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<div align="center">Mapping Street Art: The Image Narrative</div>

During a vacation in Puerto Rico ten years ago, I distinctly remember when my family

and I passed a wall with intricate graffiti and street art. We were on our way back to our

homestay from a day at the beach and decided to pull over. The wall decorated the rest of the

street with its bright colors and differing scenes—geometric shapes contrasted with the face of a

crying girl. Growing up in suburbia, I had hardly ever encountered graffiti. Given, some public

defacing existed here and there, but I had not normally seen large mural-like pieces of street art.

However, during trips to different cities, I had been exposed to it. Later on, I learned of a famous

graffiti artist by the name of Banksy. This incognito graffiti artist is originally from Bristol,

England and started crafting his own style in the 1990s. In the fall of 2013, I was strolling

through Twitter when I came upon a post featuring Banksy and New York City in the same

headline. Intrigued, I clicked upon the link and became immersed in a story about Banksy's

"residency," which was what he called his month-long stay in New York City.

From more research, I found that multiple news outlets and other sites used maps to

report Banksy's art to the public. I gathered information about his stay and the purpose of his

stay—to fashion his art throughout all five boroughs of the city for each day of the month. Then,

I asked myself the following question: Why in particular were maps such a popular way to group

this information together? I came to the conclusion that the reasoning had something to do with

how graffiti is a language itself. Graffiti, or street art, is a type of art that maintains its own level of communication throughout a city and becomes a mechanism for charting out territory. In this paper, I will analyze how Banksy's residency both exemplifies graffiti's linguistic qualities and the way it affects viewer response. I will then apply this notion to Banksy's residency and interpret how his art project, "Better Out Than In," can be read as a text and how this text is mapped out in pop culture. Through this approach, I will explore how mapping functions in light of a narrative story. In the first section, I will reason how graffiti does in fact resemble a type of literary language. I will then analyze his self-made website, which charted out his travels, and how it was able to be read as a travel narrative with images acting as words. The concluding portion of the essay will examine why people were inspired to make maps and how it built upon Banksy's narrative.

Prior to his invasion of New York City, much of Banksy's work has been seen throughout Europe, although most prominently in England. Over the past many years, his work has been seen throughout the United States more and more. He "is revered within the street art community" (Waclawek 33) and "his fame has escalated….to a level many graffiti writers can only dream of" (Waclawek 33). Although the key to remaining an active graffiti artist is to remain unknown, Banksy has expertly achieved such a level of fame and respect while still managing to remain anonymous. While street art is technically free, public art, Banksy's works are also sold for up to hundreds or thousands of dollars due to his level of renown. People want a piece of Banksy. His pieces generally have a "humorous and anti-authoritarian style…[that are] mostly categorized by anti-establishment, anti-war and pro-freedom messages" (Waclawek 33). These characteristics were apparent in the art he exposed on the streets of New York City during

his month-long stay, and his level of renown incited an active response from the residents of the city.

Another element that helped entice an active response was the artist's website whereupon he posts his different projects. For this particular one he created the web link, banksyny.com, to his original site, banksy.co.uk. If people were to search for his website, they would be redirected to the new one covering his progress through New York City. The website documented the artwork daily and released its general location to the public. He also linked the posts to Twitter, making an announcement of each post to his followers on this social media site. Each day inspired another rush to find his artwork before it became defaced, removed, or tainted. His website was compiled of photos underneath the date and general location, along with a subtitle comment from Banksy himself. Through the website, he was able to directly communicate with the public and inspire them to find his artwork.

The artist can most readily communicate through the unspoken words of his graffiti and the places in which it inhabits. In a brief look at the history and evolution of graffiti, the linguistic properties of the art-form become apparent. Graffiti "began in the mid- to late 1960s in Philadelphia, [and] exploded as a subculture in New York City in the 1970s" (Waclawek 10). The first form was a tag, which represents "a pseudonym that the writer devises or acquires" (Waclawek 14). Tags are the most simplistic forms of expression. While the tags are literal words painted or written on city infrastructure, they represent more than just that name. They "can also serve to convey an attitude or describe how writers want to represent themselves within a subculture" (Waclawek 14). The tag began the language of graffiti that uses images, style, and technique as a way to communicate through representation rather than a semblance of words.

By analyzing the symbolic nature of each tag, and through examining the evolution of graffiti, we can see how this public art is a language. Anna Waclawek, an art history professor at Concordia University, asserts that "the language of graffiti is in essence conceptually simple and visually complex" (13). She explains its evolution and how both placement and style are important elements in the language of graffiti. While tags, for example, are generally short, they are visually complex due to the symbolism they carry. Following the tag, came the "throwies" or "throw ups," which are defined as "larger versions of tags…consisting of outlined, traditionally 'bubble' letters, which are grouped together and sometimes filled in with a different colour…[and are then]… 'thrown up' on a train or wall in a brisk manner" (Waclawek 16). Afterward, graffiti fell under the broader term "street art" as the third type of graffiti was established—these are "pieces," or "masterpieces." These versions are more extravagant and more difficult to create, thus "earn[ing] a writer the most respect" (Waclawek 18). They are likened to murals and tend to have a message, shown through imagery and symbolism. By definition, Banksy's art generally can be categorized as stenciled pieces. The technique and definition is not the only important aspect to this art either. The way that words and pictures are created on the wall, as well where they are placed, imply a whole other meaning that speaks words beyond what is written down.

Similar to all languages, graffiti has its own literary rules that create a few different meanings. Rebecca R. Benefiel, a professor at Washington and Lee University, conducted a study of the ancient graffiti on the walls of a house in Pompeii, Italy. In her essay, she makes a distinction between ancient and modern day graffiti, while also explaining a key element akin to all types of graffiti. Benefiel asserts that three types of dialogues exist in the world of graffiti:

"dialogues among graffiti; dialogues between graffiti and their spatial context, and dialogues between inscribed texts and image" (60). Her statements resonate with the assertions that Waclawek makes about the language of graffiti in her book, *Graffiti and Street Art*. Waclawek explains how "their aesthetic vocabulary… [consists of] unwritten codes of conduct and hierarchies" (26) and how unwritten words can be spoken by placement of graffiti. Thus, the style of a tag can be a code for territory, status, and skill. However, the artists only need to use stylistic elements to convey a message, rather than long descriptive sentences. One example of how graffiti creates a dialogue with other graffiti is when another street artist posts a tag over another's artwork. This action could mean a reassertion of authority over a lesser artist. Yet, "crossing out another writer's work is disrespectful and should generally be avoided unless initiating a writing battle" (Waclawek 27-8). As Benefiel explains, graffiti has a dialogue with each other, one that is spoken by placement and style and one that can chart out a territory.

The combination of Benefiel's interpretation of ancient graffiti and the Waclawek's discussion of modern day graffiti provide multiple ways to analyze the art of Banksy, which like all graffiti is a type of shorthand by way of image. Banksy's style of graffiti, generally a stenciled piece, exemplifies each type of dialogue that Benefiel asserts. Banksy came to New York City intending to make his street art available and *known* to the public. Rather than allowing them to potentially encounter it, Banksy chose to be in direct contact via social media. He used Twitter and his website to ensure that people would find his art. He logged his travel throughout the city and gave vague locational clues in combination with the date and a photo (or video) of the art. In the next couple of paragraphs, I will take a look at the progression of his

travel log and at a view of the art pieces that exemplify these three types of dialogues. These dialogues ultimately create a treasure hunt.

Banksy begins in Manhattan, the central hub of the city, and his first infrastructure victim is a building with a sign on it that states "graffiti is a crime" (see figure 1). It features two boys, donning newsboy caps in what looks to be 19th century London garb. One boy is bent over, acting as a stool for the other, who reaches up and is in the act of taking a crossed out spray can from the sign. Banksy finalizes the post with the subtitle: "the street is in play" (Banksy). With this photo, he introduces the viewers to his whole scheme, named in the title of his month-long art expedition. He would rather have his art out in the open world, rather than locked up in a museum. The adolescents undermine the law and resonate with the essence of the word "play." Also, by making the sign "active" in a way, it shows his general anti-authoritarian theme. He presents the arbitrary value of the sign by using it as an enhancement to his art and as an element in his speech, thereby mocking its attempt at authority. In this piece, his graffiti enters into a dialogue with the city itself, that could expand to the actual people, as well as the intangible social constructs made in the city. Banksy begins his dialogue, and reminds the viewers that the city is his playing field, and they should be ready.

The next piece of art occurs on October 2nd on West 25th Street between 10th and 11th Avenues. The photo shows a written piece, stating "This is my New York accent" in classic New York tag style and underneath his refined font stencil, stating "…normally I write like this" (see figure 2). He distinguishes himself from other graffiti artists, while also expressing his residency through his art. The "New York" style acknowledges the different types of graffiti and speaks to the different styles of text that resonate with certain areas, spanning across countries. By

commenting on "accent," he relates image style and written type to the speech pattern of the city. Thus, his graffiti exemplifies the relationship between image and speech—therefore graffiti and language. Furthermore, he asserts the territorial difference, comparing his foreignness and different manner of speech to that of New York, while also paying homage to the New York style. He uses graffiti to chart out a locational identity.

Not only did his street art respond to the spatial context and the graffiti culture specific to New York, his works also inspired responses from local artists. A graffiti artist native to the city, by the name of Omar, defaced one of Banksy's pieces in Brooklyn. This artist tagged his name and "NYC" in his own script beside Banksy's piece, which was a heart-shaped balloon with bandages all over it (see figure 3). The graffiti artist's action expresses both Benefiel's discussion of dialogue—graffiti as a response to graffiti—and Waclawek's explanation of graffiti as a communicative territorial marker. By writing his name in the realm of Banksy's graffiti, Omar reclaims the city wall as his own and simply as a New York native. Rather than viewing graffiti as a haphazard event that occurs on walls, trains, and other edifices throughout the city, Banksy's artwork and his month-long residency established the artwork as a communicative device that weaves a city together and creates a conversation throughout the city.

In a *New York Times* article, Cara Buckley provides some examples of the social responses that help chart out the city. She explains how "In East New York, local residents charged viewers $20 for a peek of a stenciled beaver [and] In TriBeCa, at a stencil of the World Trade Center towers, people laid flowers" (2). Exemplified by Omar's defacing, she expresses a differing response in two other boroughs: "In Queens, and in Red Hook and Williamsburg in Brooklyn, images were swiftly bombed by taggers: local street artists incensed that an

Englishman had trod on their turf" (Buckley 2). Buckley suggests that "it took this Englishman to remind New Yorkers that parts of our city remain distinct foreign lands" (2). The conversation his graffiti begins with the city and its residents allows us to map out the city by spatial and social context. While each borough had a different set of responses, they were still connected by the common narrative of Banksy's month-long residency.

Banksy's travel log could be read as a travel narrative throughout the city of New York, and his graffiti serves as the written language. His website "constitute[s] an immense travel literature, that is, a literature concerned with actions organizing more or less extensive social cultural areas" ("Spatial" 123). He connects each borough into one collective story. Although the reader responses from each place separate them into distinct sections, the narrative also stresses the collective whole that is New York. Combined into one narrative, the layout of his text sets the stage for a map: "It is even possible that the words themselves can be considered a map of sorts, when their arrangement on the page suggests cartographic meanings" (Padròn 259). While Banksy does not provide his own map to his travel, the setup of the website did act as an outline for a map. However, his travel log was slightly vague, giving only a picture with a general location of a borough rather than specific coordinates of a street. Thus, his "outline" gave readers clues to the location and sent them on a treasure hunt to find the exact location. Once these locations were discovered, people were able to map out the locations more exactly.

Mapping became a tool for reporting, or telling the story of his residency. In "Metaphor: or, the Map," Peter Turchi discusses the map as a metaphor for writing and thus an exploration. He explains how writing and mapping "both result in discovery" (12) that involve two acts: "the act of exploration" (12) and the "act of…presentation" (12). The writer, therefore, changes from

the "Explorer…[into the] Guide" (Turchi 12). As Banksy was traveling through each borough, he took on the role of the Explorer, wandering through the streets and coming upon certain edifices that inspire him to post a playful and sometimes critical stencil upon. Banksy, as the initial Guide in this narrative, uses his "writing" as a way to map out the story. He gains control over the city by making it his own white blank page. Furthermore, he walks through the city unbeknownst to the public, which keeps him in control of the narrative—people cannot anticipate his next move or where his narrative will lead. Banksy makes "use of spaces that cannot be seen" ("Walking" 93), thereby making them seen, and yet his personal narrative "cannot be reduced to…[his] graphic trail" ("Walking" 99). His outline, along with viewer-made maps, only tells part of his story.

The first function of the map in this particular narrative is for the outside public to get a handle on Banksy's infiltration of their city. In his essay "Mapping Imaginary Worlds," Ricardo Padròn asserts that "the boundaries of the human are difficult to delineate, and its location relative to other beings, difficult to pin down" (271). Banksy is the epitome of difficult to pin down. He was always at least one step ahead of either the authorities or the general public rushing to find his artwork. His elusive nature spurred the treasure hunt and the website kept him one step ahead of the game. And yet, by leaving the archive of his work online and on the city streets, his story can be mapped, and his incognito quality becomes a bit more tangible. Padròn further argues that "the maps provide precisely the sort of mastery that the novels undermine. They imply the sort of commanding perspective that the narrative techniques of the fiction abandon" (282). Banksy's work is spread out all over the city, and there seems to be no

particular pattern to his movements. Since the pieces of artwork are separated by vast amounts of space, a map helps combine all of these spaces in a more comprehensive story.

Although Banksy became the first narrator in this story through the city, the mapmakers of his travels became the next storytellers. As previously mentioned in Turchi's essay, mapmaking and writing coincide with one another and are two art-forms that contain subjectivity and "attempts to make sense of the world" (Turchi 13). And, as Padròn states, "there are no maps of real worlds, only maps of not-so-imaginary worlds that we take for reality…We only map what we cannot see, in order to be able to see it" (284). The world that these mapmakers are attempting to make sense of is Banksy's version of New York City—the one defined by his street art and their commentary. Thus, the mapmakers who compile both the locations of his street art and the images create their own story, their own narrative, and they become the new writers, the new Guides. The map creates its own story, one that is separate from Banksy's, which is virtually missed besides the archive of his work. While he was the writer of the text, the map allows people to create the next narrative and it redirects the subject line.

Furthermore, people create maps to isolate an area, capture it and make sense of it. In the aftermath of his residency, many news and social media sites reported or commented on his stay. Generally, the primary form of storytelling involved a map. For example, the *New York Times* article by Buckley, "Monthlong Chase Around New York City for Banksy's Street Art" had an accompanying map, as well as news stories on CNN.com and a created site named "stealbanksy.com." The latter two maps were interactive and showed the exact location of the piece along with an updated picture when clicked upon. Therefore, if a piece had been defaced, such with the heart balloon in Brooklyn, the picture would show the new addition or removal.

Michel de Certeau explains how "the operations of walking on can be traced on city maps in such a way to transcribe their paths…[but] surveys of routes miss what was" (97). The map of the graffiti layout is a way for people to group something that is fleeting, even if they cannot capture the whole story. Although while missing part of the story, these interactive maps further exemplify how mapping creates a new story. The updated versions of the street art change the story from Banksy's viewpoint to the response from the city and its conversation with his artwork.

In particular, the "stealbanksy.com" website represents how the public used mapping as a way to create another story on top of his. Padròn compares the function of mapping and writing, arguing how the two simultaneously contradict each other:

Mapping involves visibility, stasis, hierarchy, and control. Literature often works to subvert these things. It has us experience space and place in myriad ways that have little to do with mapping it, just as it has us experience time in many ways that cannot be measured by a clock…In doing so, they make the text and its world their own, and in doing so may be mapping themselves just as much as anything else. (265)

Padròn further asserts how these mapping techniques in relationship to literature give insight into the reader and their subjectivity. In this essay, I have explained how Banksy's walking narrative, and subsequently, online travel log morphed into a type of image literature that outlined a map. The artist's literature, as Padròn explains, does undermine the control and visibility of the city and its residents due to his enigmatic qualities. He leaves it up to the reader to interpret the text of his images, rather than blatantly feeding us all of the information. However, the map offered on stealbanksyny.com exemplifies how the public "make[s] the text and [Banksy's] world their

own." This map shifts the focus from the artist's journey to the one led by the residents and the local authorities.

Both the physical presentation of the map and its interactive attributes signify how the map focuses on the public and/or authoritative response to his art. This map is characterized by white, black, and red coloring, while a starburst outlining the word "FREE" marks out each location. When clicking on the starbursts, the viewer receives a multitude of answers. If the Banksy piece is still fully intact then it will say "In Stock" with a picture of his work and a MapQuest location. If the piece is damaged, or in other words, has been defaced by another graffiti artist or attempted to be covered by local law enforcement, the sales sign blinks "Damaged" with a certain percentage off. If the piece has been removed entirely, the sign says "Out of Stock." The creators of this map allude to the notion of graffiti as "free art" or "public art." Also, they mimic Banksy's own title, "Better Out Than In" using the same written type for their title, "Better Ours Than Theirs." The subtitle reads "Get it before the MOMA gets it!" The makers of this map build on the narrative that began solely as a stance to having art in public space rather than cooped up in a museum. They stress the importance of the public having the that had been started by Banksy, and the compilation of each location on one map adds to the visibility of the story. Thus, they change the narrative from simply a focus on Banksy's impermanent narrative throughout the city to one about the question of public space and free art.

While this website, along with all of the other news outlets that feature a map of the artist's travels, still exist, Banksy's own online travel log has been removed. Now, the website redirects back to his original URL of banksy.co.uk. This change marks the end of the chapter of his story that he wishes to reveal. He allotted the public only a certain amount of time for access

and the current website now reads "Banksy" in a black scrawl against a white blank page, awaiting his next project. His online narrative mirrors the way that his street art has a time limit—both are not permanent and therefore must be captured. Although his narrative has come to a close, as I have discussed in the concluding paragraphs of this essay, the public's narrative lives on. These maps contain the pictures of his artwork, as they were and as they are now. Therefore, our own archive of his residency still exists. The public can still look back at their accounts of the residency without the use of his travel narrative. And in this last moment, we once again see how mapping can fail to fully capture the original story and yet also aid readers by allowing them to grasp onto something fleeting.

FIGURE 1: "Graffiti is a Crime"

FIGURE 2: "This is my New York Accent….normally I write like this"

FIGURE 3 "Bandaged Heart Balloon"

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