these artists are finding each other. So I created the queer street art Instagram account. And a lot of these artists are finding each other and people who were like, I knew that I couldn't be the only gay or trans street artist, now know each other.

[AD]

That actually answers my next question a bit! So obviously, you sort of talk a little bit about the negative impacts of censorship on social media and on the streets. But do you think any positives can be drawn for it? So I'm sort of getting this question from, I know one of your interviews. You talked about that this wall that you did, the 'Pay it no mind' wall, and it got sort of defaced *really* quickly, and how do you think that the reactions to this kind of censorship can have a positive effect on the movement?

[DA]

Well, so there's a couple of things. First, I would say about censorship, before I move on to that other part. The upside of censorship, I guess you could say, is that it can sometimes force artists to be a little more creative. You could argue that the Hollywood Hays Code that limited what you could put in film made Hollywood film better because you had to code and hide everything, you know, all sorts of things. And so it made it made it a little more, it had to be a lot more interesting in how you were going to make a film subversive and get past the censors. So, there is there is a sort of censorship on social media that can create more interesting art.

In terms of art on the street. So, what you are talking about, like what happened to the mural, so what what I ended up doing was I wanted to curate a mural for pride, this was before I knew that the Stonewall murals were happening. And I thought it'd be really cool to do a mural in a very prominent spot in New York City, that was unapologetically queer and just allow artists to do whatever they want. And I brought in Siriani, was originally a Brazilian artist who was living in Paris when I met him years ago and now he's in Canada, and Homo Riot. The two artists whose work, when I found it, inspired me to start this project. So I thought it would be cool for them to work together. And, yeah the mural got destroyed like immediately. Interestingly enough, that that graffiti writer claims that he didn't destroy it for, he wasn't motivated by homophobia or transphobia. He claims that he just saw the wall and bombed it. But queer work is very often targeted on the street, being destroyed. It's crossed out, it's scratched out and the level aggression. It's not just like, you can take a spray and just black it out. But instead it's like scraped and, you know, wherever the men are kissing or women are kissing. So there's there's, work is very often targeted on the street, that has a queer, that is overtly queer, or that you can tell it's queer. So, yeah, definitely. I mean, yeah, I was not happy when we woke up the next morning. I mean it hadn't even been twelve hours, so it's like, are you kidding?

[AD]

It's quite interesting how graffiti artists like you would expect them to sort of be a community just in general with street artists. Since, you know, even non-queer artists are kind of doing something that's kind of outside of what the regular society 'allows'.

[DA]

Well, you know, graffiti is, graffiti in its pure form, you know, like not a mural that's sprayed with graffiti, but graffiti writers, taggers, you know, it's it's it's a different thing. It's not, we've

been able to you know, street art has been able to be housebroken to be turned into murals. Graffiti doesn't, isn't really housebroken. It's a more rebellious thing. And there's a natural tension between graffiti writers and street artists, and particularly graffiti writers and muralists, because murals often go up on spots that used to be a graffiti hotspot, you know a spot that used to be filled with loads of graffiti. You go to the business owner and you say, hey, we can paint this beautiful wall. We'll switch it out every month and it'll stop this graffiti tag. So there's already a natural tension between graffiti writers and murals. So, yeah.

[AD]

And so obviously, we've sort of touched on it, but you're involved in a lot of collaboration with queer street artists. So I saw the 'Streets are Queer' show and this wall, and your documentary. And why do you think it's important that sort of queer street artists collaborate in this way?

[DA]

Well. I think that one of the most important things queer people do is create community with each other. We, that is how, that is how we have survived. That's how we have attained all sorts of rights and move forward because we, we build community and, you know there's community building within the queer community, particularly the generations before us who had to organize from Stonewall or the AIDS crisis. Queer people became very good at political organizing and community building. And so that that dynamic is a very important dynamic to have as community because, you know, we pop up in random places and then sometimes you don't have anything. Now the Internet, you can find people. When I was a kid. It's like you had whatever weirdo lived in your town and that was it.

So one of the things you just brought up is like over the summer. So as I was just talking about with the straight washing of pride, the corporatization of pride or however you want to describe that kind of thing, these murals that were going up, that were all straight forward, you know, it was kind of getting under my skin, and I thought, you know, well, first of all in 2016 I started something called 'Resistance is Queer', which are my poster ad takeover. So they're posts. Resistance is Queer are ad takeovers that feature photographs of queer activists I photographed over the years. And then I place them into phone booths, removing ads and taking that space with them. And it was something I started a couple of years ago. And during Pride for the 50th Stonewall, I decided, OK, rather than get all worked up about straight people getting to do murals, why don't we do what we do best, which is just take space? And so I did a series of my ad takeovers, which all featured historically important activists throughout the history that I had photographed from. And put them into historically important spots. And then I, another ad takeover collective called Art in Ad Places, who I'm friends with were like, well, we'll give you the platform for the month, bring in artists from around the world. So that's where I decided this would be kind of cool. Let's bring in actual queer identifying artists, you know, lesbians, trans people, and have them make their work and then again, we'll put them in very historically important spots.

So, an example would be this was a lesbica feminista, who's from Brazil, does this really interesting collage. It's sort of like, it'll take a historic, maybe painting probably painted by a man of a woman. But then she'll like juxtapose it with like a historic photo of two women together that maybe are kissing or something. And there's something about it that kind of, is clearly lesbian, but it's also clearly from a lesbian gaze, which is also interesting. So anyway, her piece we put that by Henrietta Hudson, which is the oldest and one of last lesbian bars in New York City. So like everything was put in places that were important. So, Siriani's portrait of Marsha P. Johnson at the Hudson piers, which is where a lot of trans people hung out and it's a very important place to queer people. It's also where her body was found. So each piece was put into historically important places. So for me, I thought, one, this is community building, it allows these artists to learn about each other, know about each other. And it sets a marker about our history. And to make, to make street art something that has a purpose that educates

and and isn't just painting some abstract, sort of rainbow, that had a hashtag that said 'Pride50' or something.

[AD]

Cool, so just my last question, you've obviously said about how, what sort of queer street art does for the artists that are involved in the movement. But what does the movement do for you personally? How does it help you develop as a person?

[DA]

Yeah, I mean, it's interesting. I mean, I started, the things I document I don't necessarily document because I was a super fan. I often talk about how I studied anthropology in undergrad and a lot of what I'm motivated to do is sort of, I would say is, anthropologically based. I'm very curious why people are doing something. And I want to understand the whole context, the language, what's happening. So partly as a motivator, my own personal curiosity about people and what they're doing. And, but I'm also, you know, I'd been documenting street art for so long and I'd kind of gotten a little bored with what's gone on with street art, I found that it's not been as interesting, it's not been as subversive. For me, these artists are doing something that's really interesting. It's subversive, it's political. It has power to it. And it's not motivated necessarily by fame or fortune or to make money, you know, you're not going to become rich doing this. So the risk that they're taking to be heard. I find really interesting. And I also think it's essential to self-document as a community, particularly queer people or any people, any minority group has to self-document. You can't leave it to someone else to write your history. Because most likely they won't. And so for me, when I realized there were so many artists doing this and that no one was really capturing their stories or writing about this in any substantial way, I felt a particular responsibility to do it. I was really curious about it, and the more I dug, the more I felt, well, these are stories that need to be told. And they're really interesting. And they're often times using shared art in a really effective way, politically, that you don't see often.

So I guess that's my motivations. And I want to tell stories that are haven't been told, but also they're important to be told and to capture it, because if you don't capture them, no one else will. You know, a good example would be, so one of the artists I documented in Copenhagen, ETES. When I found him, the only thing that I found that he existed was a Vice Copenhagen article about him. I couldn't find anything else on him. And he's been painting subway trains in Copenhagen with these very, in your face, gay imagery. It'll be like a rainbow was like a sea of cum and assholes with like cum spewing out of them and like, you know, the dicks, as the doors close going into an ass, I mean, it was cartoonish and whimsical. But it's so shocking when you see it, it's like how I have never heard about it. And then I think, well, if that Vice article didn't exist, would I know that he's been doing this work? And it's not like he just started it. He's been doing it for years. So that to me is an example of like, who else is out there doing interesting work that just, you know, if the gatekeepers don't talk about them. How do you know about them? So that to me is interesting.

Appendix 2: Telephone interview with Jilly Ballistic

Interviewer: [REDACTED] e

Interviewee: [REDACTED]

Date/time: 26/01/2020, 5pm (GMT)

[AD]

OK. So just to start off with, how do you identify with the Queen Street Art movement?

[JB]

How do I identify with them? I suppose, you know, I'm just a fellow fellow gay artist just making work in the world and addressing, not only, not only issues that impact us but impact, just humanity, you know. And the greater society. So, I do feel like I have a responsibility to represent not only women, but like gay women and queer artists, I feel like there's a special responsibility there. Yeah.

[AD]

And what do you think is, sort of, the essence of, sort of, queer street art that connects artists together within it, despite obviously their messages and styles being really different?

[JB]

I think there's like an undertone of empathy and there's a uniqueness. I think that's just something that individuals of the LGBTQ+ community, that's just a part of us. There's this uniqueness. It's because we go through the world seeing things differently. We experience of different things. And that does impact our art. So it's a little, I guess there's a little queerness to it! There's some underlying difference. And it's and it's gorgeous. And it's it's it's different from mainstream artists. There's just, there's just something to it. Maybe subconsciously we put into our artwork that makes it really stand up.

[AD]

And do you think that, sort of, cisgender and heterosexual 'allies' can be part of the movement and help within the movement, or do you think it should be reserved as a space for people who identify as queer or LGBTQ+?

[JB]

Well, you need allies. To get things done, to move revolutions forward. Straight allies are definitely key, especially in legislation and government and things of that nature. It's good for them also to know when to step back from the platform and give space and time and reserve that platform, like know when to shut up basically and raise up the voices of the people in a particular community. That goes for gay rights, it goes for Black Lives Matter, it goes for the trans community. You know, it's a dance and you have to know when to step in to help and know when to step back and like raise up their voices.

[AD]

And sort of more specifically about your art. It's obviously quite political. What kind of impact do you hope to have both on the LGBTQ+ community and also on society as a whole through your art?

[JB]

I think the impact on the LGBTQ community, I think I want. Like younger kids, younger generations to know they're not alone in in the world or even just making art that something as radical as street art and graffiti, you're accepted there too. And their voice is definitely needed. It's, you know, street art and graffiti that was like the first Twitter, it was the first Tweet. And it was the first way to react and to like feel like you're involved and you're gonna make a difference and that you exist, that kind of thing.



And I guess I guess it goes for society as a whole. Like we're all especially now we're all going through exceptional, exceptional turmoil in terms of government and our environment. And, not only are you stressed, but a lot of people feel like they don't have control and they feel alone. And I think, especially through art, people can like look at the same art piece and feel a camaraderie like, oh, this person understands me. Let me show other people and we can all talk about it or have a laugh about it or something. You know, even if it's just something as simple as laughter, you know. So I think that's what I want my work to do is just like let people know they're not isolated. You know, in what's going on right now.

[AD]

You just kind of briefly touched on the political scene that's going on at the moment. How does the current political scene in the US and I guess elsewhere in the world, impact the queer street art movement?

[JB]

Yeah. When, you know, when this dipshit was elected, sorry! There was a real, real huge concern. During the Obama administration there was a lot of forward momentum in legislation. You know, state-wide and federal. But with this this dirtbag, we kind of knew that that was in jeopardy. And and it's and it's true. He's picking judges on the federal level that are extremely conservative. And it it is going to affect our our community.

It's kind of scary when you like you look to The New York Times, The Washington Post and like it's not even the main headline. It's just like, you know, five pages in and a small font in the corner and says, like, 'something was rolled back today'. You know like a federal judge says the right you had 2015 doesn't apply in 2020. And that's where like my work would come in and I would see, you know like I'm getting this information just like everyone else in real time and like I feel like I could respond to it by making something and putting it in a public space to comment on it. You know, it's holding the administration to account. And if anyone else knows about it, just what happened. They like someone else knows about this. And then I can also educate other people like hey, this civil rights, this tiny little Civil Rights Act is being repealed. And, you know, I think it was just yesterday, it wasn't about the LGBT community, but it was something our Clean Water Act. It just like disappeared, like that was repealed. And sometimes things just happened so quickly that I didn't have time to respond. Yeah, that just happened yesterday. I was working on another piece and I'm like, Jesus. I can't keep up with all like, what is happening!

[AD]

So it's sort of your way of holding the administration to account for what they're doing?

[JB]

Exactly. Yeah.

[AD]

And your work specifically is mainly based in the New York City subway. So, I mean why, why did you choose this as your, sort of, space where you wanted to do all your work?

[JB]

So, I'm not gonna lie, it's a lot of fun. It's a lot of, I get a lot of joy out of it. A lot of it just just what's the word? Yeah I guess, just joy is a great word. Also, it's it's iconic, it, you reach literally hundreds of thousands of people a day, everything from architecture to the advertisements, are something I can use I can manipulate and work with to create something. So it's constantly changing everything from the decay to the ads there. There's something different down there.



It's 24/7. I can use it throughout the year no matter the weather. So it's you know, it's kind of thrilling, too, because you have to learn when you could put up work like you have to, like, trust yourself. You know, like the people around you, you start like using your intuition. You like you test, different parts of yourself. You have to be patient. You know, you can't do this work. And like, there are times where I want to put up a piece really terribly. But there's too many people around. Or someone looks like a plainclothes cop or the MTA is actually cleaning. And I have, there's like empty MTA agents around. And I can't I can't push away what can't be moved like I can't change this. So I have to, like, accept it and like either go to another station or wait, you know? So it is definitely a test and I like that.

[AD]

And so sort of on the subject of the legality of it. Obviously, on your Instagram page you say 'not legal' and 'no permission' and that is something which is quite important. Why is it important that it's not, you haven't got permission to use this space?

[JB]

It's you know, it's a couple of things. It's not commissioned like there's no money involved. There's no capitalistic undertone. You know, it's just me or it's just a certain community. This is our voice. This is what we want to say. It's the idea of just like bucking authority, you know, which everyone wants to do. It's like yeah, you know, everyone wants to resist. So that's it for. For me, it's important, too, especially with like, you know, graffiti is definitely fading in New York City. It's definitely the pendulum has swung towards murals. It's definitely embraced the mural culture. And, which is interesting, because New York was never like that. It was about, you know, just walls and illegal space. Just, you know, hopping the fence and, you know, tagging a train. And so I just want to like, you know, preserve that type of New York legacy.

[AD]

Cool. And what would you say, like, the Queer Street Art movement, what would you say it does personally for you, if anything?

[JB]

I think it's it's it's pretty great when like, just this past November, I think it was like November 9th, 2019. I don't usually do gallery shows, but a friend of mine who's another gay artists, he rounded up like 20 or so other gay artists. And we did a show in Los Angeles and just that coming together, it was like really fucking great. It's a great feeling. That sounds cheesy, but it's like a sense of community. But it really is great. It's like we all have different styles and we all approach street art very differently. But it goes back to that undertone of, there's something gorgeous about this, you know, and it's welcoming and it's unique and it's it's loud. But also has, there's like there's some softness to it as well, like being exposed. So for me it just feels it just feels great that there's you know, there's a community out there. And it's worldwide and it's, yeah, it's out there.

[AD]

Well you just second guessed my next question! So you are part of this, 'The Streets are Queer' art show, the one you were speaking about in L.A., and so you talked about community. Why do you think it is important for, sort of, Queer Street artists especially to collaborate with each other?

[JB]

I mean, as an artist, you you grow and you learn. You learn how to work with another artist and their materials. Like there's there's some things I cannot do. My drawing skills are crap. So if I work with an artist who knows how to draw that, that elevates my game. And then if they don't know how to wheat paste or work with graphics, I elevate their game. So it's like on a one on one level. It changes you. And also, like it's just it's also just wonderful for just art in general and for our community in general. If I collaborate with somebody in Berlin, I mean, it's

two continents, our styles, and we're like reaching vastly more people when we work together. So it's yeah, it's a win win for not only yourself, but just for art. You know art world, the LGBT community, it's just, you know, and you learn, you know, if you like, meet other queer artists. Yeah. It's like I've met so many other artists through meeting one artist and, which leads to other collaboration. And it's it's like this whole wonderful domino effect.

[AD]

Do things face any challenges being both LGBTQ identifying and female as a street artist?

[JB]

You know, there's challenges. I mean, I don't know if work is like if it's overtly, any work that I put up that's like overtly gay or like promoting the LGBT community. More often than not, that gets taken down faster. Or it's defaced a little bit faster than one that's a little bit more ambiguous. You can't really tell what the message is and you have to like kind of interpret it. There's, you know, like if, I know a lot of other artists who are a little bit more mainstream and they want press that, you know, they won't be picked first for a gallery show or it might, their work might not sell as high, you know, in terms of income or whatever it like what the sticker price is. So that's those are their challenges and it's because of stereotyping and all that good stuff.

[AD]

And so you like document a lot of your art on social media, such as Instagram. So what do you see as like the positive and negative impacts of social media on street art as a whole and also on specifically queer street art?

[JB]

Oh, yeah, it's definitely a double-edged sword. You've got the positives where I you know, anyone who doesn't live in New York could see my work, which is fantastic. I mean, it blows my mind that people, you know, in I think it was somebody in Australia just commented on some work like they dm'd me and stuff and like, that's awesome, fantastic. I love it.

And of course, the negatives would be, there's this whole like mural culture thing that rose up, it kind of rose up and took over the graffiti scene. And it's kind of hard to fight back against something that's, you know, someone doing, you know, a 40-story building. It's colourful, it's loud. And, you know, that gets a lot more attention, especially if street art bloggers, photographers, kind of recycle these images. They'll like run out, take a photo and everyone's looking at the same wall for like the next three days. And it's and it's kind of like. And then artists learn, OK, we'll I'll do the same thing. And we're all now painting sides of apartment buildings. And it's like, you know, the flowers or it's like butterflies or some shit. And it's yes, it's aesthetically gorgeous, but it stalls the movement. And also you're being used to divert graffiti and you're benefiting like real estate agents, without even knowing you're doing it. So that's that's one example of the negative.

[AD]

Yeah, well, thanks so much. Just my final question to you. You've said you experienced censorship of your art, sort of. How do you react to this, how do you, kind of, do you see it in only a negative way or do you kind of take positives from it in terms of motivation?

[JB]

Yes, definitely a motivator. That's another positive in doing work that's not commissioned or, you know, illegal or whatnot. It's because you can always go out there and do it again. And you don't have to worry about your income being affected or losing an agent or whatnot or losing gallery representation. You know, you can you can buff this one piece. But, you know, I've got five more just waiting. And its like, all right. And that's another positive to social media. Once I take a photo of it and share it, it's still out there. Yeah.

Appendix 3: Telephone interview with Little Ricky

Interviewer: [REDACTED]

Interviewee: Little Ricky

Date/time: 26/01/2020, 8pm (GMT)

[AD]

So just to start off with, how do you identify with the Queer Street Art movement?

[LR]

As far as just, well I like the word queer. I never, I always thought of myself as a gay man. And then around when the Orlando shootings happened. That's when I started feeling like that I didn't even identify, not so much identify, I just don't, even though I am a gay man. I feel more I'm a queer human being. It just sounds better to me in my, in my being, I guess.

[AD]

Is that in terms of, sort of, there's a bit more sort of fluidity and flexibility with it?

[LR]

For me it's more, like it has nothing to do with sex or gender. It just has to do with just me, as this is as a as a human being. I've always felt like an oddball, for as long as I can remember, and I still feel like one and nothing has ever changed. So the word queer just seems to apply, because I think that we're all queer, all of us, we're all queer. Like, we're all queer human beings like. If we break it down to it, we all are. You know? We are all odd and different and beautiful in one way. So yeah, I really learned too. I never understood the word until like when the Orlando shootings happened. For whatever reason, I kind of go back to that day because, it really struck a nerve and we just have more power, it feels like there's more power to it too.

[AD]

And obviously the word queer is, like, so so broad, so what do you think the essence of the Queer Street Art movement is that sort of brings queer street artists together, despite their messages and sort of styles and everything being so different?

[LR]

You know what? I mean, this is kind of, I'm going to just speak whatever is kind of coming up for me. But my first thought was like, for myself when I started doing this series, this these pink sheep, my my initial reason for for the concept becoming what it was, was because I was reading a quote from Alexander McQueen and his biography. And he referred to himself as a pink sheep. And for whatever reason, I felt like, woah, this is something. So that's how the series started, because I knew it dealt with him. I knew that it was, he was referencing himself to being a gay man. Just not the black sheep, but the pink sheep. As the series has evolved for me, I think of how they stop being these gay sheep. To me, they became *queer* sheep to me because then, that just sort of that goes back to what I said a second ago, that we're all queer. We all, how did you how did you ask the question again?

[AD]

Like what sort of connects and sort of draws together Queer Street Artists as a group of people?

[LR]

So to me in that sense is sort of with what I'm doing for myself is that it's, that we're all kind of queer. So regardless of what we're trying to say, if we join, I guess, the fact that we identify as queer beings. But again, going back, I still feel like that we all are in some way.

[AD]

[REDACTED]

And just sort of an interesting one, since you say that, obviously you believe that everyone's queer in some way or another. Do you think that, sort of, cisgender and heterosexual people, or people who identify as that, can be part of the queer street art movement, or do you think that it should be, kind of, kept as a space for people who identify either as queer or LGBTQ+?

[LR]

Yeah and that goes back to the same thing that I, the way I see the world is that we all are that so regardless of how you identify yourself, because to me it comes down as like I say, I get older I realize that for me, the the more different and the more odd I feel that, the closer I am to myself. And so I think when people you know, they, if you ask somebody, if I told somebody that they're queer and they're like, no, I'm not. I'm like, we all are, don't you get it? Like it's sort of what makes us unique. That it's it's finding that queerness, that's how I see it, it's finding that queerness or that difference in yourself and embracing all of that. That makes you you. And we we we attach so many labels to ourselves as to this and that and eventually maybe even the word, maybe the word queer at some point will become why do we even use that word? But to me that night, just at the second I thought. But that's like the best word because it makes sense. It's being different, to me. And that's that's that's life to me is that we're all different.

I mean, I've been, in the last year really, I've gotten to a point that, it's been a really beautiful process for myself, just not even with my, I get to express it through my art, you get to feel that what I'm trying to to embrace within myself is just. I don't know if this is too much but I, for me, it goes back to that moment of birth that when we're born there's a moment of connection because we were all born each to each of each human being was born at some at some moment. That connects us all. But in that moment, we're also make, we're all different. There's that moment, no, no one else is going to exist. It's like going to that space again. And I think as human beings that that to me is a magic source of life is to go back to that place. Because you being different is also what connects you to everybody else.

I feel lucky that I get to feel it and really understand it with, almost even without words. Just to know what that feeling is and when I go out into the world, I get to sort of look at people differently now and like I feel more connected to them because I know that that as odd as I feel. I know that they feel just as odd too.

[AD]

That's true! And with sort of more, to do with your work. What kind of impact do you have to have on like either the LGBTQ community or on society as a whole through your art?

[LR]

One word. It's joy. I want people to, regardless of anything, is just when they see my work on the street, whether they purchase it and they have it at their house, that when they see it, they they feel the joy that I have in, not just having created it, but in the life that I'm living. I honestly can tell you I found real joy like two years ago. And I know what it is now, and I know I feel lucky that I get to live from that place and that I, whatever I create, you're, you're feeling it. And, you know, everything I hear from people is that when they come across my work, they're like, it just makes me. It makes me smile and makes me laugh out loud it makes my day. It fills my day with joy when I see them. I'm like, that's it! It's my my work isn't like political, I mean some of it can be, but it really isn't. It's it's just very playful. And it's very honest. I'm not trying to, to bullshit it, you know. They're just they're just these little pink characters out and about, usually with a positive or a funny message out, you know.

[AD]

So, sort of more from a personal side. What does your art do you personally for you, if anything?

[LR]

Like that was an example of what I said earlier about that, the more the series, as a series evolved, I realized that they weren't gay more, that they were just queer and that they were it, it's really that it's really *all* of us. On a personal note, for me, it's like I feel I feel a great responsibility to to do this work. I like I need to. Like that I, that I get to to just channel whatever I've been given. And I put it, and I create it. To me, it's it's such a beautiful process because I don't feel like I'm trying to do it, I'm not trying. I'm not looking for like, OK, what should I do next? It's more like, I feel like a robot doing the work. Like, OK, I guess this is like there's not, it feels almost spotless. Where I'm not trying like oh, let me make this because it's gonna be cool. It's more like a, you have to do this. Just whatever information I'm being sent. It sounds kind of wacky or out there, but it's so real. I feel lucky that I get to create from that place again that it's just this, just putting it out without without effort. And it's, like I said, it's my joy, it's my joy that I get to express in painting our colouring or what have you.

[AD]

Previously, I listened to a few interviews with you and looked at your Instagram a bit, and you've previously talked briefly about, like your own internal homophobia and how sort of the 2016 shootings were a bit of a turning point for you for that? And could you sort of develop on that more like how that's kind of come across in your art?

[LR]

You know, when when that when that happened you know. It like it got me really hard and I realized that I had to, like with my art, I realized that I was being safe a little bit because I had, I did have my own thoughts of like whether other street artists would find it inappropriate or what have you or too gay or whatever. And then at that point, it just said, like, yeah, it just doesn't matter. Not only creatively, but even for myself as a person, like something something as simple as like putting on like say pink sneakers to go out to the market. I was like, ahh I don't want to put that out there. Now it's like, I don't care. I realized that it was such a simple, like almost like, I had hidden it a little bit to some extent? Where without thinking I would think, I wouldn't think to myself it would just be like a passing thought were I'm like, ahh that's a little too gay. And that all changed from the shootings where I was like, not that my work now has to be really gay because I'm like I said earlier, it's it's really about channelling whatever I'm being given, so if it's telling me to paint drag queens, I'm going to paint drag queens. If it's going to say some political message, it's gonna say it because it's, I'm channelling it, not because I'm trying to say something. For me, my work is about, it's about a feeling, so you can't, even though you can read into what I'm creating to some extent, it's still a feeling that you should just feel the joy of going back to that put up.

Yeah, so it hasn't changed my work in a lot of ways, but it kind of has to the extent of like, I stop myself if I find myself thinking that. But I actually don't even find myself thinking that because I'm just creating it like it doesn't matter. Like I don't care if it's gay or not or if it is or if it's not or you know, I do it in some way, in some odd way, and I don't know if this is another question that you might ask, I do sometimes wonder, like, you know, I'm not I'm not saying something really like political or homoerotic or. So I do always feel a bit outside of the movement to some extent, does that make sense a little bit?

[AD]

Yeah that's really interesting! So just to develop on that more, like you say, you kind of feel about outside the movement, and how do you, like, I don't know, do you mind developing on that a little more? I find that really interesting.

[LR]

Yeah. It's not like outside in a bad way. It's more like I, and this kind of applies to even just queer art in general. You know, when I started the series, I was like, why, why can't I get to be part of that show just because I'm not I'm not painting dicks or I'm saying something political

like, the whole project is about being queer, whether it's saying it or not. That's all this pink sheep is. It's, it's about being queer, your unique self. So that applies to all of us. So to me, you know, my work doesn't like, and I don't know if at some point I shared some of this with Dusty. But I I do feel, I don't know how to articulate it in some way, but there is a feeling of like, if you look at the shows, like, when we did this last show, I felt like my my stuff was like the, oh it's like the playful silliness, but you kind of feel a little, which is good, too, you know, because there's no one else doing what I'm doing. Which is a good thing! So I don't feel outside in a bad way anymore. Now it's more like I kind of like it kind of maybe goes back to that. Yeah. It's not it's not like I said homoerotic. It's not saying something overtly political or in your face. But it's still queer. Just because it's, that's the whole point. That's at the heart and soul of it.

[AD]

So why do you think it's important that your art, and also just sort of queer street art in general, is based in the streets?

[LR]

Well, for me personally, it was, when I read that sentence in the book and as soon as, even I didn't have an image of what I was going to be creating, I knew that I was going to be creating these little animals or these characters. And even though I'd never done street art ever, or I hadn't thought of doing street art because I had always just painted in studio. It just felt like, wow, this neat, they, they belong out and about.

It's an animal, so to me it was just that, it was as simple as just it's an animal and it belongs out in the street. And like I said, it goes back to, people are seeing it. They're seeing something that that's queer. They're seeing, whether they know it or not. You know, Dusty at some point said something like, it doesn't have, he said something like it doesn't have to be, you know, the fact that they're seeing it and it's a queer thing, whether they know it's it's queer or not doesn't matter, it's that they're seeing it. It's this visibility of, I think most people would get it, I think it's a pink sheep at this point, I think they would get a reference to being gay or whatever but. Yeah, I think it's, I think it kind of goes back to like also. You know, when I started, I never, I thought I was alone, kind of alone, like thinking like, well, I don't see any other people gay or queer positive messages or anything except for HomoRiot, right? His where the only stickers that were out that I saw and was like, oh it's a gay street artist, in my head. And then, but I wasn't seeing it otherwise. And now, like, I feel like there's there's, I'm seeing it more now. I find myself seeing graffiti, whether it's like, Dusty said sometimes you don't even know if it was a gay person that did it. You know like simple graffiti writing where it says, like, suck my dick. You know, like you don't even know when it's this homoerotic thing that sort of applies to the movement in some odd way. I just saw on Instagram right now that I guess the penis man got arrested. Did you hear about that?

[AD]

No, I didn't.

[LR]

There was, I didn't read, I didn't click on the link yet. But I just saw right before you called that there was somebody who was, I think it was in Arizona, who was writing the word penis man all over the city. And I'm curious to see what it what it was like. So nobody knew the message behind it, whether he's gay, whether he was doing it just to be funny. Nobody knew the back story of it, but they were like on a hunt for him.

[AD]

Wow, I guess that's the joy of street art really isn't it, you may never know the message unless. Well unless they get arrested I guess!

So obviously you were recently part of the 'Streets are Queer' show. So what what do you think the importance of collaboration between queers street artists is?

[LR]

Like what do you mean, like us working together?

[AD]

Yeah, like do you think it's important for you guys to work together or is it more just, sort of, I don't know a nice experience?

[LR]

No, I think, you know, there was a moment when Dusty did a little talk like a couple days after the show and, only about like twelve people showed up and I think like eight of us were artists. And he did a little film with us, and, you know, he talked about a little bit of the history of what he's found and, and there was just this moment of of like, wow, these are my peeps, you know, these are my friends now, like it's their not, I don't think like to me Dusty's a friend. Like, I can't go to New York now, and not see him. There's friends here like there's HomoRiot there's Divadog that I've sort of gotten to know. And I just think it's great just as a community, like, you know, you want connection. We all want connection in some form. And I think to me this is, that was just the beginning of something bigger, I think that there'll be bigger, more things to come. And I think at some point. I think even when he comes out with the documentary, who knows where we'll be at ourselves individually. But yeah, it's been good, so I think it's important. Like in a big way that possibly we're not even aware of just yet. I I really did think of it. And I know my brain thinks like this because even like in creating work, I'm creating work and I'm thinking like huh one day this is gonna be owned by somebody. Or, it's it's my history of what I'm creating. Like this is my history. And I can kind of see like, oh, right, five years from now, this is gonna be a big deal because it was I did it at this point or whatever. But with the show when he did the show, I was like, this is cool. Like, this is his. I felt like I was observing the history of something bigger. And then I got that, as it was happening, my brain was thinking like I'm in it. I'm in the history of what what people are going to write and talk about when you look at back on on this, like, you know, twenty years, thirty years from now. And they're like, wow? You remember that show that started like that? And. Like me, I have I've told Dusty that I'm in this till like, till I die, like even on the street, even if my fine art took off on a big scale, the idea of like still putting things out even that little stuff is going to be really important to me. So that hopefully inspires other other people to, like it's okay to do this. It's okay to be, you know, just to see it. Like I said, the visibility.

[AD]

Yeah. Really. I'm really excited to see his documentary and see how it brings visibility to the movement because it is so crazy how little there is out there about the movement as a whole.

[LR]

And it's all kind of created from him. I mean, I told him, you started this, I mean, you just sort of brought us all together in some way. And I know that, as it goes by that I know that he's finding, more people are reaching out to him, you know, like hey, I'm here too!

[AD]

Yeah he's in contact with so many artists!

So you document a lot of your art on some social media, including Instagram. What are like, the positive and negative impacts of social media on the movement, do you think?

[LR]

I think it's just been I mean, not for myself personally, but like I think, like I said, it goes back to what, it's brought people together. Maybe not face to face, but it's made you aware of other

artists. And then, you know, that's sort of, in some way that's a connection as well, even though it's not a you know, it's not in person. But I think I haven't seen anything, I don't see anything negative or I haven't seen anything like negative, like for myself. I think it's only good. I mean, it's good in the sense that it's you know, without it, we wouldn't have found each other.

[AD]

Yeah, that's true. And just one last question. Have you ever experienced censorship of your art and if so how do you react to it? Like how does it impact you?

[LR]

I haven't. I mean, sometimes. There was only one time that I, because, like I said, my sheep aren't really like overtly queer where people like, you know, it's not like two guys kissing like HomoRiot's work. But I did post up one time two Tom of Finland sheep somewhere. And right off the bat, they were just, somebody came in and just spray painted them. And nothing outside of it. And that was just a sort of a symbol of like, wow, somebody really didn't want to see this. So the guys and the girls who are doing art that is in your face, you know, I don't know how they, it must be weird because when that happened to me just that once, it kind of didn't bother me. I felt like it just sucks. But but I also feel like that's all just part of doing stuff on the street. You know, for me, it's, I let go of whatever it is, you know, like I know that sometimes I think I have a feeling without me being so aware of it because I'd look at it and think it is what it is. I do sometimes see like little stickers or whatever where they're just like, you could tell they just peeled it off like they went, they walked my route and peeled everything off just because they don't want to see it. And even though it's not anything really like 'gay gay', if that makes sense, I still wonder if it's just because it you know, like probably at this point, they're like yeah, this is gay so I don't want to see it kind of. I don't know. But it it to me that it is what it is. I really do like, let go of my work when I put it out. You know, it's almost like you put it out and it's not longer. It's no longer yours. So I don't I don't take it personally. I can only imagine that guys and girls could do, when like where it's just constant. I could see that. It just might, must make you like, fuck. Like I can only imagine but you know, like you just keep doing it. So at some point, I think it's just like oh you're gonna peel every sticker? Well I'm gonna keep putting them back up and at some point. Like I'm not giving up. So if you want to, if they want to focus on that, that's their shit.

You know, right when we did that talk with Dusty or what he did, that little thing. I just said to whoever was there, I was like, you know, we just have to keep doing this. You know, like keep, don't just do it and then just stop five years from now.

[AD]

Do you think you could get bigger in the future?

[LR]

Yeah, I feel like, you know. Yeah I think at some point, you know, I guess like in that show, I thought that it was just the beginning of something bigger. And I'm curious just to see what comes from that. You know, I may not see it like in a year or two years, but, you know, maybe five years from now, they'll be like, oh, like, you know, you've been doing that so long that I was I was inspired by what you were doing. had people tell me that, not that they were not that they were queer artists themselves, but they're like, I just see your stuff so much that it just made me like, wow, I should try to put something out too!

Appendix 4: Facetime interview with [REDACTED]

Interviewer: [REDACTED]

Interviewee: [REDACTED]

Date/time: 31/01/2020, 10am (GMT)

[AD]

So obviously it is a bit different for you because you're in London but how do you identify with the queer street art movement?

[PH]

Well it's kind of funny because I, so I've been doing it for 15 years now. And it wasn't necessarily it, it wasn't that movement or that area really that took me to what I was doing. I was interested in [indistinguishable] And the way that he made kind of conceptual political work. He was like an influence. But he wasn't, he wouldn't have called himself a queer street artist he was making conceptual work that was placed in the streets.

So it kind of, it sort of gradually became a thing because, over the last fifteen years street art has become more and more, you know, impactful and more, a symbol of regeneration and everything like that. So I think it's become identified almost as a movement. So I suppose, it started becoming a bit of a thing when I was in trespass, which is uncommissioned art, it's like a really big giant street art book. And I didn't quite realize the significance of that until I saw it everywhere. I've got a like page or two in it. But I now realize that some of the big like, Martin Cooper and like really big players and influential people are also, sort of, in that book and I'm kind of amongst it. When I was in Norway, the new art festival last year, it, I kind of was aware then that there was this kind of conversation going on about queer street art and how different that is in terms of street art and what I was doing. And people in that world are very connected and now I'm sort of becoming introduced. And it was around that time that Daniel got in touch with me. So I don't necessarily self-identify as a queer street artist but I just happen to be that. Although, since Norway I have been doing a bit more, like classic Street art where I'm painting pansies, so a different thing for me, a new thing. And that was inevitable, because, you know, I couldn't find actual pansies, so that's kind of changed my work slightly, I am slightly going more into that sort of classic, street art dimension.

[AD]

And talking about the pansies more specifically now, what kind of impact do you hope to have both on the queer community and also society as a whole through the art that you make?

[PH]

What's it's kind of, the challenge is, what's been interesting about what I've been doing recently and what I'm doing this year is continuing to take the pansy project outside of Queer Festivals, because often I'm just kind of preaching to the converted. So when I'm in a world where it's like a heterosexual or a heteronormative cultural centre, whatever it might be, that gives me an opportunity to speak people that not otherwise hear about my work. Because when my work's been presented, often it's in the context of a queer festival. That's not really a shock to those people or that audience that there's homophobia in the world. So that's my kind of mission always, is to encourage discussion around that, and for the work to contribute to that discussion. For me it's an interesting time because of this ability to kind of access the world which doesn't necessarily know about that.

[AD]

So why do you think it's important that this particular type of art is based in the streets and it's not done in galleries?

[PH]

[REDACTED]

You see what kind of. It's interesting. This is something I'm sort of dealing with at the moment is that, I'm an artist and the intervention on the street is very significant to me, it's like the root and the cause of the project, and that actual activity and the sort of ritual of it, is what becomes a very, very important part of the work. But but, the photograph and now more the film as well, that is also part of the work and that's of documenting the process and the photographs are really important.

So that object becomes able to get into a gallery context and, which is interesting and important to me. In order to become, sort of, part of the world where I'm seen within this universe, of queer artists or of artists in general. It's important to me to get into it. But for the majority of the time, my work, has always, because it outside, it's seen as objects, those objects are seen as memorials, the things that exist and still people think, I planted a pansy in Manchester 20 years ago, not 20, 15, and they still think it might be there.

So it's kind of, of course, the work is where it is when it happens that is the work, I'm making the work at that point. But for me, it's the significant thing is the photograph, that, it's like three steps. It was two, and now I think it's three because the film element of it is becoming more and more important to me. The actual planting and what can happen around that and the interactions I can have around that is important and significant and is, you know, is what helps tell whole story of the project. But the photographs, of course are, and still my mission is to have a big exhibition with lots of photographs, in a gallery because, that's the space which has been created to have these discussions around the work.

[AD]

So, you sort of talk a little bit about photographing and obviously you use social media a lot to document your work, such as Instagram. What do you think of the positives and the negatives of social media on the art that you make?

[PH]

I think it's been really significant to me because when I first started it, Facebook hadn't started really, it was just the infancy of social media. So I, the Internet existed, but I had, when I first started it, I wanted to I had this idea. I wanted it wanted to be able to use the Internet to help people, to help me with stories about where I could plant the pansies. That was this kind of idea that I wanted to do. And I had this idea for a sort of book interactive message board type of wall on my website.

At that time I got some funding through queer up North which was basically this queer festival in Manchester at the time and they, they got me some money to develop a website. So I spent a lot of time working with this guy to develop a wall on my website. It was around the time that Facebook was just starting and I could see this wall being there. And I was like well, we spent loads of money developing this thing that wasn't really being used on this website. So when I had a group on Facebook, that became the wall that I needed. Part of our interaction happens and the idea of there being, when I go to places what I'm doing more and more, is I'll say I'm coming there, I'll I'm making animation or whatever, and then I'll use it to help me get locations and create an awareness of my presence in that place. So it's important for that. And now I'm kind of developing followers, I suppose, I haven't kind of, Instagram is slightly different, isn't it?

Because it's interesting that when when I was in Norway, there was like lots of discussion. I think there was a talk, about Instagram in particular and how street art, those people that do that have thousands and thousands of followers. I have like 2000 or something and, if that, but people have almost millions of followers. So I don't have much of an impact, I don't think, on Instagram, but it's useful to me. But I kind of still put up holiday pictures on there, I don't just have it solely as work, I kind of, at the moment I haven't been posting, but I'm going to start posting a bit more. But it's, for others I think it's really significant. But what the street artists who are sort of pre-Instagram are talking about is, well they were a bit, what's the word, disparaging, about how they, like Instagram street artists, like this way you can filter your

image, you can make it look really super and all these kinds of things. It's almost similar to make-up tutorials in that way, that kind of, you know when people are doing beauty things, or drag queens, and it's a similar thing where you're so self-editing, you can make yourself look much more amazing, like your photographs can look amazing. But I think, it's just an interesting thing. It's funny for me. I think for me, my natural habitat for this space, the pansy project is Facebook, it somehow works more, I have more presence, I have like nearly 8000 members of my group. So it generally has more of an impact and you can share news stories more easily than on Instagram.

But when I went to Norway that did change something because I did get a lot of followers because they have Martha Cooper followed me, and lots of other's, Daniel's been really good, so it's had an impact. It's going to be interesting I think, I've got some bigger things coming up which might have more of an impact on Instagram and it might develop, but you know I always think that and it never, you know. You'll get 20 followers and then you'll lose 10 or, you know that kind of thing. But I think I'm not naturally, when I see other street artists who are very good on Instagram and they are always showing the same kind of images and their new work, they don't do anything other than that and they have 10,000 followers. I'm not so precious about Instagram in that way, I'm probably not a successful Instagrammer like some people are.

And I remember talking about it with Daniel when he was following me around and, what it does is it sanitises it doesn't it. When I'm actually on the street, generally on my own, there's a tension there, some kind of, almost danger in that environment and, especially because I'm in areas where homophobia has happened, there's some tensions. I mean maybe my work is different because it's a record of homophobia, it's quite specific, it's more conceptual I think than lots of murals that happen where they're using the streets as a canvas and there's no particular reason why it's in that location other than it being a good location or a nice wall. My work is a bit more rooted in the place, because of something that's happened there. So it's telling a different story in terms of it being [indistinguishable] within it, so maybe there's more of a story in my work than in others, and it's that which is why I think maybe that I'm interested in it. And perhaps there's a sort of, a sort of slight tension. Because I know Daniel was interested in that too, and because he's been making a film. Perhaps that's what's different between queer street art versus street art generally, Queer street art to me is generally a lot more political and often the significance of the locations have something, that's maybe different to street art, it's a funny one.

[AD]

So just, sort of, building off that and talking about your work a little bit more. What sort of, motivates you to do this specific type of work and what does it specifically do for you?

[PH]

Well, for me, when I was doing my MA, it's interesting cause my background is actually painting. And I was having problems, what I was doing was questioning why I was making these paintings that were then going to be on a wall, I didn't feel like that was doing anything and it felt quite laborious and, I was much more interested in walking around streets. I've always been interested in how the street how remembers things and how déjà vu happens and how different locations remember, it's almost a situationist point of view, so I was very interested in the way that one walks and all of that kind of thing. So I was interested in that and I started just kind of, not painting as much and thinking more about more about where I was living at the time, Manchester, and how I was interacting with it.

So I was having all these different ideas and thoughts at the time when I experienced this homophobia. And those two elements sort of came together and it just, kind of, made sense to me to do that and explore that and make work that was more instant and more direct. And what was interesting to me anyway was that, when I first planted the flowers, it changed how I actually felt about that location. It wasn't just a place where I'd experienced abuse where I

then would walk past think, oh god I got shouted at there, it became a place where I was like, oh I planted a pansy there. It's just a bit more of a positive memory, so I was overlaying that actual location with a different memory, changing how I remember it. So, and then people seemed to get that really easily and it became a thing, like people, you know. It's a neat story. People like stories. And for me it's, I think it's strange perhaps for artists to do the same thing again and again. But I find the repetition of it, helps tell a story, helps emphasize the message, the transient homophobia message. Does that answer your question?

[AD]

It does yeah, thank you! And just final one, have you ever experienced either censorship or a negative reaction to your work on the streets or on social media, and how do you react to it?

[PH]

About, nearly 10 years ago now my Facebook group deleted on, by Facebook. They thought it was homophobic because I name all my images, of course, after the abuse like 'faggot' and things, so lots and lots of images on my group, I think it was when groups were sort of used more before pages, so there's still groups, there's still pages. And I was really shocked, I sort of got an email first thing saying, your Facebook group, and at the time I had sort of 3000 members of this group. And it was useful for me to promote the work I was doing. So I was really shocked and I think I tweeted it. And Instagrammed it at the time. But it got a social media, it became a thing that my group about fighting homophobia had been deleted because of homophobic content. And it got a little bit of press and it was in like Art monthly or something. But someone on Twitter who followed me worked for Facebook or something and basically helped reinstate it. So it was reinstated, but it was a big, it was a funny moment where, and still I wonder if the images that I put on Instagram are going to be found in that way, because I still do, I think it's important to be, especially on social media, to title the images after the abuse because otherwise the image is just a pretty image. The title, that's what gives it a punch, that is what makes it a piece of work. So far, it's not happened on Instagram but I wouldn't be surprised because obviously it's offensive. And I have been shouted at on the street before, sort of when I was planting, like I was called a 'faggot' whilst I was planting a pansy that was marking hate crime, but overwhelmingly it's a positive experience, because it's planting a flower, you know. I'm not doing anything sort of overwhelmingly horrible.

[AD]

Thank you. And I I just have one more question I forgot. Do you like engage in politics, like mainstream politics in this country?

[PH]

Only sort of online, I don't go to, I mean I've been on marches, I've done some of that, because it's happy Brexit day, furious. I've been on lots of those marches and, but I'm not a member of the Labour or anything like that, but I have been on lots of the marches and I've done that for years and years, and I've been to lots of conferences and things like that, but I'm not a member of the Labour party.

Appendix 5: Email interview with WokeFace

Interviewer: Abigail Dore

Interviewee: Wokeface

Date: 03/02/2020

How do you identify with the Queer Street art movement?

I'm a queer street artist.

What kind of impact do you hope to have, both on the LGBTQ+ community and on society as a whole, through your art?

My intention behind my street art is to communicate a message of self-love and acceptance, which unfortunately is not the message mainstream has communicated to the queer community and minorities. I want to boost visibility to normalize LGBTQ+ to society and to show solidarity with those who identify that way, especially queer youth.

There has been a long history of the LGBTQ+ community using street art, but the visibility of Queer Street art is definitely growing. Why is it important that this particular type of art is based in the streets?

Accessibility is a huge factor in the importance of street art. It does not require admission or status to view, and it does not require approval or status to create. The streets are a voice of the community.

What does Queer Street art do, personally, for you?

Queer street art makes me feel not alone - I feel a sense of community and belonging. It gives me hope.

You have recently been part of 'The Streets are Queer' art show. Do you think it is important for Queer Street artists to collaborate in this way, and if so, why?

I think it's really powerful to collaborate and/or show art as a collective of queer street artists. Although we are queer, that does not solely define us, our art or our styles and there is a huge diversity in our perspectives and approach to art. Showing together displays a diversity within the community.

You document a lot of your art on social media, such as Instagram. What are the positive and/or negative impacts of social media on the movement?

I have found the impacts of social media to be overwhelmingly positive. There have been a few hateful remarks or trolls, but they are easily banned and it has become a safe supportive space for my queer community and other artists, given us more visibility and helped us find each other which is really healing. Some people live in places or with families that do not accept them where they cannot be out, and social media is the only means to be open.

Have you ever experienced censorship of your art, on the streets or on social media?

I have been "censored" plenty of times on the street. My art will get "dissed" by getting crossed out, painted over, or covered. I have not dealt with censorship on social media, but I make efforts to follow guidelines to avoid those. Which in turn does mean I am self censoring to comply.



A couple of artists who I have spoken to have raised the point that Queer Street art murals may be more censored, or 'less gay' than other street art, due to their nature of being commissioned. How do you respond to this?

I can see that being true, especially in the case of business owners worry about offending or alienating a customer base and thus their livelihood. I've been told that I can't put cannabis themed art in a shop or show, for example, because even though the business owner is cool with it they don't want to be publicly associated with something taboo. I live in Portland, Oregon which is a relatively liberal city in the US and many of my clients are queer so it has not been an issue for me.

Do you engage with mainstream politics (party politics) in your country? If so, how? And if not, why not?

Not in a public facing way through street art or with my street art persona. I have strong personal opinions but I have a lot of conflict with the political system and don't want to promote it. I'm not interested in devoting energy to these things, I don't enjoy political street art and I have no desire to make it. I feel that my messages and art communicate in other deeper ways which ideally will influence the viewer to delve within and and make decisions out of love.



Appendix 6: Telephone interview with BluDog

Interviewer: [REDACTED]

Interviewee: BluDog

Date/time: 07/02/2020, 8pm (GMT)

[AD]

So just to start off with, how do you identify with the queer street art movement?

[BD]

How do I identify? Unintentionally, I have basically, Daniel' one of these people that keeps telling me what a queer street artist is. And I, and I guess that's inevitable. But it was never really, I like, started doing the art as political protest. But not specifically to, not specifically queer art. It just happened to be one of the things that came up along the way. Initially my stuff was based on occupying Wall Street, back in 2000. Back in the day! That was, that was what initially got me started into doing socially active, like socially active art. And it happens to be that I'm queer, so it makes sense that those would be the things that affect my life, that I would get involved in.

But the actual part of, like, I didn't even know queer art, queer art only became a movement when Dusty started championing it. Honestly! Because he, he really is one of those people that helped us find each other. Instagram was integral in that, but it was also him specifically who helped me realize that there were people who were doing the same thing. Because when I started in 2009 in New York, there was, I wasn't even open about being gay. I mean, street art was very much, before Instagram, it was very much a boys' club. And it was so much of a straight, macho culture bullshit, kind of, boys' club. I mean, even to this day, even to this day, there's, there's, I'll go to events and there's definitely a group of the old school tigers who really want nothing to do with the girls and the gays and the trans, that we're all this sort of thing that has happened outside of the, outside of the club. And I mean, even I used to take, other artists would throw shit at me about it. I didn't come out for the first couple of years.

And then there was a shooting in New York of a gentleman in the West Village, he and his boyfriend were out, and someone came and started calling them 'faggot' and the boyfriend kind of, you know, puffed his chest and stood up for it and he got shot, to death. And that was one of those times I reacted with stickers and art.

The other one was the, the initial, the first group of kids, there was a there was a young gentleman who committed suicide for bullying way in the beginning. And that's where the rainbow flag, 'You're not alone' was born. Every single one of these has been sort of an event in the news or somewhere that I took personally and felt motivated to react. And that's what I love about street art. Street art is, especially when you live in a city like New York, I live in Portland now the majority of the time, but when I lived in the city, it was one of those places where like you could, there were times where I had, there was a news story that happened in the morning, there was a protest in the afternoon and I'd already have a sticker up and be out there protesting with everyone that afternoon because it's immediate. You don't you don't need to. Take it through a, it doesn't have to go through a committee. You don't have to, you're completely autonomous.

That also has mis, misfires. There are certain stickers where I look back and go, was I just having a bad day?! Like was that really that important?! So you eventually learn to, you know, prep for it a little because you realize it is powerful. I don't know why it's such a why it's such a, I don't know how to put it. It's a powerful way to get your ideas across. And if you do it in a way that isn't overt, and I think that's what Daniel, Daniel says I signal all the time. Dusty's, every time I say I'm not really you know, I mean, I'm a gay man that makes art. He's like, no, you're a queer artist! And that's when I embraced it. Because there was a point

[REDACTED]

where I was yeah that's important to say. That's important to do. And especially, honestly, like with trans rights right now. It's important. It's necessary that people, people stand up for people who are can't and are underrepresented. And, you know, it's if arts the way to do it, even if it's just a way to make somebody think differently, you know? No, I don't. I don't. I never put out art with the intention of saying I'm changing the world. I put out art because I'm mouthy, and cause it's my own, sort of, punk rock, fuck you, you know, being heard. It's a way of being heard.

And it's a very interesting one that, because Instagram, has affected it both positively and negatively. Instagram was great in the beginning because it gave us a sense of community. Like I said, I didn't even know there were other queer street artists until, you know, you can look up a tag and find out they're all over the world. Yeah, but the other thing that's come from that is that there's also it becomes its own game, the Instagram thing. I I really, there was a romance to the message in a bottle sort of thing, stickers up like you put up stickers and you walk away. And you'll never know, you know, it was fun to not really know, once in a while you'd walk by, you'd see someone take a picture or. You know, the first time some kid got off his skateboard and took a picture of one of my stickers and I was there, I would you know, that was well, two years into it. And that's when I was like huh, okay. And Instagram is created that, the reaction and the conversation, which is which is great, which is something we didn't have 10 years ago. The downside is you have a lot of people who are doing it for the 'gram'. It's just another way of, you know, driving your ego a little. And then it can be dangerous because it's just like having critics. It's just one of those things where think it really depends on what your end game is. For me, I still just enjoy the fact that it's an unedited outlet that I don't I don't have to ask anybody permission to have that opinion. And I certainly don't have to ask anybody to break the law and put it somewhere.

[AD]

So what kind of, I you've sort of briefly, like touched on it, but just to develop a little bit further, that is was sort of the impact that you aim to have specifically on like the queer community through your art?

[BD]

Inspire more people to do it, to be honest. I hope that has, not just within the queer community, but as a street artist and a sticker artist my favourite part is, is that it's, you don't you don't need any, you don't need money, you don't need access, you don't need political power. You just have to have a voice and an opinion. You can go to the post office and steal some stickers if you have to, and grab a marker. And it's that simple. And it's been that simple, like sticker, it's been amazing. For politics, for music, for so many different reasons. This culture has been around since the fifties and sixties. So it's interesting, I guess that's I mean, that's that's I want to inspire other people to do it. And realise that there's nothing, you know, be your own brand.

[AD]

That's very inspiring! So just to talk a bit more specifically about, like, a couple of pieces of your work that I have found quite interesting. So obviously, some of your work kind of pay tribute to icons. So there's, I don't know if I'm going to say these names right but Klaus Nomi and then also Divine. What, kind of, led you to specifically use them as part of your work?

[BD]

Initially Divine was just my love of John Waters and of Divine and of his work and the sub-culture that it created. And then realizing how many people I know who connect with that, that we all have that in common. That that realizing that that's, just being inspired by Divine he's, he is amazing. He was an amazing human being who inspired and took took a lot of chances. And was a little bit punk rock about it, and and just realizing that that was for me. I

can't, I'm trying to remember exactly when I did it, but it had something to do with, it was an anniversary of her death, I believe that I went ahead and made the first one, and then Klaus Nomi came up about four or five years ago, I did a wall in New York City called [indistinguishable] and it was after David Bowie died. I kind of went into my own a little and realized, mostly because I never thought about how much one person, I was fascinated by how much that one person meant so much to so many different people. Like Bowie was that lots, I mean I had, Bowie was important to me but I that no idea how important he was to everybody else in the world until he died. And so it was one of those things where I was like yes that's the kind of art I want to make, like the kind of stuff he does. That was really inspiring to me. So in an effort to not make just one more R.I.P David Bowie wall, I decided to take a month and find out all my icons and all my, like all my creative ancestors and make a wall of hieroglyphics with them on it. And that's where the Klaus Nomi actually came from, that was one of those. So I would sit down for a day and listen to all the music of a certain artist and smoke a joint and try to create, try to a create a brand, you know, because that's basically, I love icons, I think I think they're, I love the power they have and I love that they could transfer a message without language. And so I'm always fascinated by the idea of like, how can you simplify it?

Because my background was with graphic design. I grew up as a graphic designer. And so I'm so used to making logos that basically, you know, and Klaus was one of those, like Bowie and Divine. Who else is up there? Freddie Mercury. They didn't even have to be queer artists to, you know, have a queer sensibility. And Klaus Nomi I love just because he was, I remember seeing him on TV with David Bowie. Like that was a weird moment in my childhood that I actually remember being like, wow. And that was the kind of you know, that's why I went to the East Village. I came to the East Village from Seattle in 1999, and that was after a lifetime of, you know, Klaus Nomi's and David Bowie's and Divine, making me want to come and be a part of something bigger, kind of be a part of that history. And that's that's where Dusty's like yeah that makes you a queer artist! I more one of those like non-binary people that loves just, you know, [indistinguishable] with all the labels, but queer, queers a good one because it still upsets people.

[AD]

So obviously you said that you started as a graphic designer and that's not what you are doing now! Why why do you think it's important that like art such as yours and other kind of politically active or just kind of any activist art is based in the streets?

[BD]

Mostly because of the immediacy. And the access. And the, that's kind of where the fight starts. You know, I mean it's not you don't have, you don't have access to a boardroom and you don't have access to, you know, the money and the politics. But you you have access to your creativity and your frustration. And it also is a place that it's it's automatically by the nature of where it is. It can be a fuck you. Not not necessarily on purpose, but it has that, you know, that the people who are fans of street art and the people who think it's all garbage.

And I was always frustrated with that because I, especially in New York City, New York City, you are inundated with other people's ideas that they have paid to put everywhere in your way between the time you get up and the time you go to sleep. And nobody thinks anything of it. That's just that's just the wallpaper. And then you don't really get why that's the brand you choose when you go to the store. And the worst part is good graphic designers, because when they make it art, you know, there's so many artists that are working in advertising that, you know, the best art is beautiful. I mean, the best advertising is beautiful art. It's very effective. And so I kind of I like the idea of I mean, I don't know if you remember back in the day, there used to be a cable access, which was because commercial stations got to broadcast what people with money wanted to broadcast, that every cable station had

to have a station where you could just anybody in the public could come in and they had the cameras and you could put on a show. And it was the idea was to make sure that television didn't become just the property of the people who, you know, corporations who had the money to to put things on the air. That if you if you as a community leader wanted to speak to the community, you'd have that opportunity. And so for me, that's what, street art is public access of advertising. It's our chance to you know, it's our chance to put our opinions up there without without having to have them voted on or or. Especially with underserved communities. There's places where like you're not, you don't get the chance to tell your story or have your opinion discussed on the news.

But you know the cool part about New York is, some of those people that are walking by your art go do that. They do go do that. And so for me, it's just kind of like counter advertising. That's what it started out for me. And then the fact that, you know, I didn't think that, I honestly thought that the whole queer movement had gotten to a point where we were doing pretty good until we elected a president that wasn't on board. Someone who represents a whole lot of people that I don't agree with. And then and then it became really scary again. Like it was one of those things where there's a whole generation of like 20 something year old queer people who didn't who did have, I mean, that's there's always a struggle. It's just no matter who you are, if you're not willing to be part of what everybody else is doing, you're going to be on the outside and you're going to struggle like it's sort of inevitable but its sort of about making that easier on people by letting them know there's other people. You know, I the rainbow sticker, I don't even know how many times people have come to me and been like that got me out of a hard day that. You know, there was one couple that was like, yeah, you know, we live in the hood and we saw that sticker and we you know, eventually we came out because we're like, look, there's other gay people. And it's that it's that simple. Just kind of a wink and a nod of like letting somebody else know that you're not crazy for having that opinion. It's not it's not a, love is not a bad thing. Respecting other people's right to express themselves is not a bad thing. You don't all have to be the same.

[AD]

It's crazy how such a small sticker can have such a big impact on someone's life

[BD]

And I mean, that was nine, 10 years ago. So, you know, I'm still you know, honoured when people to notice it and still happy to put it up wherever I go cause, even if it's just a bad day, it's a good reminder that you're not doing it by yourself.

[AD]

And it's sort of just like away from your impact on society, what do you think like producing this art does personally for your own sort of, sense of identity, if anything?

[BD]

It's given me a sense of community and purpose and voice that, and validation to a certain point of. I mean, it's it's it's empowering for me, for me not to feel alone. For me to realize that, you know, these were not just sort of messages in bottles that I put up. And to know that it's affected other people and not even always in the right way.

The fascinating part about art is it's like once you once you put it out there, it belongs to whoever observes it. And I've had, when Trayvon Martin was murdered. That was one of those days where it was literally like this, it had happened. I was insanely upset about it. Not not so much because of appropriation, but because that was an experience I had. I was a that kid, but I was white. And I was that kid who may not have been up to, you know, he made you know, he was doing what kids do, may not have been up to like, whatever, the fact is the kid didn't deserve to get shot. And murdered. And I know that if that was me in

high school when I was up to no good, then it would have been, there would have been hell to pay. It would have been a huge, you know what I mean, I mean its not, I instantly recognized that the reason that that human being was dead was because of the colour of his skin. And that infuriated me. So I made a sticker about it and I went to the protests. And then about six months later, my sticker shows up on some gun website, where some redneck is talking about how it would be really great if you had a candy, cause its just basically Skittles, it's a Smith and Wesson made of Skittles and they're like, oh, I wanna get one of these for my kid. Mortifying! You know, it was like, I that's not my, you know, I'm not I'm not here to argue that. It's out there. And that was one of my first lessons in like you don't really have like, art's fascinating like it's not mine now, as soon as I take it outside of my head and put it out into the world, you know, it is it is what everyone makes of it. And that makes you, it makes me, it was a point at which I became more careful of distilling my ideas. Not that I regret, I mean I still think that one's really great. It's a powerful piece and I'm proud of it, but I don't. Whereas I used to just be a little more, spontaneous or reactionary. I now tend to give myself a day or two to really sit with something if I wanna put it out just to make sure that it's saying what I want it to say. And then it's hard to misinterpret.

[AD]

Yeah you want to start the right conversations! So you briefly mentioned about how it's, you know, obviously the fact that it's not legal, and some people obviously don't view it very well. But obviously, that is kind of the point of it, in a way. So what is your take on streets artists, especially Queer Street artists, who kind of have moved over to the mural scene as opposed to what you're doing?

[BD]

I, even queer issue aside, I've never I've always kind of separated muralism from street art. And *only* because I don't even have the skills to do, you know what I'm saying? Yeah, it's a clear distinction for me as an artist to be like, yeah. I mean, somebody, I've done walls and they've been an extension of what my street art is. But they are not these amazing five story epic paintings. So, I mean at that point it becomes, I don't wanna say it's influenced, but it is in influenced, because whoever's wall that is is the one who is ultimately making that decision. Does that make sense?

[AD]

Yeah, no, that absolutely makes sense!

[BD]

So that, that's the only part for me where it's like, yeah, that's great. And I think I there's no I have no problem, I think you should have more representation. I think there should be queer murals everywhere. But but it's not necessarily the same as putting that queer art in a place where queer art doesn't belong. And where queer art may not be welcome. I mean, I even struggle with that, I mean Dusty loves when somebody puts a big dick on something. You know, someone put a tonne of penises New York last year and all hell broke loose. Yeah, it was it was like not my style, but appreciate what it's doing. And I appreciate the sentiment. I've also just always, and maybe it's just the nature of my work, I like having, I like taking a whimsical approach like that, stickers for me are just fun. That's the point. Stickers really still in to any *grown up* you get them stickers and all of a sudden they're like nine years old. There's just something awesome about stickers! And so, so my work, I try to keep it whimsical, no matter how serious or important the topic is, I still you know, and that's just that's where the 20 foot penis or the, you know, swearing, I just it's one of those things where I'm like, I know it's in public. I know there's kid. And I don't I've always struggled with that. The punk rock in me says yeah, go for it. But like the guy who has to explain to somebody doesn't need to know what that is.

So, but as far as murals, yeah, I think it's great. I think I think all queer street art is important and positive. But I do think that there's an extra element of, like I said, putting it in a place where it doesn't belong or is unexpected. You know, and like murals are different, murals are billboards. And they are, if they are sanctioned, they have to you know, that means that that person agrees with that statement. And yes I'd love I'd love queer murals to show up in Tennessee. In Trump Country. That's not going to happen with murals, that *will* happen with street art. There's plenty of people who are doing that with stickers and wheat paste. So I guess I'm just a little old punk about street art staying street art. It *is* about breaking the law. You don't ask for permission.

[AD]

You just talked then a little bit about, sort of, other street artists, and I've kind of come to you through Dusty. What do you think the collaboration can do for Queer Street artists?

[BD]

Collaboration always, I always think it's a positive thing. Only because, even in my own work, I like, you need to be challenged. And whether it's being challenged creatively or being challenged emotionally, that's inevitable that if you work with another artist, that's going to come like someday. If if I worked with Homo Riot, which is overtly sexual it would be interesting to see how, well, how would that affect what I do? Would you know? Would it would it would I turn their work whimsical or would my whimsical work become more provocative? I don't know. But I won't know until I'm faced with that opportunity to do that, because on my own, it's not something that I'm inspired to do. So, and it's also so new, to be honest, I, the last five or six years is when it's become a real, I mean, I remember when Dusty was gonna come out to Portland and he was asking me if there were queer artists here and I just, I came out about two years ago and I was astounded. Not only their queer, they're bi, they're trans, their pansexual. It's not even fair to put a label on it. And I didn't even know I didn't even, outside of New York, where it was still very, I don't know, I think I maybe knew two other artists who were gay and not even really making queer specific art, but just street artists who happened to be gay.

So coming out here and finding that there's like a very underserved and underrepresented community of artists. You know, I don't know. I don't know what the future of that is. I think it's more important now than it used to be. Like for me, like I said, ten years ago, even, before the election, we were in a place where where it was the majority of people who had that sort of live and let live attitude seemed, to be the vocal majority. And since that's changed, yeah, you're gonna have that reaction. You're going to have a lot of people who are like, wait a minute, don't forget about me. Like now I'm not represented. Now, I do not feel like I have a president or Senate that represents my my my my life, my representation, my needs.

[AD]

Show's how much work there is to do still, doesn't it!

[BD]

Yes! And it's important work. And if it if it means annoying, you know, annoying somebody on the way to work, if they go to work and have a conversation about it, maybe a it'll change somebody's mind. But yeah, I don't. But like I said, I don't even know that it was something that was really, I just I remember somebody coming up, we used to go on Flickr, Flickr was the way that you were finding other street artists. And every once in a while I would see one of my pieces up and suddenly, like the rainbow flag didn't necessarily get a lot of love in Brooklyn. Initially, because it was just like, you know, 'Williamsburg is for faggots'. Okay. Yay! You're really gonna make me want to introduce myself next time we're at some, you know, street art meet up. And this was another *artist*. This this wasn't just like public reaction. This was the guys who thought that the street was theirs to paint. And that other

people coming in, especially people who didn't represent what they wanted to represent. You know, and that just made me, that just pissed me off more, so I put it more.

[AD]

So have you ever experienced, like censorship of your art, either on social media or on the street?

[BD]

Yes. Besides the people saying nasty things about gay people. They get crossed off occasionally. Mostly, honestly, it's been like the gay sticker, the rainbow sticker that's probably the most overt. And like, Dusty talks about how I signal. And I didn't even really know what that meant when he started telling me about it. But realizing that what he was talking about was back in the day, being just like, even before the 90s, gay people couldn't, gay people couldn't be gay. That's why we all had to be friends of like Liza Minnelli. That's why we all had to have these things that we knew, you know, I mean, the current one is, I mean, my husband's funny because when you meet somebody and they watch RuPaul, he knows they're going to be friends. Because with that comes a certain amount of like, OK. You're cool! You're cool with being gay and expressing yourself! And that's what, that still happens to a certain extent. And that's where things like Divine, yeah, nobody crosses out Divine stickers. Cause if you don't, if you're not aware of who Divine is, it brings you no, it brings you no reaction. It's just a sticker of a fat woman screaming, the same way that that gun isn't about a kid getting murdered. It's it's a candy-coloured gun. And that's one of the things that probably, because of the generation I come from.

I came out in the 90s and it was not easy. I mean, it certainly wasn't illegal. But it was still a time where, you know, in high school, I was bullied and it was a relief to go into the city and find other gay people like, drag queens, and get away from that. So I still I guess, there's a certain amount of my art that still signals rather than being like gay. It's just like Klaus Nomi. All right. You know who Klaus Nomi is, I mean I can *guarantee* we're going to be fine, cause even if you just went and Googled it, that means you know that I am fascinated by this alien creature, pastry chef from Austria, who had, who had a brilliant but short career and died of AIDS. You know, and that's that's a powerful story. And I'm glad that I hope that at some point my work inspires some people, at least who didn't know who he is to find out.

[AD]

It inspired me to do that! So you know you've got one person to do that!

[BD]

I'm glad! The funny part is that's, that makes what I do worth it. It's really that that's where the Instagram kind of lost me a little. At first it was fun because you're like, yay! People like! And then you realize people are just trying to get clout. Just trying to like, it's all this whole big, kind of high school game. And nothing means more to me than somebody whose like, I didn't know who that was. But now I do. And that's cool. You know, like. Just the individual person. The odds of them even finding my work are slim. But to have somebody be like, yeah I like your work or it made me think of this or made think of that or made me find out more about something. That's amazing. Like that's, you know, that's that's the kind of power you have when you have a *media* company. But you can do the same thing with some sticky paper and a marker.

So yeah, I get it, I get scratched out once in a while. I try not to take it personally. Sometimes it's just other people putting up, you know, people will put up over you, which makes sense. And some people really get into that part of the game. Like, my feelings are hurt now I hate you and I'm going to put all my stickers on yours. I don't have much time for it. I will, if it seems really nasty or vindictive yeah I love to put my sticker back up, in a place that somebody didn't want it.

And mostly it's scratching. If people take a sticker off I'm always, I assume they liked it. I'm not one of those people, I love the fact that somebody took my work off the wall. Cause the street is the gallery. You're not going to sell it. I have some friends who get really, when one of my good friends that I work with, he does great, amazing pieces. He puts in a lot of work and puts these huge pieces up and then people steal them and he'll be so upset and I'm like, but you *put it out there*. And he's like, yeah, I put it out for everybody. And I get that. I understand that. And then but I've also taken work off, I've taken people's stickers that inspire me. So I don't, you know, I I'm mostly upset when I see somebody clearly take their car keys and just try to scratch a big X on something. And like I said, the only one, nobody's ever done that with the 99 versus one. Cause we're all pretty much on the bottom end of that one. Like, we can all relate to the fact that there's, you know where we are, the 99 and we ain't got all the money!

[AD]

Yeah there must be very few people who disagree with that one

[BD]

Yeah, exactly and those are the kind of things I love to do. But yes, the Rainbow one occasionally gets scratched, but nobody ever knows. Like I said, Divine just looks like some fat lady screaming. But people who recognize her and know his work and know her work, you know, connect with it. Yeah I mean, the wall I did in New York with all the logos, the hieroglyphic wall got bombed maybe a month after I did it. And it was devastating. Like I was, I was devastated because I spent three days making this wall. And some guy just came and did his fuckin two-initial name on it. On the entire wall. And you know, and at first I was pissed. And then I did a little research. And I realized there a picture from 1992 at that same corner and that same wall with that same tag on it. That motherfucker had tagged that wall for the entire time he lived in New York. Throughout the 90s, when it was really like, you know, when it was all just about graffiti. And so he was in town for a friend's funeral and he just went back to his old play. And that's when I realized, oh, he doesn't the fucking know me. He didn't know me. He didn't care. It just was his wall. And that took the sting out of it, you know, I put it back up. I had some weird dudes well, like ask me a bunch of questions, hang out with me the whole day I was putting it back up. And that guy knew, cause I had a feeling I was a friend of the guy. And I was like, yeah, you know, I'll leave this little piece up here but this has to represent me again because I'm the one on the wall right now. But yeah. It's always frustrating when somebody destroys your work. But it's also, you never know what someone else is going through.

[AD]

And you've got plenty more to put up I presume!

[BD]

Yeah, exactly and if I, you know, in ten years if I go back to New York for a friend's funeral. I may very well go back to that same wall. But then it'll be someone else's art.

[AD]

Well, thank you so much. Is there anything else that you think that I've not sort of touched on that you think is relevant?

[BD]

Well I mean, everybody does do it for different reasons obviously. I mean for me it will always be about the resistance and that's only because I haven't, I haven't gotten a great sense of community from it. Yeah. And I don't, I don't know if that's just where where I am, you know, where I put myself. But I know there is no community for queer art in New York. And I'm just now getting into the sticker community in Portland, which does have a really, really strong community. So I'm curious about that, if that will change my my outlook on that.

Because here is that the non queer street artists are, like I said, everybody is just kind of whatever whatever needs to be resisted. So it's a very I mean, Portland is *such* a political and, politically conscious and driven and very left. And I mean we literally are anti-fascist because we have Nazis here. That didn't happen in New York. In New York you had assholes. And you had people who might have voted for Trump and quietly kept to themselves.

[AD]

But not like the extreme, right-wing?

[BD]

Yeah. Literally, across a 20-minute drive from here in Washington is where Patriot Prayer is focused.

[AD]

That's crazy.

[BD]

Yeah, they're coming tomorrow. Tomorrow they're going to be at the courthouse and a bunch of, you know, Portland trannies are, we're all gonna go down there and tell them to get the fuck out of Portland cause they don't even live here. And that's that's something I never thought I would see. Like, I didn't, that that that it inspires the resistance. So, yeah. From where I'm at and like my work now, it's a lot about resistance. And that's only because three years ago we didn't have to. Not that it didn't exist, there were people that definitely didn't like us.

[AD]

But it wasn't encouraged?

[BD]

Yeah it wasn't encouraged and it wasn't validated by the leader of a country. I mean it's an interesting angle to figure out what the difference is. I just I hope that my work fosters a community. You know, I hope that it helps people realize that they're not alone. And, you know, being different. And that it's okay to be different. In fact, there wouldn't be all of these things that we love so much or because somebody decided to be different. Like that is literally the birth of creativity is taking the other path. This is, we've always drawn the sky blue. It's the person who decides that it's going to be green that makes us go, huh? I haven't looked at the sky in a long time.

But that's, that's why I think it's important. And that's why ultimately like, I don't care whether people are making resistant art or community art as long as they're making art because it's important for people to create. Especially at times when you're frustrated. You know, you have a voice. Use it.

Appendix 7: Telephone interview with [REDACTED]

Interviewer: [REDACTED]

Interviewee: [REDACTED]

Date/time: 10/02/2020, 7pm (GMT)

[AD]

Okay, so just to sort of start off with, how do you sort of identify with the Queer Street Art movement?

[JN]

I'm a stencil artist who does a lot of queer, so I consider myself a queer stencil artist. Yeah. I've been doing street art for a number of years and doing stencils of drag queens and like leather guys other queer iconography to create queer visual safe space. There's an idea of, about queer nationhood, which was up happening in the 90s in New York or in the states and other other areas besides just being in major cities and they're putting up a stickers there, they talked about gay bashings and stopping them like, we're gonna fight back, and things like that. But they were just these like neon stickers are being put out in public. And so their idea was that like these stickers created a visual safe space for for queer people and people who identify as being queer. And so using kind of that similar idea, I feel putting out stencils of drag queens or leather guys or queer imagery becomes a a a form of creating visual safe space, in in my art.

[AD]

Cool, and sort of, in terms of not just the LGBTQ+ community, but also of society as a whole, what kind of impact do you hope to have on sort of the wider society?

[JN]

Well, I'm really hoping that, so, there's a limited amount of murals that exist in, that are about queer people, so so murals are really about empowering neighbourhoods, communities, cities like, you know, counties, boroughs like all of that stuff. And then different people of ethnic groups, you know, all of these things, women and like we have very few queer murals that exist in the world, and they get defaced by the general public. And they get shut down in the approval process by city commissioners, neighbourhood petitions, things of these nature.

So by doing queer street art like these stencils and putting them on the street, I hope that like it somehow can be a, become a stepping stone to actually allow for queer murals to exist. You know they can't shut down the approval process of a stencil or a wheat paste or a small mural of that that nature, you know. But they definitely do shut down the approval process of of any imagery that maybe would even empower the trans community. And in the place that we are in the world right now pretty much worldwide, having more imagery of trans people and in general may actually become more safe space for them. So I really am hoping that my art somehow can lead to empower people themselves and create a visual safe space, but also lead to something that would allow for more clear visibility in murals and ads and other other kinds of information that we're bombarded with constantly, that just says that heterosexuality is the norm.

[AD]

And you just sort of briefly touched on queer street art especially getting defaced. Has that ever happened to any work that you've done and how do you react to it?

[JN]

Yeah, I mean, sometimes early because I mean, I've been doing this for for quite some time now. And so early early on, I kind of did get some stuff defaced and whatnot. But I think I've



earned a little bit of street cred across the States anyways to actually not have my stuff defaced that much anymore, which is which is pretty cool. But when that does happen, you just have to like go and put it back up and you just have to do like more more stuff.

I am I'm known for these stencils of these Koi and they're like on the ground. So people really, really like them, they really resonate with that. But like, soon as they realize that they do other stencils that are all my my queer stuff. They sometimes consider it somewhat OK. Although, you know, we have a very lacking visibility in art museums and galleries as well with queer art and having art in that space and so if art gets shut down from approval from gallery staff, why not just utilize the streets and put more queer art out onto the streets? And I really definitely for for a number of years taught stencil classes and really tried to promote, you know, other artists and connect other street artists, as to create somewhat of an art movement. You know, like in general, like, you know, street art and Queer street art art in itself or whatever that is, you know, this is the thing about graffiti artists there's like breakdowns of different kind of categories in this different world of like graffiti and street art and stuff. And I think that like creating more people, doing this and empowering them and kind of bringing them together can help just create a movement more than just individuals doing it.

[AD]

And so you just mentioned the Koi fish. Obviously, that's got kind of quite overt political undertones, more than sort of some of the other work. Could you just talk a little bit about, sort of, that specific type of work that you do and kind of where it's come from and what kind of message you are trying to share there?

[JN]

Yeah, like, I mean, well, I. I spent like three months in China studying contemporary art while going to school in Milwaukee art school for the arts or whatever. And while I was in China I kind of found a lot of things really interesting. But but one thing was when the communism came there, they had to destroy everything old to make way for the new. So they actually had to destroy their history. Any written scrolls had to be burned. Any, you know, any text, any anything like that. So they devised a plan that they were going to have Chinese lucky numbers and Koi painting. So depending on how many Koi there are in a painting and what the total is, references a different Chinese like lucky number so that history would never be lost.

They became this like visual, visual history. It also has like different iconography and some of you know, just a few of the fish or whatever. And it's really interesting. Asia is a large continent and has a number of smaller countries in it and they don't really necessarily get along with one another. They sometimes have their their things that, but there's one thing that's like strong in every single country over there and that's the Koi. And the Koi in every country is definitely a symbol that's very empowering. And so like the idea of the peace stuff comes from definitely Eastern iconography, you know, like Noah's Ark. And this idea of a dove going out and finding a branch and bringing it back to the ark to see if there's land out there. And so it's kind of got turned into this thing, like this peace dove, like this olive branch as a thing. But so so in a Western society, that does mean the meaning, I think that the Koi. definitely could be something that's a very peaceful thing in all of them. And it's something that could maybe, you know, kind of join them. You know, for all for all the other countries as a symbol of love, friendship. It's like very beautiful thing that that is kind of cherished, which is, I think that's pretty cool. Oh, my goodness.

Yeah. So whenever I do, them on the ground, you know, I do them in these different number combinations, sometimes depending on an area like like if I went to like Las Vegas I would do eight of them. Because eight of them is a symbol for good fortune. So whenever I put them on, I just try to, you know, do these things sometimes like Parks is good for seven

because it's about relationships. And I think that relationship can be broken down to community. So like putting them out in these places, hopefully are creating feng shui kinds of things that have been used for a number of years in Asia, like in these pictures, they wouldn't keep just doing these paintings, if there was something that wasn't there or something that was kind of missing but in the East we haven't been really introduced to a lot of Asian art and and things like that. That's what the Koi are about. And and so I've just been doing it for 13 years now, you know first started in June 2006. And in like November on Thanksgiving Day people people would be like inside eating no-one would be out it and I would just put like a bunch of them, and and it was really it was really, really people really liked it. I didn't really expect them to be as cool they are to people. But I guess they kind of are and it's allowed for me to then be able to talk and give significance to my stencils of drag queens, you know, a lot of graffiti artists and whatnot when they found out that I do stencils of drag queens early on in San Francisco and whatnot, they definitely shunned me or kind of gave me the cold, political cold shoulder, which is kind of politically correct homophobia I broke it down to, or this thing. But, you know, it's taken a number of years of of doing them and my other stuff, too, of, you know, get get where I have a bit of my stuff doesn't get defaced so much anymore.

[AD]

That's good to hear! And obviously you've briefly touched on the drag queens, clearly queer history is a really big part of your work. Why do you think that it's important that queer history within your work is based in the streets?

[JN]

Well cause like, I think that's where the younger generation of people and any any group is like really into like, you know, video games, skateboarding, you know, graffiti, street art, you know people are into like street art and and graffiti and they really pay attention to it. And so if you can put in a message that's about the queer history and like also maybe in a neighbourhood or a location where that history actually happened. You're you're carrying on the history without having to like tell someone and feel preacher-like in any way of explaining our history.

And its cool that it has that impact on one hundred percent of the demographic, like we can have all of these, you know, art shows during Queer History Month and things like that. And these, you know, kind of designated times and spaces. But when you put it out on the street, everybody sees it like young and old, you know, all sorts of ethnic groups. They're like kind of forced to have queer visibility. And like see this, as you know, in the public realm, you know, I think I think throughout history and a lot of countries, street art has politically been used as a way to make people see something that they're not seeing. And so I think that like having our history out there, you know, it was only recently that I think, it's only in California that we now have queer history in high school textbooks. You know, like it's like got no place, like, you know, and a lot of our books in the states have been burned or whatever in libraries defaced and then turned back in or defaced without being checked out. And so there isn't, you know, that written history. And so having a visual history, you know, is is really, I think, an important way of kind of carrying on this message, and you know, it was like the idea of the Koi and like that history of like them trying to carry on their visual, their messages or whatever, that like somehow is translated into wanting to put up by my history or or the history of cities and and and whatnot for it for people to see in that way.

So I think I think it is important and it's just I think it's a good tool for things. And it creates safe space, you know, once once, you know, we see something that recognizes to us in our community as as a whole or whatever, you feel safer as your self. You know, there's all sorts of articles written about, you know, performers like drag performers getting Ubers and things like that. And then the Uber drivers just like pull off or are really rude to them you know, so, so just kind of having a visibility, that maybe will foster some change in that specifically. But

also a lot of other things, you know. And so I think I think it's really important to have a some of that history, and have this visually, in a way that everybody can see it, and not just for those who are going to go to a museum or gallery, you know, like I can make art, I can put it in galleries and stuff, but a very small percentage of the city would see it like only 10 percent or something, maybe even less. Whereas on the street, it's like 100 percent.

[AD]

Thank you. And sort of more personally. What, if anything, does creating this kind of queer street art, do you for your own sort of sense of identity or community?

[JN]

I don't know I mean I think it makes me. It makes me feel better about myself I guess. Like, you know, I was I was like, I don't know, yeah, like growing up, like I wasn't able to be gay or whatever. And and I had a like, and I never knew that there was like, I don't know. Yeah. It's just this thing of like I exist and things. It's kind of kind of weird. But yeah, it's it's I think it's it's really it's really good. It's empowering and it shows that I exist. It allows for me to show who I am and to everyone, you know, in this way that maybe I maybe I don't I don't know. Yeah.

[AD]

Yeah, and I, I've seen you were part of the, The Streets are Queer art show in L.A. back in November. What would you say is like the importance of collaboration between sort of these specific types of artists?

[JN]

I think it's I think it helps to create like like a movement, like there has to be more than one artist doing something. And the more artists that are doing something, the more that it exists as something real in the art world and people start to pay attention to it. And like, you know, there's a lot of street art books none of them really have any like any of my queer stuff, but they have other things I've done and they want to like, you know, with these things. But I've been really fighting a lot to actually have other things put in them other than than just the kind of visual safe street art that I do, and so I think that the more people that have like group shows or just shows that recognize us in different cities, that we we do our art in is really important to create a visibility to what our message is. Because, you know, some of it's very political. Some of it definitely is things that may not be approved for, you know, galleries or something or our messages. And especially going back to, you know, the stuff of Act Up and when they were doing their stuff.

[AD]

And just sort of talking about social media. Obviously, you document a lot of your art on Instagram. How has social media changed the street art scene both positively and negatively?

[JN]

Oh, yeah. It well, I think I think I think that is good because it allows for people to see art that's like not everywhere. But it also allows for, allows for some fake existence or like, I don't know. I think that it's good it allows for art to last forever for art to be everywhere and people can like go to these locations and take these pictures cause they like have social media located in geographic and stuff like that. So I think that's good. But I think at the same time, it like it has changed like street artists and like street art, like I mean, I kind of started doing what I was doing and in 2002. I used like Flickr just to like meet other artists. And at the same time, like, you can't really put your art up there cause you're concerned the cops are somehow watching it. And like now there's like social media and like anybody can make anything clear location if it's permanently there or not, if it was actually installed not and like take a picture and like make kind of these existences that are more for gallery art like or that

side of it, other than what kind of street art was kind of about when it started, which is like taking those rules away from that and putting art out on the street and not, you know, just to kind of be an advertisement, or like a branding or a company. Look, we have enough branding ads and posters on the street for Nike and Apple to buy these. We don't need to necessarily use Instagram to create advertisements that look similar to the ones of Nike and this stuff and putting them on the street.

[AD]

Thank you! And just one last question. America, along with numerous other countries, have kind of moved towards right wing politics recently. What do you think that is going to do to the queer street art movement and sort of, you know, this whole kind of scene in general?

[JN]

Well, I hope that it creates more of a fight. Like I I hope that it creates people realizing that they can express their voice maybe in this way and it definitely can empower. You can definitely be therapeutic mentally, like socially, like all these things. When when whenever you put basically a protest in an art form on the streets, where everybody can view it, you know, you have a sense of empowerment and all that stuff. And I think that is as people may start to feel that they're less, less empowered as everything's moving in this right wing direction. I hope that people can maybe see this art to create more of a peaceful way of thinking and more of an accepting way, but also for others to maybe kind of join in it and make art that's about whatever their feeling is going on in their their country around the world right now, because there's a lot of things going around the world everywhere that the media and news is improperly feeding us or improperly giving us. And and we need to find ways to stand up and and resist, telling the stories that are being told by mainstream media.

You know, and I hope that, like, you know, it doesn't stop queer street art I hope that we don't all become arrested as some political news journalist or something of that nature, like by our freedom of speech or something of that nature. I know I've heard some things about Egypt in Cairo and some of the street artists that are doing things there. They just kind of disappear. And it's very kind of unfortunate and its more political, but I hope that like, you know, it doesn't go that way with with somehow of a radification of of queerness and they come after, you know, the street artists, because it is you know, it does seem kind of fun and cool but when you think about a global scale, it definitely has huge protest and political connotations or effects that could happen. You know, the States has kind of became socially okay, sometimes certain cities do go after people depending on what they do as graffiti artists or street art imagery on a street, way more than they would go after the general person just to somehow have their point of view on the street or whatever in this very weird way. It's very, you know, but in the larger cities, that hasn't happened so much.

Appendix 8: Telephone interview with Homo Riot

Interviewer: [REDACTED]

Interviewee: Homo Riot

Date/time: 10/02/2020, 6pm (GMT)

[AD]

So just to start off with, how do you identify with the Queer Street art movement?

[HR]

Well, I mean, I feel like I, I feel like I've kind of been in it from the very beginning. I've been doing my street art under this moniker for about eleven years, a little, you know, like a little over eleven years. And at that time when I started, I was really interested in, you know, like trying to find other people who were doing, kind of, what at that time to me was more like gay street art, like homo kind of centric street art. But, you know, I like immediately found a couple of people, but there really weren't that many people who were doing it. And since then, it's just been like, you know, just like such a growth spurt, I think. And yeah, I mean, I feel like, I feel like I'm pretty wired into the whole scene and know many of the other, you know, queer street artists that, you know, I'm really happy to to, you know, to consider myself part of that group.

[AD]

Do you think that, sort of, cisgender or straight like 'allies' can be involved in the Queer Street art movement, or do you think it's a space that should be reserved solely for the people who identify as sort of queer, or, you know?

[HR]

Yeah. So. So I, just before I answer that, I just want to be really clear that, obviously I'm only answer for myself and I don't speak for the group as a whole right? But. But I mean, I'm I am a person who is really open to, to allies and assistance from all corners. And and and so like I just, um, I just curated a big show that that closed in December. And it was, you know, like open at a gallery that's in L.A. that is not, you know, not traditionally thought of as a queer space. The gallerist there is it is a cisgendered female. You know, she was very, very open to the idea of of hosting this show and really putting a lot of energy behind it. You know, I mean, I have I have lots of cisgendered friends that that are not queer, you know, and and I rely on them a lot for, you know, places to crash and good ideas about, you know, places to hit. And, you know, I I always found a lot of support in the cisgendered street art community, to be honest. You know, in the straight street art world, I have really never found any, you know, any resistance or or any kind of homophobia *directly*. I mean, I've I've I've seen some indirect examples of it. You know, like things that I've put up on the street that are that are spots that only other street artists are really going to. And then I can see something that I've put up a day or two later has been, you know, kind of marked through or tried to scrape off or something. But but but I've never really had a very direct interaction with someone where I felt like it was, you know, homophobic or they were really trying to kind of, you know, silence me in any way. So, yes, for me, I really. Yeah, I mean, I I appreciate I appreciate anybody who's who's an ally and who is open to to, you know, to giving assistance and to giving support and love.

[AD]

Nice! And, just sort of, you spoke briefly then about people kind of scratching off your art on the street.

And a couple of people that I've spoken to previously, have said that some of their more, the work that they've done that's more, kind of, homoerotic has been targeted more. Is it something that you found as well and, like, how do you react to it?



[HR]

Yeah, yeah, well, absolutely. I have I have experienced this from the very beginning of of, you know, my activity on the street. And, I have some things that I can put up that are not triggering. I think, you know, that don't really immediately scream, you know, 'homo' anything or queer or anything, they're they're like a little more coded, right? Those things can live on the street for a long time because people are not, you know, because they're not triggered by it. But but definitely like the thing that I consider to be kind of my logo and what most people identify as my work. And this is the two, this is the two bearded men kissing, right? That can really stimulate people and really trigger, you know, can really trigger reaction. At first I was you know, whenever I first started seeing that, it would frustrate me and like pissed me off. But I have kind of changed the way I feel about it to a degree, because, you know, sometimes we put work up and nobody ever sees it or you don't know if anybody has even noticed it. And and this is a real example of the energy. And just like, you know, obviously it's aggression. But but but just it's it's it's a clear example that that you are making some kind of impact that somebody is taking time out of their, out of their busy lives to like go over to your piece and try to scrape it off or they're literally putting a physical, you know, energy into into that piece. And so to me, there's something kind of gratifying about that. I mean, I hate it when it happens someplace that I'm only passing it through, and, and won't be going back to for a long time. Like I just did a tour of Europe last year. And, you know, that was that was frustrating to know that I'd put something up and a couple of days later, you know, in Paris, somebody had scraped it off. But, you know, such as the such is the life of a of a wheat pasting queer street artist.

[AD]

I guess it comes with the job, doesn't it? And you said like just briefly then about the impact, what sort of, talking about society a little bit later, with a focus just on the LGBTQ+ community, what impact do you hope to have on them through your art?

[HR]

Yeah. So so again, I will kind of flashback to when I started. The reason I started doing what I was doing was to have an impact on straight, you know, like the straight community. I was angry. I was pissed off. I wanted to be like in their face. But what turned out to happen was I ended up getting so many messages from other queer people. I mean, across the spectrum, trans, lesbians, everybody saying that, you know, that they saw this on the street and that it it made them feel good. It felt empowering. It made them understand that there, that they weren't alone. And so so that really became more of my focus and my intent behind the art and and so. And so now I really I do it more than anything to communicate with other queers and just to say, you know, you're not alone. There's a there's a group of us out here that are doing this. And and and this is about visibility and it's about community and it's about understanding that we can be radical and and, you know, punk rock and and and edgy and, you know, and and you can be a part of that group, too. You know, you know, that there is community there.

[AD]

And obviously your work, you say some of it's coded. But, obviously the work that you're known for is, is, kind of more homoerotic. Why did you choose that style and not, sort of a more, kind of covert, coded style?

[HR]

Well, yeah, because I wanted, I wanted a straight, uneducated un, you know, intellectually curious person to see it and know exactly what it was. Do you know what I mean? Like I didn't want to hide it. I wanted to fucking put it in their face, right? I wanted to put it on the street as they're going to work or they're dropping their kids off at school or they're picking grandma up from the retirement community. I wanted them to see it and understand that they can't silence me. Right. I'm I'm I'm I'm on the street corner and you're not gonna get out

of your car right here and cover it up. So, so, so so that was my initial, you know, purpose, and and it and it worked. I think at that time to to to kind of garner a little more attention for me in that moment.

I was, I started in Los Angeles, and at that time, street art was kind of seeing, you know, it was kind of seeing a breakthrough in the artistic world in in in just mainstream society people were more aware of what it was and L.A. was kind of a hotbed for it. And, and so for me, just kind of getting more attention and not blending in and not being bland or or too covert worked. I think in my, you know, I mean, worked to my benefit

[AD]

So its sort of about visibility then?

[HR]

Yeah, sure, that's right

[AD]

And what, if anything, does sort of creating this art do for, like, your own sense of identity?

[HR]

Well, I mean, again, I've been doing it for for this, you know, more than a decade. And so over that time, it has meant a lot of different things to me. You know, and and so for the first few years, it really gave me a very powerful sense of of who I was and who I wanted to be in a a public setting. You know, I was I mean, I've been out as a gay man for, you know, a long time. But but, you know, I'm I'm I'm very I am a very cisgendered appearing male man. You know? I mean, I don't, I don't really exhibit, you know, too many ambiguous physical traits or, you know, I mean, not just I mean, nobody. Let's see, what am I trying to say? I, I guess that that I wasn't wearing it, you know, really publicly the way that some people do. And so. And so the street art was more of a was more of an outlet to really like say it loudly, you know, and like really, you know, really make that my identity.

Since then, you know, I mean, I I feel like it's more of a mission at this point. I am an artist. I'm a compulsive creative. I create constantly. But I don't always create, you know, queer street art. I mean, I I I create a lot of different kinds of art. And so. And so there are aspects of it that can be a little bit confining to my to my creative spirit, actually. So, I mean, a lot of times when I'm when I'm out doing the work, I sometimes think, you know, wow, should I should I start to evolve this, you know, should I start try and incorporate more of my other work into it? And I have done a little bit of that. I I just started a kind of a new campaign that it's it's just a really raw, 'Eat the Rich'. And so. So it doesn't it doesn't specifically have any queer connotations to it, although I think a lot of I think a lot of queer culture would would kind of you know, I think I think they would kind of agree with it or, you know, kind of take it on as a you know, as a banner or something. But anyway. But, yeah, I mean, I don't know if that answered the question or not. I got a little off track. But but but but yeah. I mean in the time I've been doing it I feel like, I feel like it has it has contributed to my own identity and, but now I feel a little bit constrained within just my own my own 'homo riot' kind of moniker and voice. Yeah.

[AD]

And so, earlier you mentioned this art show that you curated in LA, is that 'The Streets are Queer', that one?

[HR]

Yes. Yeah that's right.

[AD]

So what, do you think that there's sort of any kind of specific importance that can come from collaboration between, sort of, the Queer Street artists.

[HR]

Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. Totally. Well I mean one thing that I find about about about mainstream, about mainstream street art right now is that it's it's a little passé. Right. It's like had its moment. And a lot of the straight, kind of, mainstream street artists I look at a lot of them and I think they're like sellouts. Right. They're they're they're much more interested in gallery, you know, gallery shows and and and doing murals in hotels around the world. And, you know, this kind of like really commercialised work, and most of them are not really doing street art anymore. Very few of them in the mainstream are doing, you know. And, you know, like like like like vandalism, like like, you know, work that is unpermitted, let's say. But queer, queer street artists are still out there doing it on the edge. Right. And and and I feel like we have a more holistic kind of approach to it. More like like like we're we're, I believe, still carrying on the spirit of what kind of the original street art movement was all about, because we many of us have messages that that we are trying to get across. We are we are really focused on visibility and yet we're not we're not really commercially viable in the same way that that that these other mainstream street artists are. So. So for me, I feel like it's super important to to really, like grow the community, to be really nurturing and supportive with each other and and to, you know, really push what we're doing in a way that that continues to kind of be on the edge and and that continues to to communicate our, you know, our existence.

[AD]

Cool. And so you said that you've obviously been doing street art for eleven years, so quite an old hand at it! How has social media sort of changed the street art seen, like both positively and negatively? Because I know you got quite a large following on Instagram

[HR]

I mean, I would say that if it weren't for social media, I wouldn't have continued doing this after, you know, six or eight months or a year, I would have. I think that the that the feedback that I received via social media that the, you know, street art photography is so important to what we do. Right. Always has been and it continues to be, and so someone who is is that that is going out and documenting the work and using their own time and resources to to, you know, to share it with the world is you know, it's just it's like you can't even measure how important that is. So so without social media, that would have never happened. I don't believe. And and, you know, it just gives the queer artist the ability to to connect and and to share work. And then obviously, it gives us the opportunity to share it with a wider audience and to get that feedback. I don't know that I've experienced any negativity from the social media aspect of it. The only thing that's that's a negative is that it's very time consuming. And so, you know, I I feel like I probably spend an inordinate amount of time, you know, online and trying to kind of think about what the next post is or following other people or, you know, trying to stay up on who's who's getting up and so, you know, that would be the only negative thing I can think of.

[AD]

It's not just you, I can tell you we all do that! And just one last question. More, sort of, on the political side, obviously, the US has seen a move towards right wing politics. How do you think this will affect the Queer Street Art movement, or your work more specifically?

[HR]

All right. Well, I mean, first of all, I will correct you that it's not just America that has experienced a shift to right wing politics, I think you will agree. But, you know, I don't know exactly. I think there's an aspect of it that that that is invigorating and that gives us, you

know, a really serious reason to be out and and doing what we're doing. I also think that there is a risk that it could become more targeted from, you know, kind of a governmental point of view, you know, maybe more surveillance of the artist. You know, I mean, I am somewhat anonymous, but certainly not completely anonymous. And ah, and I don't think it's too hard for someone to probably figure out who I am and where I am. And if they wanted to crack down on on this, you know, the kind of message that I'm putting out there, I think they could do that. I just think in the past we've been, you know, that it's been a little more accepted. And there are other other things for the government to worry about, right? But but as this as this kind of wave of conservatism takes over and these people who are, you know, true believers and brainwashed and and who are part of the part of that part of that establishment, you know, if if somebody wanted to target an artist or an individual, it becomes pretty easy for them to do that. You know, I mean, the censorship on social media, I think is, you know, is really abhorrent, and and is so, directly targeted at queer artist just across the board, not just street artists, but but *all* queer artists. So, you know, I think that's that can be really, really detrimental. And as those forces are emboldened, I think that we run a risk of being, you know, being targeted. And that's and that's kind of scary. But but but I don't think at this point. I think what it does for the collective, at least I hope, is to embolden us and and to it to energize us and to make us more determined to get our message out.

[AD]

Well, that's all of my questions. So thank you so much. Have you got anything else that you'd like to add that you think I might have missed or anything?

[HR]

Well, I mean, one thing that I think is kind of, you know, we are, we are queer street artists. And there is a gendered kind of sexual component that is underlying that that identity, I think. But I think that as a group, we share we share, many of us anyway, share a political ideology. And a political, you know, we we share, I think, in the way that certain religious people might share political affiliation or identity. And so I think that our message doesn't have to be restricted just to gender equality and sexual identity. I mean, obviously, those things are very important and will continue to be. But but I think that speaking from a queer perspective about all kinds of social ills is is really important. And I hope that in the future that that that that is, at least equally as important to the artist as, you know, as the visibility of of various genders and and and sexual identity. Mm-Hmm.

[AD]

Yeah. So do you that, like, being queer has sort of, would you say that there's a responsibility for the audience to kind of engage with these other social messages as well?

[HR]

Well yeah I I mean I think that's what I'm trying to say. Or you know, maybe I'm just like you said before. I'm just speaking for myself and I want to be clear about that. So I feel that I feel that burden in me. I feel like I've made, I feel like I've made the point that I wanted to make with my street art as it pertains to homosexuality, right?

So. So we live in a society right now with a man who's running for the president of the United States is gay. And I mean, a lot of people, you know, take issue with his, with his gayness, you know. But but but I mean, you know that that's the truth of it. And so and so visibility of gay men is still very important but it's not nearly as as as critical for me, I think, at this moment in my life as it was when I began. Because our society has progressed, at least it's in some respects. However, there are all kinds of social ills that I see going on at that, that that trans people, people of color are are really, you know, are really dealing with and that and that I think it's important for us to really keep in the fore of the public, mind, and that we as queer artists, you know, really represent not just not just our gender, our sexual identity, but also just what is good and right, you know, and in our culture. And so, you know, that is

especially in America, it's about immigration, it's about poverty. It is about, you know, appreciating and respecting all cultures and races.

