GRAFFITI AS COUNTER-CARTOGRAPHY: STREET ART AND THE CARTOGRAPHIC LEGACY IN BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT
GRAFFITI AS COUNTER-CARTOGRAPHY: STREET ART AND THE CARTOGRAPHIC LEGACY IN BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

El Grupo Excusado, a graffiti collective that emerged between 2002 and 2003, introduced stencil into the street art community of Bogotá, Colombia, and emerged as innovators of a style that exposed the relationship between status, identity, image, and representation through the provocative manipulation of recognizable icons and symbols. As members of Grupo Excusado related in interviews, manipulating icons and symbols at their index proved a more powerful tool to interrogate social hierarchies of power than creating original images.

Furthermore, Grupo Excusado’s influence effected a new direction in graffiti production in Bogotá, distinct from that of earlier decades, when street writing entrenched itself in political strategy, opposition, and consolidation. Moreover, changes to infrastructure, such as increased access to telecommunications networks, the Internet, and travel, changed the quotidian experiences post-millennium of many Colombians. The types of images, styles, and approaches to street art that emerged in the wake of Grupo Excusado thus reflects the twenty-first century change in perspective concerning image, representation, and status.

Notably, graffiti is not illegal in Bogotá, Colombia, in contrast to cities like New York. However, it is not legal either. Yet, theoretical analyses of street art foreground an assumption of graffiti as illicit. George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson perceived this visual medium as a symptom of disorder and crime, Armando Silva focused on its value as iconoclasm, and others have considered urban art as an instrument of representation for hip hop or youth sub culture. Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja and urban theorists consider the relationship between space in itself (physical/geographical) and political space (regimes of power). In particular, their focus is the economy of space in the urban environment, where one’s role in the economy reinforces
one’s relationship to self, others, and to the spaces of production. In addition, Soja posited space itself as its own subject of discourse, capable of revealing strategies for consolidating influence, power, and control. Therefore, Soja and others like him, contend that the spaces of street art production also outline the dimensions of “thirspace,” representative of alternative actors who can utilize its existence to subvert the dominant order. Yet, the ideas central to each theoretical framework are contingent upon graffiti’s illicit status, whether by law, rule, or custom.

Graffiti’s gray legal status in Colombia: neither legal nor illegal, creates the discursive space necessary to consider its producers and its artistic value in a broader context. In addition, twenty-first century changes in everyday life and infrastructure, including access to Internet, provided means toward livelihood, resources, and community otherwise impossible through traditional state structures.

In order to illuminate the value of the street art style pioneered by Grupo Excusado and further developed by artists and collectives Bastardilla, Lesivo, Guache, and Toxicómano, it is vital to utilize a different theoretical framework: that of cartography. Cartography, the process of stratifying objects and social types according to a hierarchy within the borders of declared national space, reinforces specific relationships between constituent social groups and those in power. More importantly, enlightenment-era naturalists acting on behalf of the Spanish crown used mapping expeditions into Colombia as a means to identify natural, financial, and social resources, often appropriating local knowledge for their own use and renaming or reclassifying a plant, animal, or social type according to their hierarchal system. The images of particular social types produced by these eighteenth and nineteenth-century expeditions became recognized as representations of a specific ethnic, gender, or social class, where one’s ethnic origin and phenotype often reflected spatial and social distance from the projected ideal of the ruling class.
Similarly, one’s perceived identity reflected and impacted future possibilities for social and spatial movement throughout the land. Consequently, social and spatial perception of self and others relative to the ruling class strengthened the existence of a social ideal, and naturalized the relationship between image, identity, and representation. The street art images of Grupo Excusado and others like them manage to expose the tenuous relationship between image, representation, identity, and perception, and thus this thesis posits their style of graffiti as *counter cartography*.

Grupo Excusado, Bastardilla, Lesivo, Guache, and Toxicómano create images that act as counter cartography, with the power to disrupt and deconstruct perception of social hierarchy through the manipulation of symbolic icons. In sum, utilizing cartography and thus counter cartography as theoretical framework broadens the scope to analyze and interrogate sign systems underlying the construction of representational images and images of representation that correlate with processes of mapping.
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Nicki, my greatest champion in all things.
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Introduction

According to the Oxford Dictionary, graffiti consists of “writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly (emphasis mine) on a wall or other surface in a public place.”¹ As ‘illicit’ art form, the definition suggests that every form of this visual medium must also be ‘forbidden’ either by law, rules, or custom. However, ‘graffiti’ is as broad in connotation as the term ‘painting,’ often denoting all forms of visual, artistic expression produced in the public forum, with the exception of formally commissioned works. Moreover, it is neither illegal, nor ‘forbidden’ in every city around the globe. In São Paulo, Brazil, for instance, street art is not only legal, but has become a critical facet of the city’s tourist industry since the mid-1980s.² In contrast, graffiti is a criminal act similar to vandalism in U.S. cities, London, and several other metropolitan areas. Therefore to fuse graffiti with the state of being ‘forbidden’ is to suggest that any legal, permitted, or customary forms of urban art must be called by another name. However, this is not the case. ‘Graffiti’ encompasses a multitude of street art forms, produced using spray paint, stencil, brush, roller, sticker, or three-dimensional materials.

With the purpose of illustrating its broad context, the author of Graffiti World: Street Art from Five Continents (2008), Nicholas Ganz, utilizes a more nuanced definition. He maintains that the ubiquitous nature of ‘graffiti’ in concept and practice emerges through its etymological origin in the Italian "sgraffo" meaning, “to scratch.” For instance he points to many different forms and media as historical antecedents to graffiti: cave painting, like that found in Lascaux;

excavated fragments from Pompeii with election slogans, drawings and obscenities on them; propaganda; and mixed media work.  

Like its definition, the history of graffiti production is rich and multi-faceted. In its simple, contemporary form, street art embodies more than scribbled letters, like those seen in Figure 1. Rather, this visual medium emerged as the result of artists and writers impassioned collaboration, independently printed zines and other publications, their involvement in political movements, and through urban youth and music culture. Despite being illegal in cities like New York and London, cultural critics, art historians, and others recognize the value of this visual form, playing a role in graffiti’s move from the street to the gallery to the auction house since the late-1980s. Furthermore, street art has gone viral with the Internet explosion, now the subject of blogs, online magazines, documentaries, Twitter feeds, and other forms of web collaboration. The question then remains: Why does the Oxford Dictionary qualify graffiti as visual expression that is (and therefore must be) ‘illicit’?

Perhaps because the definition, like its contemporary manifestations through the mid-1980s, reflected social and spatial polemics of the period, which questioned whether graffiti had value as representation of a sub culture, or if it was a symptom of urban decay and crime. This question also reflects the larger preoccupation with image, in terms of what the city as a whole represents, what identity it projects, and what status it inhabits in a global context. Thus the

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debate is less about street art’s value and place in the urban fabric and more concerned with determining the authority to define, label, and control urban networks, urban spaces and urban image (ethnic, social, and economic identity) projected through street art’s absence or existence.

![Figure 1: Typical graffiti found anywhere, courtesy of artsology®](image)

The appearance of contemporary urban art throughout the 1970s and early 1980s in New York coincided with growing debates on urban crime and perceived urban deterioration of morality. Significant voices in that debate, theorists George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson introduced “Broken Windows” (1982) – a metaphor used as foundation for the “order-maintenance” strategy of policing that assumes disorder breeds crime. Kelling and Wilson designated their theory “Broken Windows” based on the idea that the presence of broken windows in a neighborhood indicates the presence of disorder, disrepair, and decay, and thus

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predicts the presence of larger crime. Following the logic behind the theory, the appearance of graffiti was also considered a symptom of the presence of “disreputable or obstreperous or unpredictable people: panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed.” Therefore, they proposed that police must protect a neighborhood from becoming an unsafe haven for criminal activity by treating “deviant behavior,” such as the presence of graffiti, as criminal. However, at the root of “Broken Windows” lie racial and socio-economic prejudices previously articulated by Edward Banfield in *The Heavenly City* (1970).

Banfield contended that members of lower socio-economic classes (many ethnic minorities) existed in a state of lack because of inherent mental incapacity to control the need for immediate gratification, a tendency toward antisocial behavior, mental illness, and lack of ambition. According to Banfield, lower economic status was a symptom of pathology. Since members of a lower economic class were pathological, by Banfield’s model, providing them with supportive aid and services would be counter-productive. Kelling’s order-maintenance strategy of policing establishes a methodology for this perspective, suggesting that police take all measures necessary to remove elements and agents (people) of disorder, in order to prevent future crime that would no doubt occur in their presence. Under these circumstances, graffiti arguably has no positive value, but rather reflects the pathology and perceived inferiority of its producers – the ethnic minorities and members of lower socio-economic status.

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It is easy to see the parallel between “Broken Windows” theory and an assumption of graffiti as illicit. Yet, in understanding Banfield’s perspective in *The Heavenly City*, the verdict against urban art also reinforced a strategy intended to prevent members of specific ethnic, social, and economic classes from accruing the power to define, label, or control urban spaces according to their mores, and reflective of their own image.

Likewise, one can see the connection between the “illicit” art form and its producers as members of a sub culture, youth culture, or counter culture. However, street art is neither legal nor illegal in Bogotá, Colombia. In fact, its grey legal status as an act prohibited in some locations and forms but allowed in others, results in the dearth of written and enforced rules or regulations in regard to its practice.

Early contemporary graffiti, which emerged during the 1970s in Bogotá, provided the means for Leftist political groups, such as M-19, to disseminate messages, recruit followers, and consolidate their power. Under those circumstances, graffiti emerged as an effective political resource used primarily to strengthen left-leaning opposition against the far-right abuses of the state, including exploitation of workers, illegal transfer of private property for corporate use, and paramilitary violence. Although these issues continue to plague the Colombian people and nation as a whole, they reflect a lingering system that continues to reinforce social and economic inequality based on one’s gender, ethnic, social identity and spatial distance to the dominant, ruling class. Provided that contemporary graffiti in Bogotá remains political in nature, it plays a role as an oppositional force to the dominant order, yet neglects to reveal the ideological fabric facilitating state abuses, and social hierarchies of power. In contrast, el Grupo Excusado

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(Figure 2), a graffiti collective that emerged between 2002 and 2003, created a style of street art that exposed the relationship between status, identity, image and representation, through the provocative manipulation of recognizable icons and symbols.

![Figure 2: Untitled, Excusado Print System. In Situ, “A Freezer Project” (un Proyecto del Congelador), Bogotá, Colombia, 2008. Photo by Juan Camilo Arango on Facebook.](image)

The founding members of Grupo Excusado were friends and students at the Universidad Nacional (National University) in Bogotá, who yearned “to create something new” rather than follow the standard design curriculum. Members Dead Bird (Pájaro Muerto), Saint Cat (Gato Santo), Stink Fish (Pez Maloliente), and Porn Rat (Porno Rata) introduced stencil into the street art community, pioneering an artistic style where the viewer and the images themselves offered multiple interpretations. Second they built a reputation of open exchange, leaving work purposefully unfinished, enticing other artists to add to an image, creating a new one in the process. Third, the defining feature of this style of street art was the use of “emotionally

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charged” symbols and icons of national and international significance. For instance, removing a recognizable icon from its traditional context, like that of Columbus as the figure at the helm of the discovery of the Americas, instead juxtaposing his likeness with Satanic symbols like that of an inverted black cross, demonizes instead of champions Columbus and the European presence in the Americas. Rather than demonizing the indigenous native, feared as cannibal in image and text since the sixteenth century, the image seems to implicate the ethnic, social identities implied by Columbus as representative of the Conquistador, and as morally reprehensible.

Grupo Excusado’s visual strategy delivers something other than what is expected in the presence of an icon, like Columbus, and has the power to confront the viewer by challenging ethnic and social prejudice naturalized in the associations between the image of an icon or symbol, and representation of a particular gender, ethnic, or social identity. In sum, the images they produced were capable of revealing the dynamics of engineered perception that belie the construction of identity and status on a national level.

Therefore, to illuminate the value of the street art style pioneered by Grupo Excusado and further developed by artists and collectives Bastardilla, Lesivo, Guache, and Toxicómano (Figures 3, 4, 5, 6), it is vital to utilize a different theoretical framework: that of cartography.

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Figure 3: Graffiti by Bastardilla, near 13th street in la Candelaria, Bogotá, Colombia. Photograph by author.
Figure 4: Lesivo, Untitled, mixed media
Figure 5: Graffiti painted by Guache, at 20th street in Bogotá, Colombia 2013. Photograph by author.
Cartography, the process of classifying and stratifying objects and social types according to a hierarchy within the borders of declared national space, reinforces specific relationships between constituent social groups and those in power. In the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries, naturalists acting on behalf of the Spanish crown used mapping expeditions into Colombia as a means to identify natural, financial, and social resources, often appropriating local knowledge for their own use and renaming or reclassifying a plant, animal, or social type according to their hierarchal system.\textsuperscript{15} Through these expeditions, images of particular social types became recognized as representations of a specific ethnic, gender, or social class, where one’s ethnic origin and phenotype often reflected spatial and social distance from the projected ideal of the ruling class. Similarly, one’s perceived identity reflected and impacted future possibilities for social and spatial movement throughout the land. Overall, expeditions and ideological texts reinforced visual correlations between identity, status, and representation embodied in the cartographic perspective. At the center of that framework were the naturalists and botanists in charge of mapping expeditions:

\textsuperscript{15} Professor Mauricio Nieto Olarte organized the artistic exhibition \textit{Historia Natural y Política}. (Bogotá, Colombia: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 2008), which examined the relationship between the cartographic history of Colombia, the existence of inequality, and the presence of narco-terrorism. In the accompanying catalog, he explains the process of extracting local knowledge about an object, in order to stratify that object according to the rules of European nomenclature (13).
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El botánico ocupa el presente del pensamiento naturalista y el indígena el pasado atávico del conocimiento azaroso y experiencial (y sin experimento). (sic) Caldas y Lozano, entre otros tantos naturalistas, expropián el conocimiento para marcharse con él y dejar atrás, silenciadas, el cúmulo de relaciones sociales que le dieron nacimiento, haciendo, nuevamente, en sus textos, del espacio lugar.¹⁶

The Botanist occupies contemporary naturalist thought and the Indigenous the atavistic past comprised of arbitrary and experiential knowledge (without experiment) (i.e. without the scientific method). (Sic) Caldas and Lozano, among other such naturalists, expropriate knowledge in order to progress with it and leave behind, silenced, the accumulation of social relations through which it emerged, newly conceiving in their texts, place from space.

This quote by Felipe Martínez-Pinzón, of the College of Staten Island, CUNY (City University New York), illustrates how representational systems of social hierarchy emerged from processes of mapping, such as the classification of flora, fauna, and social types of people in Latin America. According to the rules of the system, one’s relationship to the land determined one’s social status (and thus one’s political sphere of influence).¹⁷ Therefore, one’s liberty to access and egress official and unofficial social space correlated with one’s gender and ethnic identity. Furthermore, the observed image of the naturalist transformed from representational image of a subject or ‘specimen’ to image of representation of a particular social type.¹⁸

Cartography, referring to the history and methods of classification of land, flora, fauna, and social types, became a powerful political instrument used to separate and organize ethnic, gender, and social identity in Latin America according to a linear hierarchy where individuals established as Caucasian, Spanish, and male assumed superior status.

¹⁶ Felipe Martínez-Pinzón. (according to Caldas). “Francisco Javier Matís, el Negro Pío, un águila y la hoja del guaco: una contranarrativa de la visión espacial de las élites sobre el trópico” Maguaré. 26:1 (Jan-June) 2012, 62-64.


¹⁸ There are also many discourses that examine the emergence of the image as specimen, the system of classification, and the emergence of social types. See J. Dym and K. Offen. Mapping Latin America: A Cartographic Reader. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press 2011. Also see P. Londoño-Vega (Exhibition organizer). América exótica: panorámicas, tipos y costumbres del siglo XIX. Bogotá, Colombia: Banco de la República 2004.
Naturalist Francisco José de Caldas, mentioned in the above quote, was an eminent naturalist and contemporary of famous Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt. Caldas explored and mapped aspects of Colombia’s Andes region when the nation was still known as the kingdom of New Granada. In particular, Caldas introduced an ideological paradigm through which he stratified identity and status according to climactic regions in Colombia, such that the ‘place’ one occupied in the social hierarchy directly correlated to one’s spatial relationship to his or her region and physical environment. According to his system of classification, the higher altitudes of the Andes constituted the privileged, elevated ‘true’ space of national history, in which the “Caucasian race begins to prosper”. Conversely, the wetlands, jungles and valleys below assume association with the ‘archaic’ past and thus with the mulattos, afro-Colombians, and indigenous social types.

Although beyond the scope and focus of this thesis, it is important to note that Caldas’ theory, articulated in the foundational text Del influjo del clima sobre los seres organizados (1808) materialized from Enlightenment and anthropologically derived concepts of cultural development. In organizing cultural progress on an evolutionary, lineal scale, social evolutionists such as Edward B. Tylor and Lewis Henry Morgan postulated that all cultures must experience different stages of development, passing from more ‘primitive’ stages of savagery and barbarism to more ‘advanced’ stages of organized civilization. These early anthropological theorists applied Darwin’s theories of natural selection and evolution to cultural progress.

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20 Ibid.
Applying the social evolutionary scale to analysis of different cultures, the European ‘Western’ model represented the pinnacle of progress, in contrast to the most ‘primitive’ societies found in the treacherous savannas, jungles, and deserts of Africa and South America. Therefore, as scientific inquiry exposed evolutionary patterns in nature, naturalists and others who shared Caldas’ view could then create assumptions about people of indigenous and African descent. As a result, assumptions concerning social evolution and racial identity persisted. Overall, Caldas’ theory influenced generations of Colombian thought through the present day.

However, Martínez-Pinzón challenges Caldas’ theory of social and spatial stratification by pointing to the way that Caldas erased the local history. Martínez-Pinzón distinguishes the ‘official’ recorded discovery of the *mikania cordifolia* plant from its local, indigenous history, in which it was known as “guaco.” Informally introduced to Mutis by self-taught and semi-illiterate painter Francisco Javier Matís and the Negro Pío, the process of mapping the plant as a species and classifying it under an official name - *mikania cordifolia* – removed any local association to the sound “guaco” the eagle made when eating it, and thus erased its indigenous history. As such, under its Latin name “mikania cordifolia,” the plant inhabits a colonized space, “liberated” of any ethnic or indigenous association, and transformed into a representative of the Creolized space of Spanish domination. Ultimately Martínez-Pinzón illustrates how the authority to claim, define, and label objects, subjects, and space, embedded in the cartographic process, establishes and naturalizes the perceived relationship between identity, image, and

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24 Felipe Martínez-Pinzón. (according to Caldas). “Francisco Javier Matís, el Negro Pío, un águila y la hoja del guaco: una contranarrativa de la visión espacial de las élites sobre el trópico” *Maguaré*. 26:1 (Jan-June) 2012, 62-64.
representation. Given these circumstances, the authority that retains this power remains the authority to control the social and hierarchal status of others, within the borders of the nation.\textsuperscript{26}

Consequently, social and spatial perception of self and others relative to the ruling class strengthened the existence of a social ideal, and naturalized the relationship between image, identity, and representation. Accordingly, this thesis posits the street art images of Grupo Excusado and others like them as \textit{counter cartography}, because of their power to expose the tenuous relationship between image, representation, identity, and perception.

Utilizing cartography and thus counter cartography as theoretical framework provides the context to consider the value of graffiti separate from its status as illicit or illegal. Previous spatial and critical urban theories focus on street art as an “illicit” visual form, as representative the “Other,” of iconoclasm, or as symptom of crime. Specifically, the larger question underlying this type of inquiry was debate over the authority to define, label, and control urban networks, urban spaces and urban image representative of a particular ethnic, social or economic identity, projected through street art’s absence or existence.

For instance, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja and other urban theorists consider the relationship between space in itself (physical/geographical) and political space (regimes of power). In particular, their focus is the economy of space in the urban environment, where the production of space reinforces one’s role in the economy and therefore one’s relationship to that space as well as others.\textsuperscript{27} In addition, Soja posited space itself as its own subject of discourse, capable of revealing strategies for consolidating influence, power, and control. Therefore, Soja

\textsuperscript{26} Op cit. 67-74.
and others like him, contend that the spaces of street art production also outline the dimensions of “thirdspace,” representative of alternative actors who can utilize its existence to subvert the dominant order.\textsuperscript{28}

In a like manner, Armando Silva posited street writing as iconoclasm. Silva’s background in Linguistics determined his focus on the role of text as vehicle of the communicated message and the historic role of the literate authority to possess the power to disseminate messages in the public forum.\textsuperscript{29} To return to the subject of the city as symbolic representation, Silva conceived of the city as a stage or arena through which one projected fantasies, desire, or nightmare. According to his paradigm, the city emerged through the process of construction, where buildings become landmarks, and landmarks represent symbols in the cultural collective. However, it was through the viewer that symbols retain their meaning through memory and affect.\textsuperscript{30}

Rather than positing graffiti as a symptom and progenitor of crime, Silva focused on graffiti as an object that comprises the symbolic landscape of the city, capable of eliciting emotional, psychological response through its illicit presence in the public forum, from its presence as image, and from its communicated message. As a matter of fact, Silva articulated four criteria that street writing must contain in order to be defined as graffiti: 1) that it employ text; 2) that it expose what is obscene as an act, as sign, and as visual work; 3) that it must be illicit in creation; 4) that it remain free from the “commercialization of the message.”\textsuperscript{31} Finally, the presence of street writing counters the authority to write and disseminate any message in the

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Los Imaginarios Nos Habitan}. Quito, Ecuador: La Organización latino americano del caribe de centros históricos (OLACCHI) 2008.
public forum. In all manifestations, Silva perceived urban art as iconoclasm – visual rupture in the fabric of communication and the aesthetic.  

In contrast, graffiti’s grey legal status in Colombia: neither legal nor illegal, creates the discursive space necessary to consider its producers and its artistic value in a broader context than as an “illicit” visual form. Silva maps the symbolic landscape of the city, noting its process of construction. Yet, while he focuses on the role of the viewer to derive symbolic meaning through the persistence of memory and affect, he neglects to highlight the role of perception of self and others relative to the dominant order, to reinforce and naturalize specific correlations between image, identity, and representation germane to the construction of symbol. Conversely, the street art images of Grupo Excusado, Bastardilla, Lesivo, Guache, Toxicómano and others like them manipulate symbols and icons, thus exposing the correlation between perception, identity, image, and representation.

Additionally, changes to infrastructure, such as increased access to telecommunications networks, the Internet, and travel, changed the quotidian experiences post-millennium of many Colombians. Since the millennium, many artists and collectives have attained success and fame through international exposure online. Technological access to international networks, support, and financial resources are indicative of alternative means toward livelihood and community otherwise impossible through traditional state structures.

Grupo Excusado, Bastardilla, Lesivo, Guache, and Toxicómano create images that act as counter cartography, with the power to disrupt and deconstruct perception of social hierarchy

through the manipulation of symbolic icons. Given these points, utilizing cartography and thus counter cartography as theoretical framework broadens the scope to analyze and interrogate sign systems underlying the construction of representational images and images of representation that correlate with processes of mapping.
Chapter 1: Living in Bogotá, Colombia

An estimated 8.7 million people attempt to survive and maintain livelihood in Bogotá, Colombia, many of whom live in numerous informal shantytowns and slums scattered throughout the city amidst formal private residences, businesses, and government institutions. Graffiti images are scattered throughout the city as well, found almost everywhere, except the exclusive country clubs and private residences of the very rich. Unlike in cities in the U.S., street art images coat almost every conceivable surface, including statues of state and historical icons, like that of Simon Bolívar at the center of the Plaza de Bolívar, just off 7th Avenue in the historical district of La Candelaria.

Although graffiti is neither legal nor illegal in Bogotá, its existence and its producers have provoked controversy and debate throughout the past nearly forty years of its contemporary history. However, the urban art that has emerged since the early years of the twenty-first century, arguably beginning with Grupo Excusado, comprise different forms, images, and approach than the political street writing of earlier decades. Before examining the contemporary historiography of graffiti in Bogotá, it is essential to understand how certain changes to government, economy, and infrastructure since the 1980s ultimately altered perception of social status, national, international image and representation. Understanding how urban dynamics and infrastructure transformed will also illuminate the ways in which visual forms of urban art evolved since the late twentieth century, either in response to or as a reflection upon those changes. Therefore, this chapter will first highlight significant historical and political events that have directly impacted the economy, urban demographic and experience, beginning with the appearance and

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proliferation of shantytowns and slums. Second, the political nature of early contemporary graffiti of 1970s Bogotá will be discussed. Last, a brief historiography of street writing in 1970s New York City will be examined as a contrast.

**Neoliberalism, Shantytowns, and Slums**

First of all, what are shantytowns and slums? Shantytowns (slums being the derogatory equivalent) consist of crude or makeshift housing, incorporated from readily available materials and constructed without formal purchase from an owner or the state. Likewise, these dwellings do not usually include running water, and electricity may be illegally established (Figure 7).

![Example of makeshift “home” in slums of periphery Bogotá. Courtesy of Archithoughts blog, 2010.](image)

Unlike families or communities who have experienced multi-generational poverty, many of the millions living in shantytown squalor in Bogotá since the late 1980s, early 1990s have been

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forcibly displaced from their homes, land, and rural communities in exponentially increasing numbers, with the implementation of Neoliberalism.\textsuperscript{36}

At its core, Neoliberalism satisfies the desire to manifest a more pure Capitalist economy, where the market remains “free” from government regulation, and industrial enterprise remains unhindered by unions. Neoliberalism proponents argue against government interference in determination of exchange rate as well. Without regulations, Neoliberalists claim, there will be greater opportunities for investment and trade, despite the fact that deregulation and elimination of unions also results inevitably in worker exploitation, and loss of control over product quality, or environmental impact.\textsuperscript{37} Under such a system, public expenditure for social services are also cut, state-owned industries such as banks, railroads, electricity, and education become privatized within a corporate system, placing the burden (and therefore perceived blame) for improving and maintaining livelihood on the individual.\textsuperscript{38}

In Latin America and in Colombia, in particular, Neoliberalism serves to continue to benefit a small elite. In simple terms, Colombian political history has been galvanized by extreme Left and Right strategies of governance, thus has vacillated between Left and Right control. When under the Left, the emphasis is on the establishment and protection of greater Democracy, where people have equal access to vote, and organizations exist to ensure worker and human rights protections. In contrast, when under the Right, governance becomes military and/or totalitarian, and seeks to remove voting, human rights, and worker protections, in favor of a small elite perceived as worthy to influence policy that affects the lives of all. Given those


\textsuperscript{37} Op cit., 5-64.

\textsuperscript{38} Op cit., 76-98.
extremes, it is easy to see why Neoliberalism is an attractive alternative in Colombia, especially when the elite and governing body benefit greatly from foreign investment.  

At its worst, the implementation of Neoliberal policy has enabled presidents to profit from corporate deregulation and restructuring of enterprise, even resorting to stealing land from poorer farming communities in order to develop the steel, silver, and oil industry, by hiring retired military and police security to act as paramilitary forces to violently displace rural communities. As a result, millions of displaced must relocate to cities like the capital of Bogotá. Yet, without money and with the threat of retaliation by paramilitary, many of these displaced have had to find informal ways to establish domicile and maintain livelihood. Therefore, their experience of disenfranchisement and of living on the periphery is different than the experience of individuals born into multi-generational poverty.

Likewise, the flood of millions of forcibly displaced into Colombian cities since the 1980s has unequivocally changed the urban demographic and experience for all. Whereas a rural family might have peacefully resided as farmers maintaining livelihood from the land and from meager profits, their experience as displaced in the city has transformed them into individuals comprising no status, or the lowest social status. Moreover, their perceived invasive presence into the city as “criminal” and unwanted exacerbates social and racial prejudices of the rural dweller, confronting the urban elite and recalling images of a social type normally situated in the

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periphery. As a result, their social and spatial ability to access opportunities is greatly compromised.\(^\text{42}\)

In response to these changes, urban studies scholars have examined ways that forced displacement and other phenomena of the cities of the Global South (the presence of poverty, violence, paramilitary, and Neoliberalism) have affected cultural, economic, and social urban dynamics.\(^\text{43}\) Whereas older discourse perceived the city as the microcosm of the state, these changes disrupted the matrix of urban spaces, the urban cultural and social hierarchy.\(^\text{44}\) Noting that informal communities establish their own social hierarchy, local and symbolic culture, some urban studies scholars have examined the phenomena with fresh eyes, thus exposing networks, patterns and infrastructure that operate through informal channels.\(^\text{45}\)

For example, scholars Kees Koonings, and Dirk Kruijt focus on the experience of poverty, violence, and exclusion in order to emphasize the informal paths, which members of these communities must traverse to maintain livelihood, mobilize support, and participate in economic, cultural, or social exchange. Like these channels of opportunity, Koonings and Kruijt determine that urban social and cultural dynamics can no longer be analyzed in strictly black and white terms (legal or not legal, formal or not formal, criminal or legitimate). Therefore they posit a discursive “grey zone” that correlates to the “grey” paths of opportunity that exist between

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informal and formal, legal and illegal, to obtain livelihood, to mobilize community, and to participate in social, cultural, economic exchange.⁴⁶

Given these parameters, scholars like Koonings and Kruijt also provide a different mode through which to view the unique local culture and images that emerge in response to changes in the urban landscape, such as the presence of informal communities (shantytowns and slums). Graffiti in Bogotá is an example of visual culture that also exists in a “grey zone,” where its images, producers, and perception occupy space in between legal and illegal, formal and informal, criminal and legitimate.⁴⁷ However, when contemporary street art emerged in the 1970s, it was a visual medium specifically used to express political opposition to the corruptions of the state, as a political strategy and form of consolidation. Therefore, this type of graffiti normally consisted of political messages written by Leftist factions such as M-19 (Figure 8).


M-19 was the urban counterpart to the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia).⁴⁸ During the early 1970s, both groups had yet to materialize fully, as cohesive units.

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⁴⁶ Koonings and Kruijt (Eds.) Megacities, 2009, 107-120 and 171-177.
⁴⁷ Koonings and Kruijt (Eds.) Megacities, 107-120.
Notably, the establishment of the FARC and M-19 occurred in response to significant economic and political events in Colombia’s history.

**Significant events in Colombian Political History**

Colombia’s political history in the late-twentieth century was extremely complex. On the one hand, it is a history of disenfranchised farming or indigenous communities who wanted equal access to the civic process, to commerce, and to services through the state. On the other, there were those in control of the government and occupying influential positions in society who wanted to exclude Afro-Colombians, indigenous, the poor, and the artisan communities so as to keep power amidst the Right-leaning population.49

The justification behind the desire to exclude ethnic, indigenous, and disenfranchised populations from equal access and participation in government was (and in many cases continues to be) extremely complex. On the one hand, the strategy of exclusion guarded against populist revolt. On the other hand, as discussed in the Introduction, many educated members of the political and social elite shared the social perspective of nineteenth century naturalist José de Caldas. Therefore, the prejudices against ethnic, indigenous, and disenfranchised populations, which relegated them to an inferior state, persisted.

However, unlike the United States where, in certain historical moments at least, the artisan or urban-working class would lean Left, the artisanal, working-class unions in Bogotá were separatists, wanting little to do with either the rural unions or initiatives on the Left, or the opposing Right-leaning initiatives of those in power.50 Additionally, the rough terrain throughout Colombia made it difficult to disseminate political ideas to rural communities. As a consequence neither the Left nor Right initiatives could consolidate a solid base, which resulted in waves of

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50 Ibid.
violence among competing smaller political factions throughout the country, with little success in either direction.\textsuperscript{51} Two events caused the country’s already unstable political climate to erupt into one that could only be described as combustible: the 1948 assassination of Liberal Party leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, and the 1959 Cuban Revolution.\textsuperscript{52}

During the 1930s, Liberal movements similar to FDR's New Deal provided a voice for those demanding social security and worker's rights. Yet, the 1948 assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán not only killed hopes for greater democratic participation and representation, but also produced chaos in the streets of Bogotá, in what is known as the Bogotazo.\textsuperscript{53}

The second event was the Cuban Revolutions. Sharp increases gained in the export economy during World War II became huge losses in the aftermath of the war. During World War II, Colombia benefit from both US and Axis power demand for platinum. In addition, export channels to Europe and Asia were cut-off during wartime, leaving the United States as Colombia’s primary buyer of coffee. However, the wartime price increase that the US Office of Price Control (OPA) granted was also lost once the war ended.\textsuperscript{54} Moreover, any gain in the international export economy suffered when European and Asian competitors took opportunity away from Colombia post-World War II.\textsuperscript{55} Despite wartime and post-wartime difficulty, the US

\textsuperscript{51} Op cit., 275-300.
\textsuperscript{52} Op cit. 301-345. Also see Alfredo Molano Bravo. \textit{The Dispossessed: Chronicles of the Desterrados of Colombia.} (Translated by Daniel Bland).Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books 2005, 11-37.
remained a main source of economic assistance to Colombia. Yet, that changed in the wake of the 1959 Cuban Revolution.\textsuperscript{56}

After the Cuban Revolution, Latin America, in general, found itself at the mercy of Cold War counter-insurgency actions covertly directed by the CIA, all in the name of combating Communism and preventing "another Cuba."\textsuperscript{57} In general, the United States perceived revolution inspired through Left leaning ideology as a threat to the Capitalist ideal and to national security. Yet, in many countries in Central and South America, access to services or civic participation is largely unequal, with the majority of ethnic, indigenous, and poor communities being excluded. Accordingly, Left leaning liberal movements that promise to fight for equal access, voice, and representation in Colombia and other Latin American countries have gained many followers.

Tragically, the goal of counter-insurgency initiatives directed by the CIA aimed to depose Liberal party leaders and dismantle the consolidation of Leftist movements that often could have created opportunities, housing, access, and helped combat inequality for many\textsuperscript{58}. Instead, what counter-insurgency action achieved was something much more sinister in many cases, and in Colombia these influences provided the means for the Conservative Right to push their influence, even on the same President Alfonso López Pumarejo, who had originally spearheaded the Liberal movement in the 30s.\textsuperscript{59} In response to consolidation of influence and power on the Right, Gaitán championed the cause for workers and peasant rights on the Left. Despite not winning the 1946 presidential election, he was the favorite for the Liberal party in the 1950 election. However, before any vote could be cast, he was "cut down" on April 9, 1948 in the

\textsuperscript{59} Molano Bravo, et al. \textit{Las crónicas de los desterrados de Colombia} 2005, 28.
streets of Bogotá, presumably assassinated by members of the Right that would do anything to prevent a Leftist populist consolidation of influence and power.\(^6\)

Gaitán's assassination marked the beginning of a civil war that continues to engulf millions in a suspended state of danger, forced displacement, and daily bloodshed.\(^6\)

Consequently, Gaitán's murder submerged the population in the *Bogotazo*: "the weeks of mass rioting in the capital and beyond, as Gaitán supporters accused the Conservatives or official Liberals of murdering their leader."\(^6\)

What followed was known as *La Violencia* (1948-1958) - a period of atrocities committed by Conservative police and military forces against not just Liberal protest and rioting, but against the entire peasant population throughout the countryside.\(^6\)

In 1958, after more than 300,000 Colombians lay dead, the Liberals and Conservatives formed the National Front pact, providing each party access to the presidency for alternative terms of four years.\(^6\)

However, any peaceful accord was complicated by US supported counter-insurgency initiatives launched in the 1950s with the Conservative right and the military.\(^6\) Peasant self-defense coalitions formed to protect what land they had won in part thanks to the reforms of the 1930s. Not only did the peasantry form self-defense coalitions, but they also attempted to construct "independent republics" in the Meta and Caquetá departments (similar to states).

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\(^6\) Op cit, 319-325.
Naturally, the central government and former landlords of these lands refused to concede to these acts. Consequently, the Conservative right forces redrew the lines of war to include not just Liberal party members or activist communities, but the entire peasantry that attempted to protect themselves and their land, calling them "communists and bandits." Vacillating between the Left and Right, the conflict continued, where disenfranchised populations felt that the only response was armed rebellion. Therefore, the FARC emerged from combined guerrilla forces of the National Liberation Army (ELN) (formed 1964) and the People's Liberation Army (EPL) (Formed 1967).

**M-19 and political graffiti of 1970s Bogotá**

In theory, the original mission of the ELN, the EPL, and the FARC was to act as the “people’s army,” spearheading the corruption of the Right and fighting to manifest “La Nueva Colombia.” Unfortunately, the FARC, in particular, has been notorious in the bombing of infrastructure – *any infrastructure* – established through the government. As a result Bogotá still does not have a subway system. It is ironic, that under far Right leaning President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002 – 2010) acquisition of mass telecommunications networks throughout many Colombian cities became possible in the early millennium. It is a phenomenon that will be discussed later, for it truly transformed individual perspective and access to opportunity.

As a militant organization, the FARC have also been demonized in the press as “Leftist guerrillas,” and blamed for the narcoterrorism of the drug trade that had actually been a source of

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
income for both the military and paramilitary units of the Left and Right for decades. While events like M-19's armed occupation of the Palace of Justice in 1985, helped form their infamous international reputation, they are also responsible for the first real waves of textual graffiti that arose in 1970s and 1980s Bogotá.\(^{70}\)

The street writing that emerged in the 1970s by M-19 consisted of slogans and political statements, normally used to incite action and consolidate the group’s movement. Initially, M-19 used newspaper media to disseminate their cause, printing slogans like "against worms and parasites, the M-19 is coming (Fig. 10)."\(^{71}\) Likewise, their graffiti adopted a particularly incendiary tone, for instance asking people to write "yes" or "no" on the wall in support of shooting adversaries like José Raquel Mercado.\(^{72}\) Over time, M-19's "messages" on the wall formed a dialogue between itself and public sympathizers, inspiring them to write things like "armed with the people we shall overcome...against corruption; signed M-19."\(^{73}\) Slogan graffiti continues to mark the walls "throughout all parts of the city," still conceived as a necessary force of opposition against life "as seen through the state."\(^{74}\)

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\(^{73}\) Ibid. Also see *El Tiempo* January 17, 1974.

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**Contrasts: Street Writing in 1970s New York City**

In great contrast, the street writing that emerged in New York City in the early 1970s in part represented minority youth culture in certain neighborhoods throughout the city. Yet, it was initially perceived as a symptom of crime, as a form of vandalism, and as a symbol of degeneracy.

When first produced in New York City in the late 1960s early 1970s, the word graffiti did not exist in connection with spray can art. Instead, spray painted “tags” or “bombs,” – the writing of the artists’ name or symbol of identity -- were known as simply “Writing.” Initially, this type of visual expression resonated with minority youth culture and counter-culture.\(^75\) Accordingly, artists used public walls, billboards, and existing advertisements in subway stations as canvas to voice protest against inequalities and authority.

New York in the late 1960s, early 1970s was a city struggling to curtail and overcome successive financial crises. The continued loss of manufacturing jobs and the rise of the service sector between the 1950s and 1970s resulted in higher competition for lower-wage jobs.\(^76\) In addition, issues like the role of African-American, Puerto Rican, and other immigrant populations in city governance exposed people's fears and desires as they wrestled with questions like: Whose city was it? What kind of city would it be?

The struggle over social and spatial inclusion, access to services and to civic participation grew particularly violent in New York City in the shadow of police brutality, which erupted into the Harlem riots of 1964.\(^77\) Consequently, the trope of the period was that of the “crisis of moral

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\(^77\) Op cit. 75-77.
order,” which the media often fueled with reports of violence and racial conflict, in addition to the reports of bureaucratic inefficiency and air pollution that already saturated the news. Underlying that crisis was a deeper philosophical dialectic that personified New York as either the "New Rome" on the one hand, and on the other feared it as the embodiment of the "Naked City."\(^78\)

Indeed, this dichotomy between the city as the fulfilled dream and the city as nightmare was echoed in other major cities of the Global North as well, such as Paris. Like New York, Paris too, dealt with questions of spatial, social, and political inclusion in the wake of utopian and counter-cultural movements of the 1960s.\(^79\) What was at stake was the question of an ideal urban environment, and the contention over ownership of that ideal. As reflected in regional studies and geographical discourse of the 1970s, the underlying issue was the polemic of space, in particular, urban spaces, urban networks, and the flow of capital through social exchange, within urban space.

Significant to the establishment of urban studies discourse, Henri Lefebvre published *The Production of Space* in 1974. However, his aim was to examine space as a function of Capitalist exchange. In short, Lefebvre (and other theorists) analyzed the city as a central hub for the production of goods and services, i.e. a hub for the commodification process. Where other later scholars, like Armando Silva focus on the symbolic landscape of the city, viewing urban space, and graffiti in urban space as an object of a converging symbolic landscape, Lefebvre’s paid particular attention to space as a commodity – something owners, lessors, renters, borrowers, and consumers could compete over and perform actions within to fulfill their particular role in the

\(^{78}\) Op cit. 10-25.
economy. In this manner, Lefebvre could relate the role of space to the establishment and reinforcement of relationships/networks critical to the flow of goods and services and therefore necessary for a functioning economy.

One critical differentiation he made, was between those with the authority to design, dominate, label, and control urban space (i.e. city planners) in contrast with those who can only be mere actors subordinate to their role in those spaces. Therefrom, from related discourses of the period emerged the notion of cultural engineering. This involved the act of consciously designing a city and its cultural image so that foreign travelers, migrants, and investors would be "enticed" to create and expand their network based in that city. Thus, the idea of the “urban imaginary” developed around this cultural mission and its underlying dialectic between the city as nightmare and the city as utopian dream. This polemic greatly influenced initial attitudes to street writing that emerged under Mayor John Lindsay in New York.

John Lindsay assumed public office as mayor in 1966 at a time when many believed New York City was verging on collapse. Lindsay knew he had to deal with the effects of the Civil Rights Movement, and the demand made by African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other immigrant populations, for citizen recognition, participation in city governance, and access to services, As part of his campaign, he promised these communities greater access to housing, municipal jobs, and participation in government. Yet, he aligned himself with corporate allies who were more interested in assimilating minorities into the larger city fold without empowering

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81 Huyssen, 5-11. Andreas Huyssen's work is particularly informative as something that focuses on urban culture as an entity shaped by transformative local and global phenomena on all levels. In this way he challenges both earlier Marxist and Anthropological conceptions of culture as either epiphenomenon of capital or conflated with "place". This idea will be explored in depth in a later section of the thesis. See Andreas Huyssen, *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age*. London, United Kingdom: Duke University Press, 2008
them. In fact, his goal was to model city government structure after the corporate managerial example.\textsuperscript{82}

Despite Mayor Lindsay’s attempts to gain favor with the business and private sector, he managed to earn the trust and support of relatively few members of his constituency. From the time of his election to office, many vocalized their disapproval, including municipal unions and ethnic groups. Among the public dissent against his election were members of the Transport Workers Union, who organized service sector strikes as he entered office.\textsuperscript{83}

Significantly, the dichotomy between the vision of New York as a “New Rome” or the nightmare that New York might become a “Naked City” emerged in part from the undercurrent of anxiety over racial representation, population, and equality. On the one hand, the vision of the city as a “New Rome” would likely be one that not only embodies celebrated Greco-Roman principles of civic participation and cultural achievement, but that would also reflect the Western ideal in its social, ethnic, racial, and cultural appearance.\textsuperscript{84} Therefore the group that controls the state would arguably possess the power to establish laws according to its own philosophy, and demand adherence to them. Indeed, the fear of the “Naked City” revealed a desire to control anarchy and rebellion by minorities and those disenfranchised, as much as it exposed public anxiety over the decay of the city’s culture and order, especially if those perceived to counter the Western ideal were given access to leadership and influential roles. As a result, many demanded for a return to “law and order,” in order to guard against the aggression and violence imagined directly correlated with being a person of color.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{83} Op cit. 75-77.
\textsuperscript{84} Op cit. 9-21.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
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In contrast, people of color in New York City were also growing frustrated with the growing divide between rich and poor, the rising loss of jobs and unemployment, and undermined attempts to gain access to services and government participation. Tragically, the police force acted on their prejudices, making police brutality a pervasive issue before the creation of the Civil Board Review to oversee the NYPD. The volatile situation erupted in the Harlem Riots and similar outcry in Bedford Stuyvesant in 1964.\(^{86}\)

At the same time, powerful members and alliances of the city's growing corporate class sought to fulfill 1950s public policy that envisioned the city as a "Capitalist marketplace" by funding choice real estate in certain areas, particularly in Manhattan. To complicate matters, Lindsay's plan for government decentralization, at odds with Urban Renewal Programs that began as part of the War on Poverty federal initiative, effectively condemned whole city blocks of commercial real estate.\(^{87}\) These contesting visions of city life manifest themselves in greater questions of spatial, social, and political inclusion. At stake in determining "whose city was it?" and "what kind of city should it be" was an urban ideal, capable of attracting investment. In that regard, public transport became a key element of a city's infrastructure and façade. Accordingly, Nelson Rockefeller gained approval for a proposal to incorporate the branches of the city Transport Authority (TA) bus and rail system under a single management body: the MTA (Metropolitan Transport Authority).\(^{88}\)

Although contemporary graffiti writing first appeared in late 1960s New York and other major U.S. cities, its earlier manifestations took the form of public announcement slogans, signs, or those seen in public bathrooms.\(^{89}\) However, when local neighborhood minority youth began to

\(^{86}\) Op cit. 74-77.
\(^{87}\) Op cit. 10-16. Also see 76-77.
\(^{88}\) Op cit. 75-93.
\(^{89}\) Op cit. 79.
use the New York City subway stations and train cars as canvas, the media criticized it as "malicious youth craze," in direct opposition to city "beautification" initiatives that not only drew tourism, but also were concerted efforts to actualize the dream of the city as a “New Rome.”

If one views the emergence of street writing in New York City, applying Lefebvre’s paradigm of the production of space, one can clearly see that the crux of the debate over graffiti’s presence was less about street art’s artistic or aesthetic value, and more that its presence was an anathema to the authority to dominate and control urban space. Using Lefebvre’s terminology, street writing is “revolutionary” in that it arguably “creates” space or annexes public urban space, forgoing proper purchase, leasing, borrowing, or permission.

It is clear that the transportation system signified more than technology or ability, but that it represented a symbol of cultural achievement that defined New York as modern and industrial, imbuing it with individual characteristics that would distinguish it from other cities around the world. Under those circumstances, many viewed the proliferation of graffiti writing as an attack on that symbolic ideal and an affront to the vitality of the city itself. Therefore it is not surprising that the 11 cars comprising the "Freedom Train," created by graffiti artists Caine, Mod 103, and Flame One, for the Bicentennial, never saw the light of day.

MTA authorities pulled the entire #7 Flushing line to Manhattan from Queens out of service, destroyed the paintings and arrested three writers the following day. While some editorialists praised New York graffiti writing for its ability to "change an otherwise depressing, dank environment into something at least that has association with color and vitality," Mayor

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90 Op cit. 72-81.
93 Ibid.
Lindsay called it an "epidemic plague" with the "paint spray can at the root of current insanity." In response he called for the formation of a task force of city bureaus and semi-autonomous public authorities that attempted to prevent graffiti by attacking spray paint manufacturers, and pushing for tougher regulations in its sale and distribution to customer. Additionally, building construction budgets expanded to include paint with spray paint resistive coating, while building owners and management employed ink remover.

Extreme reactions to graffiti writing in New York, and equally extreme measures taken to eradicate it caused many to harbor resentment by the mid-to-late 1970s toward a "war on graffiti" that took money away from efforts to reduce poverty and unemployment. In short, by the 1980s and early 1990s the anti-graffiti campaign continued to target product manufacture, while the transit authority spent an annual 10 to 24 million dollars with the intent of reducing graffiti to just 10% of exposed building surface.

Concurrently, theorists like George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson, perceived graffiti as a symptom of crime and degeneracy, reflective of its “lower class” surroundings in the people and neighborhoods in which it was most visible. In 1982 they introduced the “Broken Windows” metaphor, which also influenced the establishment of the order-maintenance strategy of policing. According to Kelling and Wilson, the presence of street graffiti foretold the presence of crime, and in particular, criminality, even pathology, assumed present in the behavior and personality of its producers.

94 Op cit., 83-87.
95 Ibid.
96 Op cit. 91.
As discussed in the Introduction, the “order-maintenance” strategy of policing mandated that any “deviancy” in behavior, such as the defacement of public property by graffiti, must be treated as a crime. This policing model also gave authorities blanket approval to employ any necessary force to eradicate neighborhoods and public spaces of deviancy, from simply removing graffiti, to removing individuals believed associated with deviancy, from the public eye.  

As noted earlier, the underlying ideology behind “Broken Windows,” lie in the socio-economic prejudices articulated by Edward Banfield – a major influence on Kelling and Wilson – in *The Unheavenly City* (1974). Banfield did more than attribute crime to the presence of disorder and deviancy, but labeled all individuals in lower socio-economic strata as “pathological.” According to Banfield’s perspective, lower class individuals were incapable of suspending the need for immediate gratification in favor of fulfilling long terms goals, and therefore proposed that utilizing a portion of the city budget on social services for the lower class was counter-productive to the maintenance of the city as a whole. Rather, his attitude, as echoed in Kelling’s proposed “order-maintenance” police strategy, was to proactively remove the individuals that would most assuredly become deviant. Although he claimed his paradigm was not necessarily racist, there were obvious correlations between class and race during the 1970s and early 1980s. Like the polemic over the city as a “New Rome” or the fear of the city as the “Naked City,” the issue exacerbated by the presence of graffiti, remained one of control.

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98 Ibid.


101 Ibid.
Despite official reactions to graffiti, reactions from the public varied. For some, graffiti represented too great a threat to their urban ideal, compelling the formation of an anti-graffiti alliance and the production of discourse that considered it a symptom of urban decay and an indicator of the presence of crime, mandating that it too, should be outlawed. For others, like Richard Goldstein of New York Magazine, graffiti writing marked the emergence of a significant "new youth culture."\textsuperscript{102} Similar opinion emerged from writers at the New York Times, who likened the New York style of graffiti to "primitive pop art," but with the powerful ability to enable the artist to leave a mark that declares 'I'm alive,' as writing on a cave wall did for primitive human communities.\textsuperscript{103} Nevertheless, graffiti production remains a felony in New York and in the United States, still policed under a zero-tolerance policy.

**Conclusion**

The classification of graffiti as illegal in New York, in contrast to Bogotá, Colombia, was critical to the establishment of ideology, like “Broken Windows” that determined cause for its eradication. In like manner, its “illicit” status in New York greatly differs from its grey legal status in Bogotá, where street art is prohibited in some locations and contexts, but allowed in others. Therefore it is useful to examine street art in Bogotá in a broader context than by its legal classification.

Although members of the socio-economic and political elite in both New York and Bogotá may harbor prejudices that continue to direct the desire to keep ethnic, indigenous, and disenfranchised populations in the periphery, the proliferation of shantytowns and slums due to mass forced displacement, the threat of narcoterrorism and Left/Right faction violence are unique to Bogotá. As a result, displaced populations have flooded Colombian cities, like the

\textsuperscript{102} Op cit. 92.  \textsuperscript{103} Op cit. 94.
capital Bogotá. In addition to these changes to the social and spatial hierarchy of the city, transformations to infrastructure and telecommunications networks irrevocably changed the urban landscape. Consequently, urban art forms, styles and attitudes changed in Bogotá, influencing the creation of street art in the millennium, which was much different than the political slogans of M-19 of the 1970s.

Cartography and counter cartography provides the context to analyze urban art in Bogotá, directing focus to the ways in which a particular style of urban art images created post-millennium alter perception of image, identity, and representation. The next chapter will focus on the historiography of graffiti, examining its initial appearance in Spanish America, before analyzing its different contemporary forms. The third chapter will examine specific images, utilizing cartography and counter cartography as theoretical framework.

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Chapter 2: Historiography of Graffiti in Bogotá, Colombia

The contemporary history of graffiti in Colombia is no less difficult to construct than in any other city, despite its grey legal status. Many scholars, including Silva, cite the Muiscas people's Chibcha ancient rock painting in the central part of Colombia, as significant to contemporary graffiti, in that it represents the human desire to communicate and leave an intelligible mark on a wall that bears witness to human presence. Yet, to identify rock painting in the same context as contemporary street writing would be problematic. Rather, various sources cite the Chibcha cave painting in Colombia and the sixteenth century appearance of graffiti in New Spain (present-day Mexico) as the two main antecedents for contemporary street writing, which first emerged in the form of political slogans, in 1970s Bogotá.

Graffiti in Spanish America

Recognized authority and professor of Semiotics, Armando Silva, claims that "el conquistador" Hernán Cortés was the protagonist in the first “graffiti war” of sixteenth century New Spain. According to the 1541 account written by historian Díaz del Castillo, Cortés engaged in a "war of signs" with his captains, that began when they "placed signs," which Armando Silva equates with graffiti, on the walls of Cortés home, accusing him of cheating them in a deal involving the division of spoils. On both sides, the "heated exchange of signs" or

106 "Pero aun así, en los tiempos de la conquista, como es natural, la escritura pertenecía todavía al patrimonio exclusivo de los conquistadores, y por ellos se puede comprender el miedo al saber público que representa la marca graffiti en el mismo sentido en que años después va a usarse en las no siempre organizaciones democráticas del continente suramericano." See Armando Silva. Los Imaginarios Nos Habitan. Quito, Ecuador: La Organización latino americano del caribe de centros históricos (OLACCHI) 2008, 26.
107 "...que cuando el conquistador Cortés, en México, se indispuso con sus capitanes en razón de un dudoso reparto del botín, éstos se lo hicieron saber por letreros colocados sobre la propia pared de la casa de Cortés. Al parecer por la narración del historiador (Díaz del Castillo) se estableció una lucha de 'letreros' de parte y parte, hasta cuando
graffiti continued, until Cortés brought the situation to a head with a large sign that read, "White wall paper of fools." 

For Silva, this historical anecdote highlighted specific qualities of graffiti writing that encompassed central themes of his work. On a literal level, Silva exposes the contradiction in Cortés final graffiti, where the written "white wall" attests to a false and impossible quality in its very enunciation as a graffiti that inadvertently produces the opposite: a dirty wall. For Silva, the dirty wall is not just the opposite of "white wall" but also the "paper of fools." Furthermore, by designating the “white wall” as the “paper of fools,” Cortés declares the wall the assumed property or “patrimony” of the “conquistador.” On the one hand the designation of conquistador is literal, but on the other, it refers to the correlation between the political elite and the literate authority. In this manner, Cortés exercises his superiority in rank, and his authority to mark public space in his name, where others must not. Consequently, his negation of his captains’ right to use this same tactic through the insulting phrase “paper of fools,” attempts to turn the tables, where the right to public expression without censure or reprisal (as on a wall) remains the privileged realm of the conquistador, but becomes futile foolish imitation by any other.
Therefore, his declaration establishes the wall as the forbidden canvas to any but the conquistador.

Armando Silva and other scholars like Farid Samir Benavides-Vanegas have utilized this historical example of graffiti, in order to examine its production as a form of resistance against the political and socio-economic elite. Yet, the very act of writing on a wall is an iconoclastic gesture that dismantles the erudite nature embodied in the literate hand. Rather the wall more closely mirrors the “paper” of the primitive caveman.112

Both Benavides-Vanegas and Silva emphasize street writing’s illicit nature (as iconoclasm and as revolutionary tool) in their scholarly work. For Benavides-Vanegas, treating graffiti as political facilitated his Leftist perspective on the visual form. Naturally, Silva’s background in Linguistics determined his perception of text as conduit for communication, and thus enabled particular focus on street writing as iconoclasm of the historic literate authority.113

Regardless of legal status, graffiti writing of 1970s and 1980s Bogotá succeeded as iconoclasm, effecting resistance against the dominant order. Silva perceived graffiti as visual rupture of what was acceptable in terms of aesthetics. Therefore graffiti text (especially political, obscene, or incendiary text) becomes an illicit image as well. As a matter of fact, Silva articulated four criteria that street writing must contain in order to be defined as graffiti: 1) that it employ text; 2) that it expose what is obscene as an act, as sign, and as visual work; 3) that it must be illicit in creation; 4) that it remain free from the “commercialization of the message” (i.e. paid advertisement or other text fulfilling a specific economic role).114

In New York City, as Chapter 1 illustrated, street writing’s classification as illegal enabled the political and socio-economic elite to maintain the authority to design, label, and control urban spaces, networks, and image.\textsuperscript{115} In contrast, Silva analyzes street writing as iconoclasm, focusing on its illicit nature as visual rupture and as act, regardless of legal status. Did this mean that the dominant class in Bogotá did not maintain control over urban spaces, networks or image? Or was their authority directed elsewhere?

At present, street writing and graffiti images saturate the walls and surfaces of city structures, just as one finds shantytowns and slums scattered on the outskirts and in between formally established areas. Not only is street writing found everywhere in Bogotá, but it has become a visual medium for teens, encouraged as a positive creative alternative to crime, in stark opposition to the teen in New York City who would be arrested for committing the crime of graffiti. While graffiti itself is permitted, even encouraged in some contexts, what is not tolerated is the direct implication or accusation of the state in graffiti text (if caught). Nor is the creation of an image that could easily be interpreted as slander against an icon or head of state tolerated.

Under these circumstances, it would appear that the political and socio-economic elite police content, rather than space. Yet many examples of street writing exist throughout the city, even on national icons, such as the statue of Botero near 50\textsuperscript{th} street and 26\textsuperscript{th} Avenue, warning of the corruptions of state. However, images that appear in historic or tourist heavy areas and contain

obvious inflammatory content directed at the state have been painted over with “officially”

Bogotá Humana is the main city beautification initiative that oversees the implementation
of official murals that either praise Colombian diversity and other tourist attractions, or contain
abstract designs. Perhaps in order to maintain incognito and mystery, while ensuring a visual
legacy, post-millennium artists Bastardilla, Lesivo, Guache, and Toxicómano produce huge
images that are provocative and jarring, yet visually complex and hard to interpret. It is
intriguing that their images endure, usually without censure or interference by authorities. In
many ways, their style reveals a novel approach to the street art image that is not necessarily
political. Nevertheless their images are no less powerful, and have indeed inspired international
praise and following.

The remainder of this chapter will examine the evolution of street art through the
millennium, when members of the graffiti collective Grupo Excusado succeeded in producing a
new wave of street image creation initially based in stencil. Rather than an overt use of text or
political slogans, which already saturated the city, Excusado manipulate historical, political, and
pop-culture icons, juxtaposing them with images or fragments not necessarily connected.
However, the finished product seems to alter the original context of the icon, in such a way that
the viewer becomes uncomfortably aware of the tenuous relationship between an image as
identity, and an image as label - vulnerable to visual prejudice and perception. Even if not
originally intended by Excusado, later artists like Bastardilla, Lesivo, Guache, and Toxicómano
manage to interrogate the semiotic relationships underlying image, representation, and

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perception. Put another way, their images counter traditional visual conceptions of gender, ethnicity, and class, often naturalized through processes of mapping and classification, and reinforced through memory and affect. Given this context, the street art they conceive acts as counter cartography. One work from Lesivo will be analyzed in this chapter, in contrast to preceding styles of street writing or political graffiti. The urban art of Bastardilla, Guache, and Toxicómano will be examined in the next chapter.

**Historiography of Contemporary Graffiti in Bogotá**

The 2009 documentary *Scoundrel Memory: Documentary of Graffiti in Bogotá* traces the emergence of contemporary graffiti in the late 1960s, early 1970s to two international events: post World War II artistic movements of Dadaism and Situationism, and the May 1968 student protests in Paris. According to Silva, the production of graffiti in 1970s Bogotá acts as the third manifestation of contemporary graffiti worldwide, the stencil graffiti movement of 1960s Paris and the 1970s subway school of graffiti in New York comprising the first and second. In addition, the student protests of May 1968 Paris, which resulted in the student occupation of the Sorbonne on May 10, fueled the desire to use public walls as canvas to protest and to rally for change.

Whereas the preferred medium in late 1960s Paris was stencil placed directly on the wall, Colombian graffiti artists preferred spray paint. They created images, slogans, or messages rife with satire, meant to engage, rally, or provoke the spectator. In like manner, the street writing

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118 Silva. Imaginarios urbanos, 1992, 32.


of 1970s Bogotá formed part of the political strategy of Leftist groups like M-19, through which they transmit ideas and consolidated their influence.\textsuperscript{121}

As explained in Chapter 1, the FARC's stronghold remained largely rural, and M-19 acted as its urban counterpart.\textsuperscript{122} Despite sources that claim Colombian contemporary graffiti modeled itself after the New York "subway school" of street writing, produced by minority and hip-hop culture, its early contemporary form developed in response to specific political and economic events, such as the assassination of Gaitán, and the Cuban Revolution, as noted in Chapter 1.\textsuperscript{123}

Since the 1980s contemporary street art has evolved in Bogotá and includes multiple styles, types, and forms. According to multiple sources and scholars like Armando Silva, the four main types of graffiti in Bogotá are: Graffiti de Consigna (slogan graffiti), Graffiti Barrista (graffiti made by las barras bravas, or violent soccer fanatics), Arte urbano (urban art), and Escritura (writing).\textsuperscript{124}

Graffiti de consigna (Figure 9) – as seen in the street writing of M-19, arose first, in connection to university movements, such as those at the Universidad Nacional. Slogan graffiti, as examined in Chapter 1, contained political statements meant to rally following, incite action,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{124} Op cit., 46.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
or response, and was used as political strategy by M-19, the ELN, EPL, and the FARC.

Figure 9: Example of M-19 slogan printed in *El Tiempo* January 17, 1974.

Reflecting back upon Cortés "white wall," M-19’s political and territorial use of the wall served as a mechanism to challenge the corruptions of the political and socio-economic elite, which historically would have comprised the literate authority of Cortés social stature. Thus, the overt politics that saturated graffiti de consigna in its earliest form in Bogotá, seems all the more appropriate, as a mode through which people might reclaim the right to oppose the authorities of state – modern forms of the sixteenth century “conquistador.” Unlike American cities, where the state would find graffiti denouncing state power on monuments or other objects of cultural patrimony particularly offensive, slogan graffiti denouncing the state, the use of violent

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paramilitary forces by the state, and social injustices against the poor, continue on and near state monuments and institutions (Figure 10).¹²⁶

Figure 10: Pietro Tenerani, *el Liberator Simon Bolívar*, 1846. Center of the Plaza de Bolívar, surrounded by the Palace of Justice, Capitol Building (seat of Parliament), and Archbishopric Cathedral of Bogotá. Photo by author.

Graffiti Barrista (Fig. 11), or graffiti made by violent or fanatical soccer fans marks associated team territory on buildings and on particular zones, or districts throughout the city. Graffiti "gangs" who support specific teams will often produce this type of street writing. Yet the trends of production by these groups or gangs have been difficult to trace. On the one hand, the

¹²⁶ I observed this throughout the city, from the graffiti seen on the statue of Simón Bolívar in the Plaza de Bolívar to a sculpture created by Fernando Botero near the Centro de Memoria and the infamous graffiti “Wall of Memory” just off 26th Avenue Op cit., 26.
stylistic history of barras groups of *grafiteros*, or artists, relates to the Pixação (or Pichação) graffiti writing of soccer fanatics in Brasil. On the other, the letter styles they employ shares its typology with metal music groups like Metallica, Megadeth or Rhapsody (Fig. 12). While this style of graffiti clearly correlates with a single practice and theme, the competition among rival fanatical gangs, and members’ insistence on anonymity makes it the most elusive form of graffiti in Bogotá.

Figure 11: Example of Graffiti Barrista, courtesy of “Graffiti Bogotá 2012: Diagnóstico: December 28, 2012, 48.
Escritura (Fig. 13), or graffiti writing (closest to “Wild Style”), is the type of graffiti in Bogotá that emerged from the influences of hip hop and New York based spray can art, as seen in popular documentaries. Of the four main types of graffiti in Bogotá, Escritura is the most pervasive, where artists manipulate and invent letter styles used to tag a specific space or territory, with the intention of reclaiming that space. Unlike the other three categories, this particular style of graffiti did not arise until 1998, whereupon Bogotá graffiti artists began to produce their own style of hip hop, rap, and artist gangs in parallel to those in New York. Some included Golpes, Contacto rap, and Gotas de rap. In the late 1990s, graffiti artist collectives who specialized in this type of graffiti like ROS, Beek and Yemeco took specific action to make a place for their art in Bogotá, under mayor Antanas Mockus. Consequently, this style of graffiti has since become the "most prolific" in Bogotá, with the majority of its artists comprising youth between the ages of 13 and 18 years.

Over the course of its materialization and development in Bogotá, many perceived graffiti writing as an outlet that provided youth culture with a socializing and creative tool that is

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130 Op cit., 34-38.
a productive alternative to crime, delinquency, or drug trafficking. For this reason, many NGO's have also combined efforts to provide tools and access to materials in order to encourage this form of graffiti writing among youth. Indeed the grey legal status of graffiti in general enabled such positive qualities to be conferred on Escritura, and as such, it has been promoted as a productive outlet for bogotano youth.

Figure 13: Example of Escritura, courtesy of “Graffiti Bogotá 2012: Diagnóstico: December 28, 2012, 52.

Arte urbano (Fig. 14), also represents a prolific form of graffiti found throughout the city, but is unique in its similarity to mural art, and its marked return to the use of the figure. Yet, the history of this particular kind of graffiti is somewhat more complex than slogan graffiti (graffiti de consigna), soccer fan graffiti (graffiti barrista), or graffiti writing (escritura). Even though Armando Silva's research has proved instrumental in understanding this type of graffiti for its connections to conceptual, avant-garde visual expressions of the early twentieth century,

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132 Ibid.

and to political movements like the student protests of May 1968 Paris, this style embodies its own unique trajectory, best understood through specific historic events in the country and in the graffiti community itself.\textsuperscript{134}

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 14:** Example of Arte Urbano, located in downtown Bogotá, near the Transmilenio station at 26\textsuperscript{th} Street. Photo courtesy of author.

Arte urbano graffiti, which emerged in the late 1980s, grew from a "solid political student movement" in the Department of Visual Arts in the Universidad Nacional, interwoven with the political aims of some of its founders: Camilo Torres and Fals Borda. Camilo Torres Restrepo (1929-1966) co-founded the Sociology Department of the Universidad Nacional, but was also a member of the National Liberation Army, or ELN, one of the two primary early guerrilla groups in Colombia.\textsuperscript{135}

As a Catholic priest, he worked to reconcile his role as religious figure with his academic position, his stalwart Marxism, and later, as an armed member of the ELN. Unfortunately, his


\textsuperscript{135} Farid Samir Benavides-Vanegas. “From Santander to Camilo and Ché: Graffiti and Resistance in Contemporary Colombia.” *Social Justice* 32:1 (2005), 53-56 and 60-61. While conducting fieldwork I took a 6-hour private bike tour with an alumna of the Universidad Nacional, who showed me the graffiti on campus, and elaborated on the connection between the university’s history and Camilo Torres Restrepo. Also see Camilo Torres Restrepo. *Revolutionary Priest: The Complete Writings & Messages of Camilo Torres.* Bogotá, Colombia: Vintage Books, 1971.
beliefs pushed him into exile soon after an early forced resignation from his faculty position. Consequently, his participation in an ambush of the Colombian Military patrol in 1966 resulted in his death.  

Following his death, he became known as a martyr of the ELN and of Leftist politics in general, transforming his image into a symbol of the liberation movement for "la nueva Colombia." Many of the images that appeared throughout the city incorporated visual symbols or emblems to refer to the heroic members of populist movements, like Camilo Torres (Figure 15).

In contrast, street artists portray figures or branches of government as caricatures or through visual parody, often using these forms to draw attention to the corruptions of state, as in the caricature of Bolívar, to the left of Torres on the wall in Figure 15. The contrast between the

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136 Ibid.
137 Ibid. See also Introduction, 24-30.
two in terms of how they are depicted and the ideals they provoke are antithetical to the extreme, depending on one’s perspective. For some, Torres is “Latin America’s first ‘radical’ priest” calling for revolution, and to others he is the quintessential ‘guerrilla.’ Likewise, Bolivar is and always will be the patriarch of the founding of Colombia, known as the “Liberator,” who made independence possible for Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. For many, however, his historic image epitomizes the social, political, racial, and gender exclusions of the Colonial era’s ruling class to an equal extent. Therefore, his caricature is often the target of graffiti artists, intent on denouncing social inequities and corruptions of state. The image of the rat is a favorite form of visual satire on government corruption, often used by graffiti collective APC as seen in Figure 16 below. The image and text are straightforward, marking the inception of the Congressional caucus of the Republic of Colombia.

Although graffiti production continued to contain direct and overt political symbols and messages from the 1970s through the 1990s, a different kind of arte urbano, or public art emerged in the early 2000s, marking a distinct turn from Leftist messages of opposition to an "aesthetics of chaos," as described by graffiti collective Grupo Excusado leader Stink Fish in a reprint of an interview featured in their first publication.140

As the next section will illustrate, the style of street art that emerged due to their innovations changed the rules of graffiti production.141 Rather than creating political slogans, which already saturated the walls and surfaces of the city, or relying on text, the members of Grupo Excusado preferred to manipulate icons, and symbols as opposed to producing their own.

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Two of their main goals, as will be introduced in the section below, were to liberate the image and to have fun. Yet the provocative and complex nature of their work inhibited the viewer from reading recognizable aspects of the image in a familiar way. As a result, their work compels the viewer to reconsider the ideas inferred by the presence of a symbol or icon, like those relating to social status and identity.\footnote{Adriana María Alzate. \textit{Sociedad y orden: reformas sanitarias borbónicas en la Nueva Granada 1760-1810}. Bogotá, Colombia: Editorial Universidad del Rosario 2007. Also see Francisco José de Caldas. \textit{El influjo del clima sobre los seres organizados}. Semanario del Nuevo Reino de Granada, tomo 1 1808.}

**A new type of Urban Art**

In the documentary “La Memoria Canalla” (Scoundrel Memory) Armando Silva and other scholars discuss four significant events occurring between 1986 and 2002 that changed graffiti production in Colombia and provided the inspiration to incorporate the figure, reminiscent of earlier murals. The first event was the 1986 Apostolic visit by John Paul II to Colombia; the second was the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ “discovery” of the Americas in 1992; another was the 1999 assassination of radio personality Jaime Garzón (1960-1999) and the fourth was the transfer of control over the Internet, to the Minister of Communications during the presidential tenure of Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010).\footnote{\textit{Scoundrel Memory}, directed and produced by Bastardilla, with Memoria Canalla and Hogar Productions (2011; Bogotá, Colombia: Guerilla Flow Magazine, April 4, 2011), online at: \url{http://www.guerrillaflow.com/2011/04/scoundrel-memory-historia-del-graffiti.html}. Also see Alfredo Molano Bravo (translated by Daniel Bland). \textit{The Dispossessed: Chronicles of the Desterrados of Colombia}. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books 2005, 17-36.}

Between first and the eighth of July in 1986 the Pope made Apostolic Voyage 30 to Colombia, according to scholar Marta Rodríguez.\footnote{\textit{Scoundrel Memory}, (2011), Bogotá, Colombia: Guerilla Flow Magazine. Accessed 2014. \url{http://www.guerrillaflow.com/2011/04/scoundrel-memory-historia-del-graffiti.html}.} What made the trip so significant for Colombians was the realization that they were “not alone” in their suffering or plight.\footnote{Ibid.} Many found the courage to vocalize how marginalized and how hungry they were. The act of
articulating their misery gave Colombians courage to continue speaking out about the extreme social and political inequality, poverty, and corruption.  

Six years later, in 1992, Colombia celebrated the 500th anniversary of Columbus’ "discovery" of the Americas. Instead of a celebration, Colombian indigenous communities organized protests, spoke out, and created graffiti that rebuked Columbus as harbinger of destruction. For instance, graffiti artists would manipulate the black cross – symbol for Christopher Columbus – by inverting it and placing it over his caricature. This inflammatory image marked several public sites throughout the city. Where older styles of graffiti used political slogans, or other incendiary text to directly address and implicate the corruptions of the political and socio-economic elite, the sight of the distorted likeness of Columbus, made into caricature and juxtaposed with the Satanic symbol of the black, inverted cross was much more provocative in image and affect.

The image creates a parallel between Columbus, and by extension the European presence in the Americas, with that of evil. Whereas older, well-recognized discourse established a visual parallel between the representational image of the indigenous and the heathen cannibal, this street image inverts that dynamic, instead demonizing the ethnic, social identities embodied in the European conquest, as epitomized in the symbol and caricature of Columbus.

146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
Chapter 2, 60

The third event that impacted the street art community and Colombian society at large was the 1999 alleged assassination of radio personality Jaime Garzón (1960-1999). To many young people, Garzón offered hope and promise for a new political era, in his courage to use the medium of radio to speak out against corruptions of government and to rally for populist cause. In response, street artists transformed Garzón’s face into a symbol for the people, similar to the image of Juan Camilo (Figure 15). Although graffiti produced in homage to his legacy and as symbol of solidarity included image and text, the message was still highly politicized, and reminiscent of the street writing of 1970s and 1980s Bogotá.

In Figure 17, the unknown artist placed a quote over Garzón’s illustrated face and head, which reads “country of shit,” making the caustic nature of the political intervention against the state quite clear.

Figure 17: Anonymous. "Country of Shit" urban art image in homage to Jaime Garzón. Photo by author.

On one side of Garzón’s head is his name and on the other are the dates charting his birth and death. Like a wall label at a museum, there is a singular interpretation this graffiti image offers: that of Jaime Garzón. Despite being on the street, this image is still firmly locked within a sign system that maps its location in the state, in the politic, and in relation to the cultural, historical, and social legacy of Colombia’s past. Even though a passerby might react to the image differently, it is firmly embedded in Leftist politics of opposition, clearly acting as a voice of resistance against corruption and against the state.

Graffiti artists were among those who dared articulate the truth of lived experiences using street images that blatantly accused the state for its injustices. Because of their actions, artists were subjected to imprisonment, violence, bribes, and even death, when their work directly implicated the government in text or image. This was the case for sixteen year old Diego Felipe Becerra, whom police shot in the back in 2011, as he ran away from them after being caught in the midst of creating his infamous Felix the Cat graffiti tag, which often accompanied accusations of murder and corruption against the state.150

Above all it is graffiti’s gray legal and unregulated status that causes so many artists to risk imprisonment, violence, retaliation, bribery, or worse, at the hands of police and private security forces.151 Felipe Becerra earned the reputation as being a graffiti artist inclined toward creating the older form of urban art graffiti, which mixed slogans and political messages with the image of Felix the Cat. On the night of August 29, 2011, he and four other teens between 16 and 18 years old were caught painting graffiti in the streets of a private district of the city, reserved

for the upper classes, and near the bridge on Boyacá Avenue. Although the police grabbed one of the younger boys as they all tried to run away, Diego Felipe turned around to help his friend, taking full responsibility for the graffiti, and told the police to take him instead. The police proceeded to walk with Diego Felipe about 55 feet, upon which it was obvious by the boy’s calm manner that he was no threat. Sensing he was in danger, Diego Felipe ran toward the bridge, only making it about 6.5 feet before he was shot in the back with a 9mm.152

It is unclear what the police might have done, had Diego Felipe not tried to run away, but many graffiti artists shared stories of being questioned and intimidated all night, only to be forced to pay off the police, deal with imprisonment, or deal with public service, such as cleaning cigarette butts from city parks.153 Yet, not only did police shoot Diego Felipe, but also they concocted a story that he tried to hijack a city bus, as justification for murdering him.154

Indeed, his plight provides strong evidence to support the argument for regulation of graffiti in Bogotá. Despite changing perspective on graffiti’s value overall, there are currents of the private sector that associate graffiti with “ugliness” and the denigration of private property.155 Yet, their largest complaint, is more with graffiti’s subject matter, deeply disapproving of the

152 Ibid.
manipulation of political icons, regardless of the context, but more likely to approve a commissioned mural like those organized through Bogotá Humana.\footnote{Ibid.}

City beautification initiatives such as Bogotá Humana began in the early post-millennium, arguably in competition with changing public opinion of graffiti’s value as cultural patrimony. In fact, in the five short weeks in which I conducted fieldwork there, Bogotá Humana went to great expense to repair graffiti damage to the statue of Simon Bolívar in the eponymously named Plaza bordering the cultural and state center of the city, in order to prepare for the Independence Day celebrations the weekend of July 20, 2013.\footnote{Ibid. Many discussions with scholars also influenced the conclusions I ultimately drew in relation to Bogotá Humana.} Under these circumstances, overtly political street writing or image is vulnerable to erasure, and risks exposure and retaliation for the artist. Moreover, overt political graffiti permeated city wall surfaces throughout Bogotá by the millennium. Rather than continue to embroil street image or text in polemics of opposition, as earlier street writing and urban art had, post-millennium collective Lesivo produce a street art image that entangles the viewer in allusion and contradiction (Figure 18).
Lesivo visually inference the symbolic discovery of the Americas by Columbus on a gold banner in Figure 18, which features a timeline that begins with the illustrious “1492,” yet ends with “2012” – a year of ambiguous significance. There are several examples of graffiti throughout Bogotá that use the year of Columbus’ discovery of the Americas as a visual target,
but when suffused in a conglomerate image of contradictory signs and references, its significance changes into something yet unidentifiable. For instance, it is unclear to what exactly the year 2012 refers. It is most likely the year Lesivo completed the work. However, it is possible that 2012 has other meanings: The last year Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002 – 2010) was President was 2010, and in 2012 he founded the Centro Democrático with other allies, in order to contest national elections in 2014. On either side of the featured dates, the banner reads “His Predatory Highness” (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Lesivo. Untitled. Mixed media, close-up. Photograph by author.

The banner serves as the bottom of the bust of a composite figure. Fitted with a dark, copper crown of blank significance, the face resembles the decrepit and gnarled likeness of a king. However, the features of his faces incorporate aspects reminiscent of a bird-like beak and that of the face of former president Uribe (Figure 20).

![Figure 20: Photograph of former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010)](image)

Strange pale yellow short wings protrude from the shoulders of the crowned figure. However the wings are not large or majestic in appearance, as those of an angel depicted in paintings from the Renaissance. In fact, the wings don’t appear to be capable of flight, because of their stubby and spindled appearance. Instead, they frame the menacing and hairy-tufted countenance of the graffiti king like flames, with each somewhat separated feather curling up toward the rust-colored crown.

The artist collective juxtaposes their tag of “Lesivo” with that of several black birds in flight, against a solid grey background. The black birds resemble the Colombian Maria Mulatas or Great-Tailed Grackle (known as the “New World blackbird”) indigenous to the Northwestern
Maria Mulatas are not the national birds of Colombia. In fact there is no “official” bird, but the Andean condor has always been unofficially recognized as a national symbol.

Likewise, the Maria Mulatas are birds of national and historic significance, and pervade the sculpture, art, and national image. In fact, academically and nationally acclaimed artist Enrique Grau created a series of sculptures of the Maria Mulata, which preside proudly over the cities of Cali, Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Valledupar, Colombia (Figure 21 & Figure 22).

Figure 21: Digital photograph of artist Enrique Grau with a sculpted Maria Mulata, 1995. Courtesy of the Virtual Library at the Luis Ángel Arango Library and Cultural Institution.

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In contrast, they emerge as ominous symbols of arcane significance, often in the background of graffiti throughout the city, as they appear in this image by another artist, on the wall of a building facing the Plaza Chorro de Quevado, in the historic district La Candelaria (Figure 23).
Suspended over the entire image is a large talon-like claw, frozen open in attack position. Framing the image on the bottom are four human hands and two arms, each holding one weapon that resembles a tear-gas launcher. Only the hands, arms, and “arms” – weapons - are devoid of color, except for the black paint that outlines their forms against the kohl blue background. Overall, the striking image assumes a political, social, and historical identity of a new dimension, because it neither fully represents any historical personage, symbol, or aspect to which it refers in part, nor can the sum of its visual parts add up to a recognizable, cohesive whole. Rather, the huge image seems to probe the relationship between the acquisition of power, domination, and corruption through its ambivalence and contradiction.

For example, the face is a composite of the qualities of a bird and a king. The beak-like nose, menacing forehead wrinkles, angular chin, and hairy mutton chops that merge into ears
seem to incorporate aspects of every corrupt historical ruler. In this manner, they are the epitome of corruption, greed, and thievery of identity reminiscent of Spanish conquest and colonization, from the perspective of the dominated indigenous and mestizo populations.\(^{162}\) Likewise, the black cravat tie, white dress shirt collar, and dark grey-blue jacket that adorn the bust comprise nineteenth century fashion, referring to the era of Independence, and to the “official” creation of the Republic of Colombia in image and on the map.

Colombia declared Independence July 20, 1810, finally gaining full Independence from Spain 1819. However, the region comprising present-day Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador formed “Gran Colombia,” until 1830 when Venezuela and Ecuador seceded. It was not until 1886 that the nation emerged as an independent republic, after failed experimentation as the Republic of New Granada, the Grenadine Confederation, and the United States of Colombia.\(^{163}\)

As with other nascent Latin American nations during that period, naturalists, the political, social, and intellectual elite directed concerted effort toward developing an “official” ethnic, cultural, and cartographic image of “Colombia.” Yet, the design of an “official” image of the country projected the ideals and ideology of the elite. Therefore, the ethnic, social, and political identity embodied Creolized ideals, like those espoused by Caldas (analyzed in the Introduction), which championed European conceptions of culture as superior.\(^{164}\)

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\(^{164}\) Ibid. See also Miguel A. Centeno and Agustín Ferraro (Eds.). *State and nation making in Latin America and Spain: Republics of the Possible*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press 2013; and Francisco José de Caldas. *Obras Completas*. Bogotá, Colombia: Imprenta Nacional 1966.
Likewise, those in power developed national emblems and implemented official names for places and objects (like the mikania cordifolia plant) consciously distanced from mixed, indigenous, and African descending narrative or members of the population. With that purpose in mind, the first official maps of Gran Colombia reflect the aim to incorporate knowledge, display natural resources, political power, and present a unified identity.\footnote{Introduction, 13-15.}

Significantly, the design and printing of the first official maps of Colombia served two purposes: to formulate and organize an official portrait of the country’s national territory, and to establish its international status as an independent republic (separate from the crowns of Europe). Initially, the latter goal of recognition as an independent republic was paramount, which is why the first official map of the Republic of Colombia was printed in Philadelphia in 1822. However, the greater endeavor was to establish the nation as an idea – as an image – in contrast to opposing visions circulating throughout Europe at the time, which sought to subordinate the government, presenting it as an incorporated region of the greater territories of Central America, the Amazon, and the Orinoco. Therefore, engraving and printing presses in Paris and the United Kingdom best facilitated the construction of the republic as an independent political body, as an idea, and an image, legitimizing the nation as an official member of the international community in the process.\footnote{Lina del Castillo. “La Gran Colombia de la Gran Bretaña: la importancia del lugar en la producción de imágenes nacionales, 1819 – 1830” Araucaria: Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades. 12:24. 2010, 123-149. Also see Sebastián Ángel Díaz, Santiago Arbeláez Muñoz, Nieto M Olarte. Ensamblando la nación: cartografía y política en la historia de Colombia. Bogotá, Colombia: Universidad de los Andes. 2010.}

The presence of the three most auspicious symbols representing the Colonial encounter, the imposition of the Spanish crown, and the ratification of the region as a Republic, powerfully reveals the authority to design, label, and control space, in the service of a prevailing ideology. Moreover, subsequent efforts to project a single, dominant ethnic, cultural, and social image
Chapter 2, 72

visually correlated to those aforementioned ideals, which embed themselves in collective memory, over time forming symbols and icons. In parallel manner to Lefebvre’s designation of Conceived space or “true space,” the power to engineer spatial dynamics according to ideology is reciprocated in the power to effect social and cultural perception of that space (Perceived space) and relationships which occur within it (Representational spaces). Social status, social hierarchy, and social inequity emerge as the matrix that reinforces those dynamics, while representing the ideology of the engineers of “true space.”

To briefly reflect back on The Production of Space, Lefebvre explores urban spaces as a function of the commodification process, reinforcing one’s role in the economy, one’s identity, and one’s relationship to others. His work contributed to urban theory and broadened the theoretical scope to examine dynamics of political and social power, albeit through a Marxist lens. For Lefebvre, dynamics of political and social power emerge in the market relations of Capitalism, informing the creation of space (representational spaces), through which these dynamics occur, just as physical spaces themselves (perceived spaces) reveal and reinforce dynamics of political and social hierarchy that reflect the ideology of space as conceived through its engineers (representations of space). Throughout the text, he distinguishes what he calls true space, conceived space, or representations of space: the abstract consciously projected ideology of urban planners, cartographers, etc., from the truth of space, lived space, or representational spaces: social relations of power reinforced through shared experience and associated images and symbols.

What is critical to remember is that the urban planners, cartographers, and architects of “true space” also become the arbiters of that space, identifying and labeling its objects, subjects,

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168 Ibid.
and accompanying images in a way that influences what is perceived. Not only does that process effect the construction of symbols from specific images, but the process of classification of objects in space also produces a visual index arranged on a hierarchal scale. Consequently, representational images of subjects, like ethnic or indigenous social types, become images of representation perceived as occupants comprising specific social, political, and spatial status.¹⁶⁹

Thus, in returning to Lesivo’s street art image, Lesivo distort and contort former magisterial symbols, such as date of the Colonial encounter - 1492, the subsequent Spanish conquest represented by the crown, the ratification of “Colombia” as an idea and as an official country on the map (represented by the nineteenth-century dress of the featured bust), and the likeness of former President Uribe into something monstrous. In similar manner, the visual likeness to Uribe and the designation of “His Predatory Highness” underneath the bust implicates his administration (2002 – 2010) as culpable to the service of those same ideals and corruptions, transforming him into the contemporary “ruler,” capable of embodying malevolence of equal degree.

In summary, the use of visual symbolic fragments, juxtaposed and overlaid, becomes a powerful mechanism through which to interrogate and subvert the ideals and authority of the original architects of “true space,” comprising Colombian “image” and its accompanying visual narrative. Yet, Lesivo’s image is not what Lefebvre would have designated as “revolutionary,” since no aspect of it attempts to insert alternative figures or “create” a space for visual counter-narrative, in opposition to the perceived corruptions of those in power, like the politically oriented graffiti of older decades.¹⁷⁰ Rather, the urban art of Lesivo acts to deconstruct the symbol, altering what is signified and thus disrupting one’s ability to read what is depicted as

sign, so that it ceases to be an image of representation. Instead of substituting an alternative representational image, the artist collective dismantle the power of the image as symbol. Indeed, it is Lesivo’s ability to dissect layers of signification that have comprised Colombian visual narrative, that enables their urban art to counter the ideology of the “true space” architectural, cartographic authority inferred through it. Therefore their work functions as counter-cartography – challenging the framework through which current images of representation emerged.


As stated earlier in the chapter, it is significant that aspects of former President Uribe’s likeness were incorporated into the graffiti created by Lesivo, rather than a portrait, caricature, or text directing the spectator to read the face as Uribe. By eluding to Uribe, but without representing him completely, Lesivo avoid harassment or the threat of imprisonment for the desecration of a national icon. Similarly, the juxtaposition of multiple symbolic references and visual allusions (as discussed in the preceding section) establish the complex work as much more than political graffiti, or opposition. Yet, allusion to Uribe is purposeful. For many Colombians, in particular, Uribe’s presidency altered the urban demographic and range of lived experience throughout the nation in irreparable ways.

Uribe’s presidential policies manifested the hypocrisies of the state. The resulting human rights atrocities, disappearances, exponential increase in internal forced displacement and inequity only served to exacerbate the paradox of the Colombian lived experience, in contrast to official claims circulating at the time, designed to boost tourism and investment.¹⁷¹ Uribe claimed to enforce hard line policies against narcotrafficking, and “guerrilla” aggression by the

¹⁷¹ Ibid. At the time of the writing of this thesis a (perhaps tenuous) truce between FARC and the Colombian government was signed.
However, his administration’s solution involved the taking of millions in US support towards an alleged war against drugs and terror that covertly placed retired military and police private militia forces in a position to commit genocide and forced disappearance. Uribe’s administration manipulated and targeted the innocent peasant and farmer population throughout the interior, which often were caught between the Left and Right, FARC and private militia. Thus many Right-leaning thinkers who often praised Uribe for combatting the FARC, drugs, and violence, so that the country might enjoy a booming tourist industry once again, remained blind or complacent to the paradoxical reality that hundreds of thousands of Colombian citizens, migrants, and other displaced experienced.

Additionally, the Uribe administration advised the transfer of control over the Internet from the University of the Andes to the Minister of Communications – the fourth and final event, which transformed urban, social, and cultural dynamics throughout the capital city. While telecommunications and Internet network capability greatly expanded under a centralized system, the switch also provided Uribe’s administration with more power to censure content and monitor citizen activity online. In fact, many accused Uribe of violating citizen privacy by monitoring digital and Internet communications at will.

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172 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
Nonetheless, the Internet increased modes of communication for Colombians, and introduced new local, national, and international perspectives.\textsuperscript{177} Moreover, the Internet is a much harder dimension to subject to censure and counter-intelligence tactics, especially when it is quite simple to make one’s identity anonymous, or bypass controlled search engines, like Google, in favor of the Deep Web.\textsuperscript{178}

Broader telecommunications access affected the evolution of graffiti in Bogotá as well. Members of the Escritura street writing phenomenon, inspired from artists in New York, could more easily communicate and collaborate, often incorporating collectives, music, and artists from cities in Europe for street art festivals, symposia, and other events.\textsuperscript{179} Consequently, graffiti creation in Bogotá evolved and exploded into a myriad of dynamic forms. These colliding events and developments fostered “a new look” for graffiti production in Bogotá and in other cities throughout Colombia. Members of street art collective Grupo Excusado pioneered a new style of urban art in the early millennium, which primarily employed stencil as visual medium.\textsuperscript{180}

**Grupo Excusado**

Initially, the four members of the graffiti collective Excusado were friends at the Universidad Nacional in Bogotá, who became disappointed over the design curriculum offered

Accordingly, they adopted the artist pseudonyms Dead Bird (Pájaro Muerto), Saint Cat (Gato Santo), Stink Fish (Pez Maloliente), and Porn Rat (Porno Rata), and conceived the collective name Excusado, which itself signified multiple ideas and objects.

Linguistically speaking, the Spanish word \textit{excusado} connotes many things. According to \textit{Spanish Dictionary} online, the word translates to \textit{toilet}.\footnote{182}{“Excusado.” Spanish Dictionary – Curiosity Media, Inc., 2014. Accessed 2014. \url{http://www.spanishdict.com/translate/excusado}.} However, it may also connote the British equivalent for the smallest room in a building. Additionally, as an adjective the word means “unnecessary” or “superfluous”, yet used in adjective phrases may suggest something that is out of the question (pensar en lo excusado), or something that someone remains exempt from (estar excusado de algo). Last, it may literally mean, “excused” (disculpado).\footnote{183}{Ibid.} Thus, the very significance of the word refers to a tangled web of possible connotations that are in some cases very dissimilar. According to the \textit{Royal Spanish Academy} online dictionary, “excusado” may also mean, “That through privilege is free from paying taxes/tribute.”\footnote{184}{“Excusado.” Royal Spanish Academy 2014. Accessed 2014. \url{http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=excusados}.} The name is an interesting play on words, and it is possible that the group chose Excusado as a way to designate their art as “free” to others to pay or not pay tribute.\footnote{185}{“Colectivo de jóvenes: ‘Excusado’ llena la calle de arte…” arte y callejero, 2007. Accessed 2014. \url{http://www.artyecallejero.blogspot.com/2007/12/colectivo-de-juvenes-excusado-llena-la.html}. Also see El Grupo Excusado, et.al. Decoración de Exteriores 2007, 25-40.}

In fact, Dead Bird related in an interview that the modus operandi of the group’s stenciled creations was to establish the street as liberal forum image production, and to establish graffiti that remains open to \textit{free} interpretation.\footnote{186}{Ibid.} In a city like Bogotá, the appearance of this new...
graffiti without the incendiary messages of the politically Left M-19, or saturated with distinct political messages of opposition, as in the graffiti of the 1980’s and early 1990’s, was unprecedented. Furthermore, Excusado quickly earned its title as an innovator of contemporary stencil graffiti, and as the creators of a street art where “one can freely share all types of imagery, sounds, tastes, smells, products, or knowledge.” In its earliest form, what they created represented “aesthetics of disorder.” In juxtaposing familiar cultural signs or symbols with one another (primarily through stencil), the resulting images had the potential to dislocate the viewer from meanings that may have been derived from the image’s context or the symbol’s previous uses. Simultaneously, manipulating signs or symbols of historical, cultural, or national significance proved a powerful tool capable of revealing the dynamics of engineered perception that belie the construction of identity and status on a national level. As Stink Fish related, the group discovered that “it is much more powerful to transform the indexical value of certain images already emotionally charged than to make new ones.”

Grupo Excusado, and other street artists of their generation in Bogota, manipulated and recontextualized their images through three main methods. The first was to utilize the advantages of the Internet and social media, where they welcomed the chance to incorporate transnational...
and international visual narratives. Producing a strong online presence also had the potential to exponentially broaden the artistic collaborative community, and the possibility of disseminating the images produced. Second, they found new inspiration from the work of other graffiti artists who used stencil, such as Britain’s Banksy. Stencil was also the preferred medium of subversive student street art movements of the 1960’s in Paris, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. Third, they used the wall as free PR, welcoming passersby to comment on, or add to their pieces, and to pass the word. While added inscriptions and overwriting were a common practice and consequence of much of world graffiti of recent decades, Grupo Excusado actively welcomed the additions, which, were in practicality, visual dialogues (we are reminded of the earlier case of Willie Herron’s 1972 “Wall the cracked open” in East City Terrace, Los Angeles, California). The result for the Colombian group was a truly unique product that changed the subject/object relationship and position to the observer with every alteration.

Although Excusado earned their tribute as the “pioneers” of stencil graffiti in Bogotá, members Stink Fish, Dead Bird, Saint Cat, and Porn Rat utilized any and all media capable of “leaving a temporary or permanent mark on the street.” Beginning in 2003, they participated in conventions in addition to their printed fanzines. In due course, the effect of their street intervention played a critical role in transforming the graffiti phenomenon into part of the

\[\text{191 Op cit. 22-25.}\]
\[\text{http://www.blog.com.co/ediciones/articulo/excusado-esta-rayado/70.}\]
\[\text{195 Ibid.}\]
cultural patrimony of the city, albeit in a continuing unofficial manner. For example “Objetivo Fanzine,” the first magazine dedicated to graffiti, was published in 2005. Not only did it support graffiti artists, but it also gave birth to a generation of urban writers who contributed through articles and interviews. Notably, Bogotá hosted the first festival of graffiti in 2005 entitled “Usme 29”, under the direction of graffiti collective “Mientras Duermen” (while you sleep, or while they sleep).

By 2006, Excusado began to organize shows, the first named “Desfase,” which continued annually through 2008, and from which Figure 24 belongs, attracted international attention.

![Figure 24: Featured mural from the third edition of “Desfase” organized by el Grupo Excusado in 2008.](image)

The title of the show itself is ambiguous in meaning, since the word desfase could mean either “gap” or could be the command form of the verb desfasar, meaning “phase out” or

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197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
“change the phase of.” Indeed as in initial organized exhibition of sorts for the group and for contemporary graffiti in general, the title does seem to signify all possible meanings at once: presenting images from the “gap,” which “phase-out” previous absence and other imitations thereof, while “changing the phase” of the contemporary street art scene. Like the name of the collective itself, Excusado have historically preferred to widen the spaces of significance and interpretation, rather than limiting themselves or their urban art productions to singular definitions and dimension. Stink Fish related that shows like “Desfase” attract artists from all over the world.
Street Art Studies and Research

Unlike in decades past, graffiti was more welcomed as a legitimate, validated form of artistic expression. In fact, the administered surveys of the Artery Foundation and those that comprised Armando Silva’s research provide insight human response to urban districts and changing attitudes toward street art.

Silva administered surveys to measure psychological, emotional, and mental perception and response to city districts. As noted in the Introduction Armando Silva posited street writing as iconoclasm. Silva’s background in Linguistics determined his focus on the role of text as vehicle of the communicated message and the historic role of the literate authority to possess the power to disseminate messages in the public forum. To return to the subject of the city as symbolic representation, Silva conceived of the city as a stage or arena through which one projected fantasies, desire, or nightmare. According to his paradigm, the city emerged through the process of construction, where buildings become landmarks, and landmarks represent symbols in the cultural collective. However, it was through the viewer that symbols retain their meaning through memory and affect.

Rather than positing graffiti as a symptom and progenitor of crime, Silva focused on graffiti as an object that comprises the symbolic landscape of the city, capable of eliciting emotional, psychological response through its illicit presence in the public forum, from its presence as image, and from its communicated message.

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Silva referred to early urban art as "artistic interventions, where graffiti de consignas (Slogan Graffiti) intertwines with aesthetic form." Specifically, his book *Una ciudad imaginada* (1986) applied philosophical, linguistic, sociological, and psychoanalytic theory to develop a concrete framework through which to define and examine this nascent type of graffiti expression.

His primary focus in urban studies has been concerned with exploring the city as phantasmagoria, or examining the processes by which symbols emerge from landmarks, and landmarks from constructed edifice. For Silva, affect and memory play a significant role in the construction of meaning in symbols, in language, and especially in subjective response to an object, like graffiti, or to a specific place in the urban sphere. Thus, the key to understanding how people construct meaning in the urban imaginary, for him, lies with the ability to map the process of creation of messages that comprise the symbolic collective of experience, memory, and affect. In this sense, graffiti writing possesses a symbolic charge, not just representative of an act of iconoclasm against the symbol of the literate authority, as discussed in the Introduction, but also as an illicit image. Thus, the finished visual product becomes a symbol of a different nature, as an intervention in the urban, and as a subliminally communicated message that comprises an aspect of the phantasm dimensions of the urban: a paradox of isolation and crowding, of the public and private, and of fear and desire.

In order to gauge public response to the city’s neighborhoods, its graffiti, and ultimately to the city as phantasmagoria that produces the dreams or nightmares of each individual, Silva

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203 Ibid.

204 My emphasis. Silva discusses the paradigm shift from a question of "that" to a question of "how" in *Proyectar la comunicación*. Santa Fé de Bogotá, CO: Tercer Mundo Ediciones 1997, 202-205.

conducted surveys, polls, and studies of pedestrian response in the urban sphere. Accordingly, the degree to which external objects or locations appeal to repressed desire, or reflect nightmare determines its attributes in the imaginary.\footnote{Armando Silva. Imaginarios urbanos. Bogotá y São Paulo: cultura y comunicación urbana en América Latina. Bogotá, CO: Tercer Mundo Ediciones 1992, 160-222.} However, for Silva, the urban imaginary of Bogotá is not necessarily rooted in the dialectic of the city as utopia vs. the city as decaying nightmare (like New York as a "New Rome" vs. a "Naked City"). Rather it emerges in the psyche, in collective memory, and in the symbolic realm of both the spectator and pedestrian. Therefore, human perception/representation mediates the form and degree to which that urban utopia or nightmare materializes.\footnote{Armando Silva. Imaginarios urbanos. Bogotá y São Paulo: cultura y comunicación urbana en América Latina. Bogotá, CO: Tercer Mundo Ediciones 1992, 97-123. Also see 160-222.}

Rather than study the affect or symbolic components of graffiti, the Artery Foundation examined attitudes toward its existence in the early 2000s. Between June and September 2012, in conjunction with the Visual and Plastic Arts Administration of the city, they administered over 600 surveys and 67 interviews.\footnote{Santiago Raúl Castro P. La Fundación Arteria, et al. "Grafiti Bogotá 2012: Diagnóstico." December 28 de 2012. http://www.culturarecreacionydeporte.gov.co/portal/sites/default/files/finaldiagnosticotero.pdf.} The purpose of their study was to identify types of graffiti production, identify its creators, and trace its development, in order to affirm its role as cultural patrimony, while providing suggestions for regulating its practice.\footnote{Op cit., 5-26.} Notably, the foundation also commissioned the creation of six graffiti murals in public sites that had been at the center of the graffiti debate in the past.\footnote{Ibid.}

Arranging these works of production provided an opportunity to collect public opinion, study graffiti media, and explore site-specific circumstances that influenced graffiti creation in the past. Of the 19-20 localities in which members of the foundation administered their polls, the

majority of the participants were between 13 and 56 years of age, with approximately 58% male, 42% female, 82% with at least a Baccalaureate degree, and 46% engaged in graduate study. Significantly, the demographics of the survey’s subjects illustrate what portion of the population took the time to formulate a perspective on graffiti production on the one hand. On the other, the survey affirmed that these citizens were educated. Ultimately, the polls illuminated the fact that more than half the population recognized no difference between technically legal or illegal graffiti. Overall, the purpose of their study was to validate graffiti as a legitimate visual form, worthy of city support, and justify cause for its regulation.

**Conclusion**

Indeed, the graffiti of the post-millennium could not help but reflect the powerful forces that were not only changing urban life, but that were also disrupting the fabric of its traditional cultural and social order. As a result, street art images of the early 2000s reflect a collision of perspective, illustrating the social, cultural, and temporal dissonance that many bogotanos experienced as they witnessed the city scape be subjected to the invasion of millions of displaced, international migrants, competing business interests and increased exposure to the world via the Internet. Yingjin Zhang, professor of Chinese Studies at the University of California at San Diego, discusses this process of transformation as seen in similar circumstances experienced by urbanites in Beijing, during the same period.

Zhang analyzes the effects of increasing global commerce and influence on the “older imaginaries” of the traditional “sacred” city of Beijing, as seen through cinema, in *Other Cities, Other Worlds* (2008). Films like *The World, Beijing Bicycle* and *I love Beijing* employ methods of transportation – plane, bicycle, and foot – as a metaphor for the contradictions of

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211 Ibid.  
progress and stasis that collide in the individual, who must rectify contemporary foreign, invasive images, symbols, traditions, and points of reference with atemporal conceptions of the sacred that previously dominated local traditions, perspective, and symbolism. For Zhang, this produces “the ruined map,” personified by the ambivalence and anxiety that accompanies the task of having to reorient one’s sense of self to an urban landscape punctuated with the chaos of change.213

Similarly, residents of Bogotá had to integrate the hidden truths of Uribe’s administration that became exposed as more displaced flooded the cities, into their own individual frame of reference that may have focused on the boom in tourism, commerce, and access to cross-country travel made possible because of Uribe. Moreover, an increase in tourists, foreigners, and the Internet offered unprecedented dissenting cultural, social, and historical perspectives on Colombia than had been inaccessible previously. Last, an increase in informal microenterprise made possible through these changes to the city also transformed the ways in which people could obtain and maintain livelihood. Several urban artists themselves, for example, have acquired wealth, fame, and notoriety through these new channels of access, rather than through traditional networks of state, where opportunities were more limited to those of higher social and economic status. Given these points, the style of urban art introduced by Grupo Excusado indeed represented a new generation of street art presentation and reception.

Yet, if one were to visit any of Bogotá’s official cultural institutions or museums, one would find him or herself suspended in time, because the art displayed in those spaces continues to display objects according to academic and traditional rules. In particular, formal exhibition spaces continue to inscribe images or objects within a social hierarchy constructed from

213 Op cit., 239.
relationships of opposition and exclusion. In that sense, earlier graffiti, especially slogan graffiti, reflected the same dynamic. Older styles of graffiti that employed the visual medium as a political method of resistance, after all, represented the voice of opposition against the corruptions of state.

In contrast, the image created by Lesivo (Figure 20) incorporates allusions to Columbus, to the Spanish conquest, to the emergence of Colombia as a territory and idea on the map during the nineteenth century, and to the human rights atrocities perpetuated through Uribe’s administration. Yet there is no label, as in a museum, nor any text directing the viewer or onlooker to draw any specific conclusion about the image or its meaning. Instead, the agency to determine meaning rests more squarely with the viewer than any image in an official exhibition space. Given these circumstances, the image might more broadly probe the relationship between the acquisition of power, domination, and corruption. However, it would depend upon the viewer’s perception.

Rather than comprising resistance and opposition, post-millennium artists such as Lesivo create work that embodies deconstruction: of symbol and of symbolic process. In decontextualizing the aspects that comprise an image as visual representation of identity, event, or time, Lesivo’s work opens the discursive space to reconsider visual associations of symbolic construction that are embedded in memory. Ultimately, Grupo Excusado pioneered a mode of graffiti production that provided a visual narrative that countered the official narrative of city and country that one might encounter in the museum. The members of Excusado engineered their work so that the meaning of each piece remained free to be “conceived in accordance to the imagination of passersby.”

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214 My own observations.
complex street art, which alluded to several narratives simultaneously, by incorporating and juxtaposing visual aspects of symbol and icon. Their method provided post-millennium artists with a mode for addressing controversial figures and events in a visually complex manner, thus permitting the space to explore provocative themes without aligning themselves with a political cause.

Consequently, the street art style of Grupo Excusado and later artists and collectives Lesivo, Bastardilla, Guache, and Toxicómano are profound because the images produced beckon the viewer to reconsider the framework in which an image becomes representative (and symbolic) of a particular status or identity overall. Prime examples by artists Bastardilla, Guache, and Toxicómano will be examined in the following chapter.

\[^{216}\text{My own observation, as well as the result of multiple discussions with artists and scholars.}\]
Chapter 3: Graffiti as Counter-Cartography

The previous chapter traced the evolution of street art in Bogotá, Colombia through the millennium, when a new style of graffiti emerged, exemplified by Grupo Excusado. As previously examined, urban art of the post-millennium could not help but reflect the powerful forces that were changing urban life, and that were also disrupting the fabric of its traditional cultural and social order. In response, street art images of the early 2000s reflect a collision of perspective, illustrating the social, cultural, and temporal dissonance that many bogotanos experienced as they witnessed the city scape be subjected to the invasion of millions of displaced, international migrants, competing business interests and increased exposure to the world via the Internet. Similar to Yingjin Zhang’s concept of the “ruined map,” the urban art of Lesivo, Bastardilla, Guache, and Toxicómano provide a visual context in which to explore the widening distance between traditional conceptions of identity, status (entwined with one’s relationship to the land), and representation, as new horizons for self-identification, representation, and livelihood became possible.217

Rather than presenting images reflective of a social hierarchy, which originated in cartographic processes of mapping, the street art of Lesivo, Bastardilla, Guache, and Toxicómano manipulate symbol and icon, introducing counter-cartographical creations that alter the framework through which to identify and interpret an image. Theorist Armando Silva posited graffiti as an object inhabiting the symbolic landscape of the city, its forms personifying the hope, fear, and desire that each spectator perceives and projects through them (as phantasmagoria).218 In contrast, the images produced by the artists mentioned above probe the

historical events, inequity, and prejudicial associations germane to the construction of the symbol itself. In manipulating recognizable and iconic images, these artists produce the space to interrogate the process of symbolic construction. Lesivo’s work in Chapter 2, for example, invites the spectator to broadly explore the relationship between power, domination, and corruption, through a complex matrix of juxtaposed symbolic and iconic allusion.\textsuperscript{219}

The piece includes visual allusion to the discovery of the Americas by Columbus, to the corruptions of royalty perhaps embodied in the Spanish crown of the Conquest, to the era of Independence, during which mapping and political authorities established the Republic of Colombia as an idea and as a conceived territory on the map, and finally to the corruptions of state personified in Uribe and his administration. Each reference epitomizes an authority with the power to define, label, and control space in service to a prevailing ideology, thus informing the creation of symbols that reinforce social status and perception of status within those spaces.\textsuperscript{220}

Similar to the “discovery” of the mikania cordifolia plant during the mapping expeditions of the nineteenth century (analyzed in the Introduction), the dominating powers of the Conquest, the ruling class of the nineteenth century, and those behind Uribe exploited knowledge, labor, and land on a local level, in order to champion specific acts and identities within their own ethnic, social, and economic class, as the central lens by which to identify, represent, and refer to each respective historical period.\textsuperscript{221} In effect, social hierarchy and social inequity developed through their systems of classification. In consequence, representational images (of social types, of natural resources) became images of representation, symbolic of their status and class within that hierarchy.

\textsuperscript{219} See Chapter 2, 86-87.
\textsuperscript{220} Chapter 2, 63-87.
\textsuperscript{221} Introduction, 13-15.
The urban art of Lesivo acts to deconstruct the symbol, altering what is signified and thus disrupting one’s ability to read what is depicted as sign. Instead of substituting an alternative representational image, the artists collective dismantle the power of the image as symbol, by depicting it in a denigrating rather than heroic light. Yet the image as a whole is not an image of resistance or suggestive of rebellion against the implied malevolence and corruption depicted. No political slogans accompany the image, directing the viewer to read or respond to it in a particular way. Nor are there attempts to substitute alternative figures of opposition or restitution (like Camilo Torres or Jaime Garzón) for those who have misused their power. Instead, Lesivo’s work confers the agency to interpret, even define the image, to the spectator and passersby of the street. Bastardilla, Guache, and Toxicómano employ similar strategy, and an example of their work will be examined in the next section.

**Bastardilla**

Bastardilla, like her contemporaries Guache and the collectives Lesivo and Toxicómano, create graffiti and street art that challenges the observer to consider the correlation between the presented image’s context and the represented identities. Likewise, her graffiti provides visual narrative that reflects an aspect of the twenty-first-century urban experience in Bogotá, Colombia, that is otherwise absent in the official spaces of the museum.
In Figure 25, for example, Bastardilla manipulates the signifying elements of gender identity and sexual orientation, constructing a work that challenges the observer to probe the structures that determine and constrict gender roles, expression, and their relationship to one another. In fact, her chosen artist tag is itself a play on gender signification. Despite the feminine gender of the word Bastardilla, the artist’s chosen name actually refers to either letters written in italics or a musical instrument that is a type of flute. The term also connotes the homonym bastardo meaning “illegitimate” child, which points to the very status of the artist’s medium and practices of street art.

This particular work is so large that it dwarfs the cobblestone street at the crossroads of Thirteenth Avenue and 14th street. The two large pink and blue faces engulf the entire façade of a three story residential building, overshadowing the small children’s playground nestled in front

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of the mixed media work. The two disembodied heads appear to be “buried” chin deep in the ground, as if the rest of their figures might protrude hundreds of feet below the surface of the street. They only expose one hand each, differentiated by neon contours of pink and blue. Although one face is neon pink and the other blue, to assume the gender of either would be a mistake.

On the left, the blue face seems mask-like, comprised of geometric shapes, rigid contours, and stoic expression. In contrast, the pink face is the portrait of intensity, comprised of flame-like swirls of bright yellow and fluorescent orange, bearing a tongue of several gold-hilted swords. Yet the pink eyes, framed with yellow eyelids and bushy black eyebrows don’t make eye contact with the blue-faced companion with whom he or she is locked in embrace. The pink eyes, instead stare vacantly upward, concentrating on something beyond the viewer’s gaze. Behind the locked embrace of the two heads and hands, Bastardilla left her signature paintball accents, in bright yellow, against the black painted background of the building’s façade. The entire embrace is one of opposition and intensity. Without text or other indicators that delineate identity, or visual narrative, the viewer is free to interpret Bastardilla’s graffiti in a multitude of ways.

Overall, the work seems to probe the spaces between conflict, intensity, violence and passion that permeate romantic relationships. Yet, it remains impossible to identify the pink or blue-faced figure as women or men, the relationship as either hetero or homosexual. Rather, the heads seem to embody the grey space of nonspecific identity, perhaps indicative of the currents of transformation in the city and in the country since the millennium.

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For instance, forcefully displaced individuals and families become members of the masses of nameless and, status-less, comprising generic statistics on the periphery of formal experience. Moreover, neighborhoods are rapidly changing in Bogota, with the continued encroachment of informal communities. In similar manner, the street artist him or herself, often inhabits contradictory status and identity, assuming a tag and persona designed to hide and protect their official name. Bastardilla, like her contemporaries, has become internationally renown, yet her official family name and status remains shrouded in mystery. In other words, the artist Bastardilla’s famous reputation, made possible through informal channels such as social media, belies the construction of her official nonspecific identity. In particular, online media has facilitated the growth of opportunity and fame for these artists – something that was not possible to the same degree in earlier decades. As illustrated in the preceding chapter, the city has also experienced a tourist boom for the first time in decades since 2002. As a result, more foreigners are visiting and settling in Bogota and other cities. Last, Colombian Constitutional Court recognized the rights of same-sex couples in 2011. Current President Juan Manual Santos (2010 – 2015) recognized same-sex couples as well in 2014, citing that they should have the right to be legally married. The ruling reflects the fact that the Catholic Church no longer has the influence over societal mores and norms that it did in the past.

Like the faces of Bastardilla’s street art image, gender and sexual identity are much more fluid at present. Similarly, the structures that might have previously determined or limited identity construction or expression have transformed. Whether the faces depict the anxiety of change, the trauma of displacement and loss of identity, or the fluidity of gender and sexual orientation in the millennium, the agency to interpret the image lies with the viewer.

Bastardilla, produces street art that probes the relationship between identity construction, image, and representation. Bastardilla’s work exposes nonspecific identities, suggestive of the transformations to everyday life, which have either provided opportunity for greater freedom to construct one’s status and identity (as in the case of the artist him or herself, and in respect to gay rights), or reflect the circumstances that have caused a loss of identity and status (as in forced displacement). In similar manner, Guache presents ethnic and social status and identity that counters a historical precedent, established through cartographic images of representation, and naturalized in cultural memory.

**Guache**

Figure 26 represents just one facet of a much larger mural at the same site, contributed to by other members of the collaboration – Lesivo, Toxicómano, and artist D.J. Lu. Like Bastardilla’s work, the collaborative image fills the building surface of an entire block, (Fig. 27 and Fig. 28).
Figure 26: Graffiti painted by Guache, at 20th street in Bogotá, Colombia 2013. Photograph by author.
Figure 27: Second half of large graffiti created by Guache, D.J. Lu, and Toxicómano, at 20th street, Bogotá, Colombia 2013. Photograph by author.
Initially, when encountering even the portion of this graffiti in Figure 26, that Guache created, what stops the spectator or pedestrian in his or her tracks is its sheer size. Take the crate for example, set at the base of the mural, just under the tail of the black cord, held by the large pink hand of the man or woman who appears bearing another individual on his or her back. On the street, the crate measures approximately 2.5 feet high and yet the colors and figures of the street art image dwarf it. At approximately 6 feet from the sidewalk surface, the small green street sign in the upper left corner indicates the position of the graffiti-laden wall, at 20th street. The white letters of the sign barely measure even a sixteenth of the entire work, easily more than 10 feet across. The mammoth scale of the work is equal only to the exaggerated scale of the figures and objects central to the scene.
The two figures in the center of Guache’s portion of the street art piece counter and oppose one another in scale and action. One figure appears to struggle and wobble under the weight of the other figure of slightly greater scale and size, which seems to teeter on his or her back like a seesaw. The difference in scale between the figure on the bottom and the larger individual lying on his or her back suggests a parallel contrast in status or significance between the two. For instance, the legs of the figure on the ground look as if they might buckle under the sheer magnitude of the body on his or her back. Yet, the person lying on his or her back seems to rest comfortably, elevated above the figure on the ground and overshadowing his or her human “carriage” in proportion and scale.

A white board sits between the two figures, itself trailing the weight of objects tethered to it in a parade of contradictory proportion to its size and flimsy width, and in opposition to the human mechanism sandwiching it. In the opposite direction, magenta birds halt mid-flight, attempting to break free despite the black tethers holding them captive, controlled by the hands of the man or woman on the bottom like horse reigns, as if he or she might harness the strength from their flight to emerge against the paradoxical weight suppressing and tugging at him or her. Overall, the scene is a contradiction of momentum: each figure vellicating in between states of movement forward or projection backward.

Like Lesivo’s work, previously examined in Chapter 2, Guache also juxtaposes allusion to different symbols and representational frameworks. In contrast to the graffiti created by Lesivo, Guache’s references are much more direct. Yet, without label, political slogan, or other accompanying text, one is free to interpret the piece in a variety of ways. In fact, Guache’s work comprises an aspect of an informal walking tour through the graffiti of La Candelaria, through which I encountered it for the first time.
This example of urban art by Guache lies hidden in the periphery of La Candelaria, away from the tourist-heavy historical district. Yet, it is one of several ‘main’ attractions along a successful, yet uncensored graffiti walking tour of La Candelaria, led by a local artist. Rather than an ‘official’ tour, sponsored through an institutional tourist body, it is the result of an informal micro-enterprise begun by CRISP, an Australian street artist, and OPEK - a Canadian graffiti artist - in 2010.\(^{228}\) Both relocated to Bogotá in 2002, however it is now run only through the efforts of CRISP (Figure 29)

![Figure 29: CRISP, Australian graffiti artist, providing context and background to better understand graffiti production in la Candelaria, Bogotá, Colombia 2011. Photo, courtesy of http://www.yeity.com/features/graffiti-heaven-in-bogota.](http://www.yeity.com/features/graffiti-heaven-in-bogota)

Yet, there is no storefront, nor is the business ‘registered’ with the state in any capacity. CRISP owns no business license, and takes only cash tips, making the amazing ‘tour’ otherwise free.\(^{229}\) CRISP alone manages this creative micro-enterprise: It is advertised through a

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WordPress site and marketed through social media, through local hostels, by shared reviews on trip advisor, on past participant blogs, on graffiti community websites and journals, or through entertainment websites like vive.in.\textsuperscript{230} CRISP’s success from this informal venture runs parallel to graffiti’s ability to thrive, both exploiting the grey space between legal and illegal in a city where informality is the norm and graffiti is not unlawful, only prohibited in certain context. Like the proliferation of graffiti as a continued enterprise that is neither legal nor illegal, CRISP’s micro-enterprise continues to thrive outside the limits and conditions of official commerce in the city of Bogotá, operating in the “grey zone” articulated by scholars Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, previously analyzed in Chapter 1.\textsuperscript{231}

Overall, the most intriguing aspect of CRISP’s walking ‘tour’ was the chance to witness other reactions to this image. Graffiti tour participants were from regions all over the world, including Manchester, England, New York, Australia, and Spain. Many on the tour interpreted this graffiti differently, from 'cartoony' to nonsensical, to 'beautiful' to 'political. Yet none could confidently determine or agree on the identity of the figures, or their local, cultural, national, or international significance. Yet, as an Art Historian, I immediately recognized the artist’s visual allusion to the historical carguero (Figure 30).

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{231} Koonings and Kruijt (Eds.) Megacities, 2009, 5-19.
Figure 30: Ramón Torres Méndez, *El carguero de la montaña de Sonson, Estado de Antioquia, 1841.* Colored lithograph in watercolor. Bank of the Republic of Colombia.

Normally seen in costumbristo illustrations, like this one by nineteenth century artist Ramón Torres Méndez, the *carguero* or *silletero* was usually an indigenous or mestizo male who carried travelers on his back with the aid of a chair, through mountain passes in Antioquia and between Ibague and Cartago. Countless travelers, including the famous Prussian naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) used and wrote about this type of transport, but claimed that this backbreaking profession was not necessarily identifiable with the “Indian.”

An anecdote he shared in a memoir says otherwise. He related the tale of an officer who was traveling through a mountain pass in Antioquia, who insistently shoved his mule spurs into

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the ribs of the carguero carrying him, noting that, “Even ‘Indian’ patience, however, may be exhausted, and on reaching this spot the silletero jerked his human rider from his chair into the torrent below and made his escape into the mountain.”

It is clear that the costumbristo image of the nineteenth century carguero reflected a social, ethnic, and gender perspective in operation at the time, which associated indigenous, rural, male identities with manual labor and lower socio-economic status, existing on the periphery of ‘civilization’ as experienced in the urban landscape of the city. In parallel manner to the stratification of class and cultural development, articulated by Social Evolutionists and Naturalists like José Antonio Caldas, the image of the carguero became naturalized in the cultural collective as an image personifying indigenous, rural male identities. As a result, indigenous identity became synonymous with rural landscape, manual labor, and gender inequality. Furthermore, it is significant that female indigenous identity remains absent from this historic costumbristo image, and overall was a social type relegated furthest from the central visual narrative of cultural life, development, and ‘civilization.’ In this sense, the two individuals at the center of the street art image created by Guache allude to gender inequality and related social, cultural inequity replicated within indigenous communities themselves.

While the reference to the historic carguero is clear, the graffiti by Guache juxtaposes contradictory iconic fragments, changing the context and significance of its historic elements and the image as a whole. On the street, Guache’s work no longer operates in the same context as the nineteenth century costumbristo image by Torres Mendez. Yet, its fragments of allusion still anchor parts of the graffiti to the historic symbol of the carguero. Thus the street art image has not yet become something else either. Rather, the image seems suspended in an ambiguous

signifying space, as if the characters comprising the central scene themselves personify attempts to move beyond the social and spatial constriction of indigenous and gender identity and representation, just as the image as a whole neither represents the carguero nor something other.

It is likely that the figure on the bottom is female, but the artist leaves a degree of ambiguity to the shapes and contours that define this figure. First, the round black hat with white stripes and tiny red dots that he or she wears, and the thin, but muscular arms that reach forward blocks any view of the face. Second, the magenta shirt with its polka dots is loose, and seems to bulge out in a way to indicate breasts, but also flares out loosely at the sides and bottom, so this could just be the way the fabric pulls under the weight of the figure in the black jacket. The legs are thin and straight, with definition along the right hip, thigh, and backside that indicates how much strain the weight of the figure being carried causes. Even if it might seem logical for one spectator to perceive the bottom figure as female, Guache leaves room enough for doubt that a different spectator might reach a different conclusion.

What about the figure in the black jacket? This larger figure wears magenta colored pants, wine colored socks and black dress shoes. The outfit is eclectic and somewhat garish, even effeminate, accentuating the thin and small-framed body underneath. The left hand seems curiously poised just above the groin, as if in mid motion downward, with fingers outstretched but disappearing in the fold of fabric, or hovering in an uncomfortably tensed position just above the lower abdomen. While some might perceive the larger figure as male, others might see a female.

As noted in examination of Bastardilla’s work, sexual and gender identity have become more fluid in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the colors and style of clothing worn by the individual being carried suggest a gender, social and cultural identity that operates outside the
central spaces of the ‘norm.’ Moreover, short hair appears to be a clearer indication of sexual orientation in Bogotá, than it would in the U.S.\textsuperscript{235} To some the figure being carried may be a masculine female, yet to others a male with an effeminate appearance. Likewise, the sexual orientation of either figure would not be easily assumed or determined. It is noteworthy that the artist produced this figure with a degree of ambiguity, permitting passersby to draw their own conclusions. However, the difference between the two figures, in scale, size, and dimension, clearly personifies an inequality and imbalance between the two.

The male or female burdened with the androgynous figure on his or her back does not merely contend with human cargo, but must also pull symbols of Consumerism, Capitalism and institutional Dogmatism; a black horse or donkey, a passenger car, a large black cross, and a TV with a dollar sign on its screen. The magenta birds, traditional symbols of ethereal flight and freedom, seem to be the only force propelling the figure onward by black cords, the heavy cargo at his or her backside threatening to pull the whole human mechanism beneath the pavement with them.

There is no title or accompanying text to direct the viewer to interpret the image in a specific manner. Rather, Guache juxtaposes symbolic fragments of multiple mapped systems, effectively challenging viewers to probe the constructed nature of the original carguero image – as representative of static socio-economic and ethnic status or identity. In like manner to Lesivo’s work, Guache produces an image with the power to probe the relationship between ideas revealed in context. For instance, the unequal human mechanism at the center of the scene seems to epitomize the struggle to overcome constrictions upon gender, social and spatial freedom, imposed through a hierarchy that relegates one’s class and status to one’s relationship to the land, to each other, and to the dominant external authority.

\textsuperscript{235} My own observation based on fieldwork and discussion with scholars.
Torres Méndez created his "Carguero of the Sonson Mountain, State of Antioquia" (1841) as a lithograph, colored in watercolor and based on a drawing by the artist. Although Torres Méndez was a draftsman, portraitist and miniaturist, he was most often identified as a costumbrista painter, who created works "stamped with his original vision of the Colombian land and its people."  

As with the drawing of the carguero of Antioquia, the artist reflected "the crisis of nation," that resulted in the wake of the wars of Independence and the tentative establishment of national territories in South America, roughly between 1820 and the 1870s (previously discussed in Chapter 2). Part of the effort to "map" the nation was to understand its topographical structures, resources, and human inhabitants. Naturalists like Torres Méndez traveled throughout the country, visually recording local customs, structures, and social "types."

On the one hand, his efforts reflected the search for "emblems" and "emblematic images" like the Indian, the gaucho, or the Andes, capable of "defining" the nation and evoking its prevailing ideals when encountered its anthems, flags or shields. On the other hand, these projects aspired to reify local knowledge, custom, spaces, types of habitation and populace through an ideological lens that interpreted the nation and its citizenry according to either a centralist or federalist spectrum, broadly speaking.

Each dialectically opposed side would continue to fight for claim over the fate of the nation and the need to recognize or exclude its rural and urban indigenous, ethnic or mixed inhabitants as citizens with the power to contribute to the national and civic process. Moreover,

237 Ibid.
239 Ibid.
as illustrated in the Introduction, Social Evolutionists like José de Caldas, disseminated an ideological perspective that truly perceived indigenous and ethnic individuals as less evolved and less ‘civilized,’ therefore mandating that their spatial and social ‘place’ belonged in the rural, labor extracting periphery of the urban landscape.242

Thus, in an act of metalepsis, mapping expeditions consolidated local knowledge into a single reference, symbol, object, and name that assumed a self-aggrandizing power for the nation.243 Thus, one can trace how the name carguero became interchangeable with the "Indian" type of Humboldt’s memoirs, and Torres-Méndez' lithograph. Not only had the social type of the carguero been mapped through the scientific expeditions of the period, but that the mountain pass regions of Antioquia had become synonymous with producing and enclosing that specific social type. As its ability to build and gain international recognition depended upon the acquisition and control of territory, resources, and people, the symbols, objects, and names of those territories were essential to the power of the nation. The mapped social, ethnic, and gender type alluded to the authority to domesticate an otherwise ‘savage’ and ‘foreign’ space, relegating those types to the periphery, so that individuals that most closely emulated the gender, ethnic, and social image of ‘perfection’ retained the power to control and operate within the spaces central to the prevailing authority’s conception of ‘civilization’ and ‘progress.’244

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Guache’s street image in Figure 28 alludes to those older sociocultural frameworks, like that introduced by Caldas, where ethnicity, gender, and one’s relationship to the land determined one’s fixed place in society. According to that hierarchal framework, representational images, like that of the carguero, became images of representation of a particular status, through the efforts of mapping expeditions. Given those circumstances, one’s identity as indigenous male or female (at the center of the graffiti image), becomes an identity burdened (on the left) by generations of ideological perspective, chaining the expression of that identity to its ‘rightful’ place as ‘worker’ and ‘subordinate,’ amidst the symbols of institutional labor (Capitalism, Neoliberalism), religion, economic, and cultural conditioning. Probing deeper, the imposition of inequality permeates the image of the figures at the center, suggesting that indigenous communities replicate the pattern of subjugation and domination, constricting identity, gender, and social expression of one another to an equal degree. On the right, lie symbols of liberation that have not yet produced a realistic counterpart. The birds offer hope that that these identities may no longer be relegated to subordinate cultural, socioeconomic, and gender status. However, as Guache illustrates in his work, that hope remains vulnerable to destruction.

Guache himself describes the street art image as reflective of the "interwoven relationships of the social world, which are woven and unwoven in [depicted] local contexts and subjective configurations, through which they might reveal and illuminate their meaning." Guache inhibits a traditional visual reading of the symbolic parts that comprise the image he created, juxtaposing the signifiers of gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic identity. Consequently, the artist creates the discursive space to interrogate the correlation between an image of identity and representations of status in traditional frameworks of reference. Thus, the graffiti acts as a

\[245 \text{“las imbricadas relaciones en las que se tejen y destejen el mundo social, los contextos locales y las configuraciones subjetivas, respecto a las cuales éstas pueden ayudar a arrojar luces para su dilucidación.” Also see Camilo Martínez. } \text{Calle Esos Ojos: Bogotá Street Art} \text{ Bogotá, Colombia: Cartel Urbano 2011, 114.}\]
counter-cartographical visual narrative, antithetical to conventional processes of identity and status construction, which have been formulated through mapping expeditions. Therefore, Guache and Lesivo interrogate the authority to define, label, and control space (social space, spaces of representation, physical space) according to hierarchy and prevailing ideology. In juxtaposing icons and symbols, they effectively dissect the process of symbolic construction itself, by peeling away layers of ethnic, gender, and social signification embedded in the image, and separating its visual features from the context in which they operate as representation.

**Toxicómano**

The authority to define, label, and control space is also the authority to manufacture an ideal, against which all within that sign system are measured. In the traditional costumbristo image of the carguero, one confronts a brown male, performing manual labor and inhabiting the Rural, as opposed to the white-skinned passenger, wearing garments of expensive, imported material, traveling through the rural periphery on route to the ‘civilized’ central spaces of the Urban.

In contrast to earlier styles of graffiti, Guache does not produce an image representative of political opposition or faction, poised to confront social and economic inequality. Nor does his street art display an alternative ideal. Neither character depicted in the center of the image reflects the ideal. The artist produces each figure with a degree of ambiguity, such that each spectator might draw different conclusions in regards to gender, social, and socioeconomic identity. Both individuals have red skin, rather than brown, exaggerating their status as “other,” yet their difference in scale and size suggests that social and economic inequalities externally imposed by the system continue to be perpetuated within their own community. The trailing objects on the left of the human mechanism, symbolic of additional systems of oppression and
subjugation counter the birds to the right, which symbolize the possibility of liberation, yet remain in stasis. The work seems to personify the struggle to emerge from the structures of social hierarchy and visual traditions that associate indigenous identity with manual labor, inferior status, and an existence on the periphery. Simultaneously, Guache’s apposition of objects from multiple sign systems disrupts the original context of the costumbristo image of representation, challenging the viewer to question its validity and the value of the ethnic, social, economic ideal, central to the system. Utilizing a different methodology but toward a similar end, artist collective Toxicómano directly attack that ideal, and the commodification of that ideal as personified in commercial images and images of pop culture.

Commercial images and images of pop culture personify an ideal, delivering it to the spectator as a product of desire, as well as a desired product. The street art images of the preceding artists: Lesivo, Bastardilla, and Guache, juxtapose signifiers for gender, ethnic, historical, and social identity, producing works that counter the visual ideal generated through the framework of cartography. As noted throughout Chapters 1 and 2, those with the authority to map space are those with the power to label and control that space, according to their own ideological framework. In due course, they generated images of social types that reinforced a spatial hierarchy, where those individuals who possess the same gender, ethnic, and social identities of those in power, and share that ideological perspective, ultimately inhabit the most elevated status, and embody the space central to the production of culture. Under those circumstances, images of social types transformed into symbols of social status. As a result, images representative of the gender, ethnic, and social identities of those in power became images indicative of the cultural ideal. As counter-cartography, the value of the street art images generated by Lesivo, Bastardilla, and Guache exist in the power of their work to deconstruct that
ideal by creating distance and ambiguity between the image, its function as sign, and what is signified, provoking the viewer to reconsider the relationship between image, identity, and representation.

Encompassing more than a visual, cultural ideal, commercial images and images of pop culture are the symptoms or byproducts of the commodification and homogenization of the ideal, as a product with market value that anyone might acquire, possess, consume, and reproduce with the right capital. Thus, the manufacture of images that promote the visual, cultural ideal as epitomized in a specific character, slogan, or message produced on a mass scale, manipulate one’s desire for it, by presenting the idea that identity and status are sellable, marketable, and obtainable.

Like the other artists featured in this thesis, artist collective Toxicómano manipulate and juxtapose signifiers of gender, ethnic, or social identity, exposing the correlation between representative images of social types central to a cartographic framework, and images of representation in the social hierarchy. While each previously examined artist or collective: Lesivo, Bastardilla, and Guache, succeed in dislocating sign from signified, by creating distance between visual features and their traditional interpretations, artist collective Toxicómano do more than target this process of encoding. Rather, in producing mock commercial media and images of pop culture, which would normally reify the visual ideal as desired product (and product of desire) in the spatial and social hierarchy, they expose and implicate not just those in power to label and control spaces (producers), but also those who function in those spaces as consumers, distributors, and adoring spectators of the ideal. In other words, their works seem to challenge the viewer to question the products of cultural desire, as such. Overall, Toxicómano produce works that not only counter spatial and social structures of hierarchy, but that
deconstruct the very fabric of their order, normally kept in tact through symbol, association, and validation by each individual in society.

Utilizing that approach, artist collective Toxicómano produce works that parody commercial media, constructing images and mock slogans that mimic the design, presentation and marketing of brands. Whereas the other artists target the symbolic construction of social and spatial status, Toxicómano attack the method by which a particular social status becomes the desired norm, and the marketable product of desire.
Figure 31: Graffiti produced by Toxicómano, Mixed media, near 24th Street in Bogotá, Colombia. Photograph by author.

Like the work by Guache, examined earlier in the chapter, Figure 31 also comprises a facet of a larger work of collaboration between artists Toxicómano, Lesivo, and DJ Lu. Unlike the example created by Guache, however, each artist section is more clearly defined. Each artist group worked in tall, rectangular registers, dividing the wall into three equal parts, like a triptych (Figure 32).
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Figure 32: Graffiti created by from right to left, artists Toxicómano, Lesivo, and D.J. Lu on a connecting wall between two buildings near 24th street in in Bogotá, Colombia. Photograph by author.

The wall, which these artists used as canvas, also encloses a square section of urban space between two buildings. Toxicómano created the section on the far right.

The strategy of the group developed with the intention of “fighting, (even a little) against accumulated stupidity, product of information, based in mass media.” 246 Naturally, the exploitation of the signs and symbols of mass media or pop culture serve as an effective method to achieve their objectives. To fulfill their aim, they use the walls of the city to twist "histories, personalities, phrases, commentary, critiques, and other things," in a style sometimes reminiscent of Lichtenstein (Figure 33). 247

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247 Ibid.
Figure 33: Graffiti by Toxicómano, comprising second half of graffiti collaboration on a wall stretching a city block, at 20th street in Bogotá, Colombia. Photograph by author.

However, in this particular example by Toxicómano (Figure 34), passersby confront the deranged smile and distorted face of a gimp-toothed man. Large black smudges of paint create shadows all over his face, over and below his right eye, and around the bridge of his large round nose.
The overall effect produces a face that one might never want to imagine confronting. The imagined character might lurk in the shadows of the city as well, trying desperately to get too close, and freely sharing his rife cologne on a balmy summer day. He bares his buck and blackened teeth in a smile that taunts those who meet his gaze on the street. His hair is almost buzzed off, and the bristle-like stubble painted on his upper lip, along his mandible, and at his chin suggests that he has not shaved. Yet, as a disembodied head, the face of this man, with its crazed expression, is even more foreboding.
The disembodied head seems to float in the rich sea of the teal background on the wall on which it appears, like a giant Looney Tunes™ head. Roughly 10 inches from the point of his chin, the smaller floating head of a female seems frozen in an expression of horror and confusion (Figure 35).

![Figure 35: Close-up of graffiti created by Toxicómano near 24th street in Bogotá, Colombia. Photograph by author.](image)

In contrast to the three-dimensionality of the large face and head of the snaggle-toothed man, the disembodied head of the female below his chin seems stiff, plastered against the graffiti wall like a sticker. A 1940s June Cleaver style hairdo frames her face in rigid, purposeful lines,
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but the electric turquoise color of her hair gives her an eerie psychedelic appearance. Her facial features are comic strip-like in the style of a Mary Worth or Brenda Starr. Her mouth hangs agape, exposing her teeth that are not drawn or exaggerated like the snaggle-toothed man above her, but pushed against her top lip like a mouth guard, in an eerily tinted translucent shade of periwinkle. Like the rest of her face, black paint outlines the simple shape of her teeth and features of her face, only with very general detail. Her eyes are a neon-lilac, almost crossed and frozen in a moment of panic, or even madness. A series of "u" shapes form comic book like beads of sweat at her forehead, impaling themselves on the tips of her dramatically painted "S" curved black eyebrows.

Passersby who encounter this mixed media street art collage might interpret the work in a variety of ways. Where the other artists expose social and spatial inequalities that emerge from cartographic processes of mapping, Toxicómano reveal dynamics of power and desire that exist between the image and the spectator - as benefactor and perpetuator of those inequalities. In creating visual parody of commercial images and images of pop culture, Toxicómano can thus powerfully personify the concept of “the subaltern model of the picture” that WJT Mitchell utilizes in order to pose answers to the question “What do pictures want?”

In “What Do Pictures Want?” W.J.T. Mitchell – Gaylord Donnelley Distinguished Service Professor of English Language and Literature, Art History, and the College – suggests that pictures and images do much more than act as “vehicles of meaning or instruments of power.” In asking, “what do pictures want?” Mitchell probes the significance of the image

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249 Op cit., 76.
beyond its rhetorical value and effects, suggesting that the key to the answer lies in determining what pictures lack.\footnote{250 Op cit., 73-75.}

Mitchell contends that one must reconsider the “power of images” in asking what pictures “want,” rather than focusing on what they “do.” In contrast, if one examines a picture in terms of what it does, there is an automatic association between the image and the power it represents, or the regime to which it correlates. Thus, the focus on “what pictures do” is a preoccupation with power, and resistance against that power. For instance, pornography and criticisms against pornographic images themselves by critics like Catherine MacKinnon, claim that these images perform acts of violence against women, just as they might represent them or perpetuate them in the visual cultural collective. Yet, as Mitchell indicates, destroying the pornographic image or to “overturn scopic regimes” does not effect change in the visual or political culture that exists, behind them.\footnote{251 Ibid.} The same is true of social inequalities reflected in the creation and stratification of visual social types, and the construction of symbols of social status. Even if one destroys the image (e.g. the costumbristo image of the carguero), the social inequalities that relegate the indigenous, female, rural identities to the periphery persist, because those symbolic constructions subordinate to the gender, ethnic, social, and spatial ideal have already become embedded associations in the minds of individuals in the collective.

Instead Mitchell suggests examining pictures using a broader framework than one merely reflective of dynamics of power and powerlessness. Rather, if one considers the role that the spectator plays in reproducing and reflecting social inequality, than one can reveal the correlation between vision, authority, image, and representation. Incidentally, Lefebvre’s notion of representational spaces vs. representations of space, previously examined in Chapter 2, draw
attention to the effect that associated images and symbols, which reinforce social hierarchy, have on individual perception.\textsuperscript{252}

According to Lefebvre, dynamics of political and social power emerge in the market relations of Capitalism, informing the creation of space (representational spaces), through which these dynamics occur, just as physical spaces themselves (perceived spaces) reveal and reinforce dynamics of political and social hierarchy that reflect the ideology of space as conceived through its engineers (representations of space). Throughout the text, he distinguishes what he calls \textit{true space, conceived space, or representations of space}: the abstract consciously projected ideology of urban planners, cartographers, etc., from the \textit{truth of space, lived space, or representational spaces}: social relations of power reinforced through shared experience and associated images and symbols.\textsuperscript{253}

What is critical to remember is that the urban planners, cartographers, and architects of “true space” also become the arbiters of that space, identifying and labeling its objects, subjects, and accompanying images in a way that influences what is \textit{perceived}. Not only does that process effect the construction of symbols from specific images, but the process of classification of objects in space also produces a visual index arranged on a hierarchal scale. Consequently, \textit{representational} images of subjects, like ethnic or indigenous social types, become \textit{images of representation} perceived as occupants comprising specific social, political, and spatial status.\textsuperscript{254}

Yet, commercial images are products of \textit{commodification}. In contrast to images and symbols representative of the social hierarchy, commodified images \textit{package} the cultural ideal as \textit{product} of desire. Under those circumstances, the cultural ideal becomes the \textit{fetishized} desired


\textsuperscript{253} Ibid. Also see Chapter 1, 33-37 and Chapter 2, 71-72.

\textsuperscript{254} Henri Lefebvre. See \textit{The Production of Space} 1991, 169-292.
product, packaged for the Consumer in various guises and adorned with the symbols and signs of commercial brands, slogans, mottos, and media. According to the rules of that Capitalistic system, one believes that transfer of ownership in purchase assumes a totemic function, endowing the buyer with the illusion of status and image on equal ground with those originally in power. Likewise, images of pop culture often present personalities who exemplify, exaggerate, or parody that ideal. Indeed, these images emerge through direct social exchange, and illustrate the power of public interaction in perpetuating, amplifying, and transforming the cultural ideal.

Rather than locking the image and spectator in polemic of opposition on the spectrum of power and powerlessness, to ask what these images want, by focusing on what they lack, according to Mitchell, opens up dialogue with the image by exposing what ethnic, gender, and social identities remain on the periphery, or remain silent within the stratified, mapped hierarchy of social space. Indeed, if one examines the image, especially the mass media and pop-culture image through the lens of *Desire*, and with focus on *lack*, one reveals the manner in which the commercial image is not unlike the idol or fetish – an object with the power to imbue and repel that which is *most desired* and *most feared* at the same time. Therefore, Mitchell provides the means to explore the aspects of social identity, image, and status otherwise purposefully hidden in the negative spaces of the image, or beyond the borders of the image. In this manner, Mitchell emphasizes the culpability of the public in perpetuating inequity to the same degree that they appear to be victim to it. Similarly, the image by artist collective Toxicómano seems to confront the spectator, challenging one to consider the degree to which he or she replicates the social inequities of historical, cartographic frameworks of representation within his or her own perception and belief systems, and to what degree those ideas are really one’s own.
Returning to the graffiti created by artist collective Toxicómano, one crucial distinction must be made. The street art image central to this analysis is not a formal commercial image, but rather a parody of a commercial image. Due to that aspect of its construction, it is an even more provocative image, specifically in its ability to engage the spectator by first disgusting rather than enticing him or her. By making a mockery of the commodification of status, the image challenges the viewer to question why certain identities are the ideal – as seen in commercial images - and perhaps to ascertain how their perception influences and perpetuates inequality. To illustrate the point fully, it is necessary to return to the image itself.

![Image of graffiti with text: "DISEÑAMOS TU SONRISA!"

Figure 36: Close-up of the text in the graffiti produced by Toxicómano near 24th Avenue, in Bogotá, Colombia. Photograph by author.]

The theme of desire permeates the image created by Toxicómano. Underneath the artists’ “tag” or stenciled name at the center top of the wall is a single phrase, which reads: "DISEÑAMOS TU SONRISA!" (We Design Your Smile!). Both the artist’s tag and the accompanying text are stenciled in military font on the wall in white paint. However, the image of the snaggletooth man and the horror-stricken, advertising-styled head of the woman at the bottom of the graffiti contradict the commercial appeal of the message, because neither acts to affirm or criticize the function of the image as marketable media in support of a specific social
status, image or cause. Instead the disembodied heads are visual paradox in relation to the text and each other.

Significantly, the subject pronoun “WE” in all caps, in the statement “WE DESIGN YOUR SMILE!” is the critical element that establishes the ambivalent position of the image as a whole. The initial sight of the man with his blackened teeth, stubble, sweat, and deranged smile would disgust most onlookers. Yet the statement above him makes no attempt to define who the “We” represents, establishing the man as the subject, object, and product of the same declaration. Moreover, it is unclear to what the woman on the bottom refers, whether she is an extension of his psyche, that of the spectator, that of an authority, or its victim. Given this construction, the hovering text above both heads most significantly seems to ask: Who are “We”? What is the product of desire? Although there are several possibilities for interpretation, the image, overall, might infer a darker reality belying the manufacture and promotion of a specific social and spatial vision of beauty, as commodity, in Colombian society.

It is significant to note that the blackened teeth and haggard appearance of the hovering head of the man may refer to the effect of smoking a street form of cocaine, popular in Bogotá through the millennium, known as “bazuko.” In excess, the drug causes the teeth to rot and fall out. Taking this into consideration, the statement “We Design Your Smile!” is a mock slogan promising to absolve the rich street drug user from exposing their addiction. Yet the irony lies in the portrait of the poor addict, who may appear to embody the lowest social and spatial level of stratification, yet in reality is no better or different than the rich addict, apart from the ability of the latter to hide his or her ‘true’ face.

It is intriguing that if one examines the street art image through this adjudicating lens, than the conclusion one must reach is that the “WE” is the illusion of difference perpetuated by

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the system of social hierarchy itself, where perception is never reflective of one’s true face, and the reality may be that status is moot and we are all effectively the same. Equally, the “WE” demands that all onlookers resolve whether they are addicts, perpetuators, consumers, or distributors of that illusion. The zombie-like appearance of the woman personifies her as possible representative of the rich addict who in reality may mirror the man above her. The other possibility is she represents the hypnotic power of the message regarding the commodification of beauty, and its desirability to the consumer. Additionally, she might represent the dominant authority, with the power to engineer social space and status according to their ideology and illusion of desire.

Regardless of the interpretation, the questions underlying the image itself are key: Who are the We? What is the product of Desire? Overall, those questions establish a full spectrum of possibility in meaning that the spectator must resolve, and their resolution demands that the spectator be able to look beyond the graffiti image in front of them to comprehend what that image might convey, what it lacks, and what its depicted elements might be saying about what is present, missing, or lacking in the social hierarchy and traditional cartographic systems of representation.

The street artists previously explored produce works that interrogate and deconstruct the process of symbolic encoding embedded in cartographic systems of representation. In contrast, artist collective Toxicómano creates an image that implicates the spectator him or herself, demanding that one question the degree to which he or she inherits and replicates gender, ethnic, social, and spatial inequities established through those representational frameworks.
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**Conclusion**

Each of the artists examined in this chapter utilize unique means to probe the significance among image, identity, and representation, by creating distance between sign and signified. The example by Bastardilla, for instance, manipulates the signifying elements of gender identity and sexual orientation, culminating in a work that challenges the observer to consider the structures that determine and constrict gender roles, expression, and their relationship to one another.

Guache, in contrast, produces a street art image that juxtaposes allusion to different symbols of social and ethnic status, which directly emerged from cartographic mapping expeditions (i.e. the costumbrista image). Yet, Guache inhibits a traditional visual reading of the symbolic parts that comprise the image he created. In consequence, the image seems suspended in an ambiguous signifying space, as if the characters comprising the central scene themselves personify attempts to move beyond the social and spatial constriction of indigenous identity and representation, just as the image as a whole neither represents the costumbrista image of the carguero nor something other.

Instead, the graffiti acts as a counter-cartographical visual narrative, antithetical to conventional processes of identity and status construction, which have been formulated through mapping expeditions. Overall, the work seems to personify the struggle to emerge from the structures of social hierarchy and visual traditions that associate indigenous identity with manual labor, inferior status, and an existence on the periphery. Simultaneously, Guache’s opposition of objects from multiple sign systems disrupts the original context of the costumbrista image of representation, challenging the viewer to question its validity and the value of the ethnic, social, economic ideal, central to the system. Consequently, the artist creates the discursive space to
interrogate the correlation between an image of identity and representations of status in traditional frameworks of reference.

Like the work by Lesivo, examined in Chapter 2, the street art image produced by Guache interrogates the authority to define, label, and control space (social space, spaces of representation, physical space) according to hierarchy and prevailing ideology. Incorporating and weaving icons and symbols, these preceding artists effectively dissect the process of symbolic construction itself, by peeling away the layers of significance embedded in the image, separating its visual features from the context in which they operate as representation.

Whereas artists Bastardilla, Lesivo, and Guache weave, layer, and manipulate the signifying elements of ethnic, social, and gender identity, in order to expose the constructed nature of the cultural ideal, artist collective Toxicómano directly implicate the spectator as benefactor and replicator of the inequities produced by the valorization of that ideal.

Instead, artist collective Toxicómano create an image that implicates the spectator him or herself, demanding that one question the degree to which he or she inherits and replicates gender, ethnic, social, and spatial inequities established through cartographic frameworks of representation, by parodying the commodification of status in commercial media and pop-culture. Consequently, their work challenges the spectator to resolve the question of what is the product of desire and who is its designer and consumer. Ultimately, if one probes those questions deeply, it may be possible to conceive alternative constructions of social and spatial representation, other than those manufactured and valorized through historic and traditional cartographic processes of mapping.
Conclusion

The central objective in this thesis is to explore the work of street artists and artist collectives Bastardilla, Lesivo, Guache, and Toxicómano, utilizing the theoretical framework of cartography and counter cartography as a means to broaden the scope to analyze and interrogate sign systems underlying the construction of representational images and images of representation that correlate with processes of mapping. In doing so, I have hoped to distinguish these artists’ work from urban art in other cities, such as New York, and from the graffiti produced in earlier decades in Bogotá. Toward that aim, each chapter focused on first articulating the circumstances that exist in Bogotá, that have influenced the production of political and slogan graffiti that has proliferated since the 1970’s, and then distinguishing the street art that emerged post millennium from that of earlier decades. Beginning with Grupo Excusado, street art in Bogotá transformed with the advent of the Internet, increased access to telecommunications networks, the influx of millions of forcibly displaced people into Colombia’s major cities, and the surge of tourist activity since 2002. The types of images, styles, and approaches to street art that emerged in the wake of Grupo Excusado thus reflects the twenty-first century change in perspective concerning status, image, and representation.

Chapter One established that one of the greatest differences between graffiti in Bogotá, Colombia and other major industrial cities, such as New York, is that its practice is neither legal nor illegal. Rather, urban art is prohibited in some locations and contexts, as opposed to New York, where it is not only criminalized, but a felony. Making this distinction also provided the means to examine socioeconomic circumstances that exist in Bogotá, as in other cities of the Global South, like Neoliberalism and forced displacement. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, Brazil, its history and its socioeconomic circumstances represent an exception that effects
the perception of street art as well. In cities like São Paulo, for example, urban art is not only legal, but has comprised a critical facet of the city’s tourist industry since the mid-1980s.\footnote{During the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, certain entrepreneurial and state institutions in São Paulo saw the potential to convert what other cities perceived as “a graffiti “problem” into a tourist franchise by becoming “O capital de graffite” (Graffiti capital) of the world. See Eliene Percilia “Grafite” Brasil Escola. \url{http://www.brasilescola.com/artes/grafite.htm}. Also see “A Arte Urbana” Subsolo Art (online) at \url{http://www.subsoloart.com/blog/tag/a-arte-urbana/}.}


“Broken Windows” introduced the “order-maintenance” strategy of policing, which mandated that any “deviancy” in behavior, such as the defacement of public property by graffiti, must be treated as a crime. This policing model also gave authorities blanket approval to employ any force necessary to eradicate neighborhoods and public spaces of deviancy, from simply removing graffiti, to removing individuals believed associated with deviancy, from the public eye.\footnote{Ibid.}

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Banfield’s perspective, lower class individuals were incapable of suspending the need for immediate gratification in favor of fulfilling long terms goals, and therefore proposed that utilizing a portion of the city budget on social services for the lower class was counter-productive to the maintenance of the city as a whole.\(^{260}\) Rather, his attitude, as echoed in Kelling’s proposed “order-maintenance” police strategy, was to proactively remove the individuals that would most assuredly become deviant.\(^{261}\) Although he claimed his paradigm was not necessarily racist, there were obvious correlations between class and race during the 1970s and early 1980s in New York. The saliency of “Broken Windows” reflects the urban anxiety of the era.

Significantly, the dichotomy between the vision of New York as a “New Rome” or the nightmare that New York might become a “Naked City” emerged in part from public ambivalence over racial representation, population, and equality. On the one hand, the vision of the city as a “New Rome” would likely be one that not only embodies celebrated Greco-Roman principles of civic participation and cultural achievement, but that would also reflect the Western ideal in its social, ethnic, and cultural appearance.\(^{262}\) Therefore the group that controls the state would arguably possess the power to establish laws according to its own philosophy, and demand adherence to them. Indeed, the fear of the “Naked City” revealed a desire to control anarchy and rebellion by minorities and those disenfranchised, as much as it exposed public anxiety over the decay of the city’s culture and order, especially if those perceived to counter the Western ideal were given access to leadership and influential roles. As a result, many demanded

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261 Ibid.

for a return to “law and order,” in order to guard against the aggression and violence that many imagined directly correlated with being a person of color. Overall, the presence of graffiti exacerbated the polemic between the conception of the city as a “New Rome” and the fear that the city might become the “Naked City.” Therefore, the debate over street art’s value, concomitant with its emergence in the 1970s ultimately had more to do with the authority to define, label, and control urban networks, urban spaces and urban image (ethnic, social, and spatial identity), projected through street art’s absence or existence.

In contrast, the proliferation of shantytowns and slums due to mass forced displacement, the threat of narcoterrorism and Left/Right faction violence are unique to Bogotá, Colombia. Unlike families or communities who have experienced multi-generational poverty, many of the millions living in shantytown squalor in Bogotá between the late 1980s and early 2000s have been forcibly displaced from their homes, land, and rural communities in exponentially increasing numbers, due to the effects of Neoliberal policy.

As explored in Chapter One, Neoliberalism serves to continue to benefit a small elite. In simple terms, Colombian political history has been galvanized by extreme Left and Right strategies of governance, thus has vacillated between Left and Right control. Generally speaking, when under the Left, the emphasis is on the establishment and protection of greater Democracy, where people have equal access to vote, and organizations exist to ensure worker and human rights protections. In contrast, when under the Right, governance becomes military and/or totalitarian, and seeks to remove voting, human rights, and worker protections, in favor of a small elite perceived as worthy to influence policy that affects the lives of all. Given those

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263 Ibid.
extremes, it is easy to see why Neoliberalism is an attractive alternative in Colombia, especially when the elite and governing body benefit greatly from foreign investment.\textsuperscript{265}

Likewise, the flood of millions of forcibly displaced into Colombian cities since the 1980s has unequivocally changed the urban demographic and experience for all. Whereas a rural family might have peacefully resided as farmers maintaining livelihood from the land and from meager profits, their experience as displaced in the city has transformed them into individuals comprising no status, or the lowest social status. Moreover, their perceived invasive presence into the city as “criminal” and unwanted exacerbates social and racial prejudices of the rural dweller, confronting the urban elite and recalling images of a social type normally situated in the periphery. As a result, their social and spatial ability to access opportunities is greatly compromised.\textsuperscript{266}

And yet, as noted in Chapter One, the presence and flood of millions of forcibly displaced was only one of multiple factors that have irrevocably changed the quotidian experience for most Colombians. As previously discussed, two events that caused the country’s already unstable political climate to erupt into one that could only be described as combustible were the 1948 assassination of Liberal Party leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, and the 1959 Cuban Revolution.\textsuperscript{267} In the wake of Gaitán's murder, the capital city of Bogotá erupted in the weeks of mass rioting known as the Bogotazo.\textsuperscript{268} Subsequently, the country found itself submerged in La Violencia, where factions on the Left and Right committed acts of mass atrocity against one another. Vacillating between the Left and Right, the conflict continued, where disenfranchised


\textsuperscript{266} Alfredo Molano Bravo. \textit{The Dispossessed}: 2005, 1-41.


populations felt that the only response was armed rebellion.\textsuperscript{269} In consequence, the FARC emerged from combined guerrilla forces of the National Liberation Army (ELN) (formed 1964) and the People's Liberation Army (EPL) (Formed 1967).\textsuperscript{270} Under these circumstances, the emergence of graffiti in the capital of Bogotá in the 1970s took the form of political slogans and incendiary writing, spray-painted on the walls in support of M-19 – the urban counterpart to the FARC.

From the historical and political circumstances of the 1970s to the contemporary presence of Neoliberalism and shantytowns throughout Colombia, the production of street art throughout the country has been saturated with political rhetoric and objective. Yet from the early millennium, specific changes to the social and spatial hierarchy of the city, its infrastructure and telecommunications networks permanently altered the urban landscape. Consequently, urban art forms, styles and attitudes changed in Bogotá, influencing the creation of street art in the millennium, which was much different than the political slogans of M-19 of the 1970s. Thus Chapter Two traced the historiography of street art in Bogotá, in order to differentiate the style that emerged in the millennium from that of older political graffiti.

Chapter Two probed the significance of intense changes to urban life since the late twentieth century, paying particular attention to how they influenced the production of a new type of urban art, introduced by artist collective Grupo Excusado in 2002. As previously examined, four major events effect the production and transformation of contemporary urban art in Bogotá since the 1970s. In sum, those events were: the 1986 Apostolic visit by John Paul II

to Colombia; the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ “discovery” of the Americas in
1992; the 1999 assassination of radio personality Jaime Garzón (1960-1999); and finally, the
transfer of control over the Internet, to the Minister of Communications during the presidential
 Actors: Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010). Each of these events changed the appearance of
street writing that had previously served a Leftist political aim. The style of street art introduced
through groups like Grupo Excusado could no longer be defined as a method of propaganda for
groups like M-19 and other oppositionist/revolutionist factions. Likewise, the aim of street art
with the same approach as that used by Grupo Excusado was not necessarily to confront the
corruptions and tyranny of the Right-wing government.

Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Voyage 30 to Colombia, inspired many to speak out
against extreme socioeconomic inequity and state corruption. Six years later, in 1992,
Colombia celebrated the 500th anniversary of Columbus' "discovery" of the Americas. Instead of
a celebration, Colombian indigenous communities organized protests, spoke out, and created
graffiti that rebuked Columbus as harbinger of destruction. For instance, graffiti artists would
manipulate the black cross – symbol for Christopher Columbus – by inverting it and placing it
over his caricature. This inflammatory image marked several public sites throughout the city.

Where older styles of graffiti used political slogans, or other incendiary text to directly address
and implicate the corruptions of the political and socio-economic elite, the sight of the distorted
likeness of Columbus, made into caricature and juxtaposed with the Satanic symbol of the black,

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271 Scoundrel Memory, directed and produced by Bastardilla, with Memoria Canalla and Hogar Productions (2011; Bogotá, Colombia: Guerilla Flow Magazine, April 4, 2011), online at:
272 Scoundrel Memory, directed and produced by Bastardilla, with Memoria Canalla and Hogar Productions (2011; Bogotá, Colombia: Guerilla Flow Magazine, April 4, 2011), online at:
273 Ibid.
An inverted cross was much more provocative in image and affect. The third event that impacted the street art community and Colombian society at large was the 1999 alleged assassination of radio personality Jaime Garzón (1960-1999). To many young people, Garzón offered hope and promise for a new political era, in his courage to use the medium of radio to speak out against corruptions of government and to rally for populist cause. In response, street artists transformed Garzón’s face into a symbol for the people, similar to the image of Juan Camilo Torres (Figure 17). Although graffiti produced in homage to his legacy and as symbol of solidarity included image and text, the message was still highly politicized and reminiscent of the street writing of 1970s and 1980s Bogotá. Last, the administration of former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002 – 2010) precipitated many permanent changes to the political and socioeconomic fabric of Colombia.

As previously analyzed, Uribe claimed to enforce hard line policies against narcotrafficking, and “guerrilla” aggression by the FARC and others. However, his administration’s solution involved the taking of millions in US support towards an alleged war against drugs and terror that covertly placed retired military and police private militia forces in a position to commit genocide and forced disappearance. Uribe’s administration manipulated and targeted the innocent peasant and farmer population throughout the interior, which often were caught between the Left and Right, FARC and private militia. Thus many Right-leaning thinkers who often praised Uribe for combatting the FARC, drugs, and violence, so that the

275 See Chapter 2, 53-60.
276 Chapter 2, 72-76.
277 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
country might enjoy a booming tourist industry once again, remained blind or complacent to the paradoxical reality that hundreds of thousands of Colombian citizens, migrants, and other displaced experienced.280

Among the many changes to state, which coincided with Uribe’s presidency, one of the most significant in terms of its effect on communications and access to means of livelihood was the transfer of control over the Internet from the University of the Andes to the Minister of Communications in Uribe’s Administration. While telecommunications and Internet networks capability greatly expanded under a centralized system, the switch also provided Uribe’s Administration with more power to censure content and monitor citizen activity online. In fact, many accused Uribe of violating citizen privacy by monitoring digital and Internet communications at will.281 Nonetheless, the Internet increased modes of communication for Colombians, and introduced new local, national, and international perspectives.282

With increased modes of international communication, members of the Escritura street writing phenomenon in Bogotá could gain inspiration from and collaborate with artists around the world, often extending their network to include collectives, music, and artists from multiple cities.283 Consequently, graffiti creation in Bogotá evolved and exploded into a myriad of dynamic forms. These colliding events and developments fostered “a new look” for graffiti production in Bogotá and in other cities throughout Colombia. In the wake of these changes,

282 Ibid.
members of street art collective Grupo Excusado pioneered a new style of urban art in the early millennium, which primarily employed stencil as visual medium.  

In search of “something new,” four friends from the National University adopted the artist pseudonyms Dead Bird (Pájaro Muerto), Saint Cat (Gato Santo), Stink Fish (Pez Maloliente), and Porn Rat (Porno Rata), and conceived the name *Excusado* to represent a type of graffiti, centered around innovation, experimentation, and liberation from the static forms and structures of the past. Thus, they endeavored to engineer a type of street art that juxtaposed familiar cultural signs and symbols, effectively disconnecting them from their traditional context and framework. Simultaneously, manipulating signs or symbols of historical, cultural, and national significance proved a powerful tool capable of revealing the dynamics of engineered perception that belied the construction of identity and status on a national level. As Stink Fish related, the group discovered that “it is much more powerful to transform the indexical value of certain images already emotionally charged than to make new ones.”

As highlighted in Chapter Two, Grupo Excusado, and other street artists of their generation in Bogota, manipulated and reified their images through three main methods. The first was to utilize the advantages of the Internet and social media, where they welcomed the chance to incorporate transnational and international visual narratives. Producing a strong online presence also had the potential to exponentially broaden the artistic collaborative community, and the possibility of disseminating the images produced. Second, they found new inspiration from the work of other graffiti artists who used stencil, such as Britain’s Banksy. Stencil was
also the preferred medium of subversive student street art movements of the 1960’s in Paris, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Third, they used the wall as free PR, welcoming passersby to comment on, or add to their pieces, and to pass the word. While adding inscriptions and overwriting were a common practice and consequence of much of world graffiti of recent decades, Grupo Excusado actively welcomed the additions, which, were in practicality, visual dialogues. The result for the Colombian group was a truly unique product that changed the subject/object relationship and position to the observer with every alteration.\footnote{El Grupo Excusado, et.al. \textit{Decoración de Exteriores} 2007, 22-27.}


Despite the positive reception to graffiti in Bogotá, there is a dearth of regulation in regard to its practice. As a result, many private security, police, and military often exploit their power by bullying, threatening, and attempting to control the street artist community and subject matter produced.\footnote{Op cit., 54-62.} Nonetheless, these changes to society have resulted in an increase in informal microenterprise that has transformed the ways in which people could obtain and maintain livelihood. Several urban artists themselves, for example, have acquired wealth, fame, and notoriety through these new channels of access, rather than through traditional networks of
state, where opportunities were more limited to those of higher social and economic status. Given these points, the style of urban art introduced by Grupo Excusado indeed represented a new generation of street art presentation and reception.

As Chapter Two describes, however, the transformations to the urban social and spatial fabric, and accompanying alterations to the street art phenomena remain isolated from the visual art one might encounter in official cultural institutions and museums. In contrast, formal exhibition spaces continue to inscribe images or objects within a social hierarchy constructed from relationships of opposition and exclusion.  

Yet, as demonstrated by the urban art of artists and collectives Lesivo, Bastardilla, Guache, and Toxicómano, street art since the millennium has the power to present alternative means through which to conceive social and spatial status than those of historical and traditional frameworks of mapping, hierarchy, and classification. Therefore, the value of their contribution to this visual medium might best be appreciated utilizing the theoretical framework of cartography.

As defined in the Introduction, cartography, the process of classifying and stratifying objects and social types within the borders of declared national space according to a hierarchal system, reinforces specific relationships between constituent social groups and those in power. More importantly, naturalists acting on behalf of the Spanish crown between the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used mapping expeditions into Colombia as a means to identify natural, financial, and social resources, often appropriating local knowledge for their own use and

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293 My own observations.
renaming or reclassifying a plant, animal, or social type according to their ideology and hierarchal system.  

Through these expeditions, images of particular social types became recognized as representations of a specific ethnic, gender, social and spatial status, where one’s ethnic origin and phenotype often reflected spatial and social distance from the projected ideal of the ruling class. Similarly, one’s perceived identity reflected and impacted future possibilities for social and spatial movement throughout the land. Overall, expeditions and ideological texts reinforced visual correlations between identity, status, and representation embodied in the cartographic perspective.

Representational systems of social hierarchy emerged from processes of mapping, such as the classification of flora, fauna, and social types of people in Latin America. According to the rules of that system, one’s relationship to the land determined one’s social status (and thus one’s political sphere of influence). Therefore, one’s liberty to access and egress official and unofficial social space correlated with one’s gender, ethnic, and regional identity. Furthermore, the observed image of the naturalist transformed from representational image of a subject or

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294 Professor Mauricio Nieto Olarte organized the artistic exhibition *Historia Natural y Política*. Bogotá, Colombia: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 2008 which examined the relationship between the cartographic history of Colombia, the existence of inequality, and the presence of narco-terrorism. In the accompanying catalog, he explains the process of extracting local knowledge about an object, in order to stratify that object according to the rules of European nomenclature (13).


‘specimen’ to image of representation of a particular social type. Cartography, referring to the history and methods of classification of land, flora, fauna, and social types, became a powerful political instrument used to separate and organize ethnic, gender, and social identity in Latin America according to a linear hierarchy where individuals established as Caucasian, Spanish, and male assumed superior status.

The effect of the cartographic perspective in Colombia cannot be underestimated. The symbols and icons that comprised cartographic systems of mapping became embedded in the cultural collective as associated signs of identity, status, and representation within the social hierarchy. In effect, it is the culturally embedded relationship between socio-spatial status, image, and representation, that provides the context to consider the street art of Lesivo, Bastardilla, Guache, and Toxicómano as works of counter cartography.

A portion of Chapter Two and the entirety of Chapter Three focus on examining one work from each artist and collective through the lens of cartography. Each artist and collective creates distance between sign and signified, producing the discursive space to consider the role of perception, memory, and affect in encoding and reinforcing traditional relationships among social identity, representation, and image, germane to the construction of the symbol.

As articulated throughout each chapter, urban planners, cartographers, and architects of “true space” (Lefebvre) also become the arbiters of that space, identifying and labeling its objects, subjects, and accompanying images in a way that influences what is perceived. Not only does that process effect the construction of symbols from specific images, but the classification of objects in space also produces a visual index arranged on a hierarchical scale. Consequently, representational images of subjects, like ethnic or indigenous social types,

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297 Ibid.
298 Ibid.
299 Ibid.
become *images of representation* perceived as occupants comprising specific social, political, and spatial status.\(^{300}\)

In essence, as understood by the close of Chapter Three, each artist mentioned above produce a mode of street art that moves beyond the political slogans *(Graffiti de consigna)*, street writing *(Escrutura)*, soccer fanatic graffiti *(Graffiti Barrista)*, and earlier urban art *(Arte Urbano)* of preceding decades. Their approach is not overtly political, despite the manipulation of icons that include political symbols. Although each artist and collective utilizes independently conceived means, the effect is the same: a deconstruction of symbol, causing distance between the sign and signified, which prohibits the spectator from interpreting the work in a traditional way.

The street art image created by Lesivo (Figure 20) incorporates allusions to Columbus, to the Spanish conquest, to the emergence of Colombia as a territory and idea on the map during the nineteenth century, and to the human rights atrocities perpetuated through Uribe’s Administration. Yet there is no label, as in a museum, nor any text *directing* the viewer or onlooker to draw any specific conclusion about the image or its meaning. Instead, the agency to determine meaning rests more squarely with the viewer than any image in an official exhibition space. Given these circumstances, the image might more broadly probe the relationship between the acquisition of power, domination, and corruption. However, it would depend upon the viewer’s perception.

Rather than comprising resistance and opposition, post-millennium artists such as Lesivo create work that embodies deconstruction: of symbol and of symbolic process. In decontextualizing the aspects that comprise an image as visual representation of identity, event, or time, Lesivo’s work opens the discursive space to reconsider visual associations of symbolic

\(^{300}\) Op cit., 169-292.
construction that are embedded in memory. Similarly, Bastardilla manipulates the signifying elements of gender identity and sexual orientation, culminating in a work that challenges the observer to consider the structures that determine and constrict gender roles, expression, and their relationship to one another.

Guache, in contrast, produces a street art image that juxtaposes allusion to different symbols of social and ethnic status, which directly emerged from cartographic mapping expeditions (i.e. the costumbristo image). Yet, Guache inhibits a traditional visual reading of the historic, symbolic parts that comprise the image he created. In consequence, the image seems suspended in an ambiguous signifying space, as if the characters comprising the central scene themselves personify attempts to move beyond the social and spatial constriction of indigenous identity and representation, just as the image as a whole neither represents the costumbristo image of the carguero nor something other.

Instead, the graffiti acts as a counter-cartographical visual narrative, antithetical to conventional processes of identity and status construction, which have been formulated through mapping expeditions. Overall, the work seems to personify the struggle to emerge from the structures of social hierarchy and visual traditions that associate indigenous identity with manual labor, inferior status, and an existence on the periphery. Simultaneously, Guache’s apposition of objects from multiple sign systems disrupts the original context of the costumbrista image of representation, challenging the viewer to question its validity and the value of the ethnic, social, economic ideal, central to the system.

Whereas artists Bastardilla, Lesivo, and Guache weave, layer, and manipulate the signifying elements of ethnic, social, and gender identity, in order to expose the constructed nature of the cultural ideal, artist collective Toxicómano directly implicate that ideal, by
producing graffiti that parodies the commodified image of commercial media and pop-culture. As a result, Toxicómano create street art with the power to attack the structures of social hierarchy, which continue to valorize particular gender, ethnic, social, and spatial identities as the desired norm, and the marketable product of desire. Moreover, artist collective Toxicómano seems to confront the spectator, challenging one to consider the degree to which he or she replicates the social inequities of historical, cartographic frameworks of representation within his or her own perception and belief systems, and to what degree those ideas are really one’s own.

In effect, artist collective Toxicómano create an image that implicates the spectator him or herself, demanding that one question the degree to which he or she inherits and replicates gender, ethnic, social, and spatial inequities established through cartographic frameworks of representation, by parodying the commodification of status in commercial media and pop-culture. Consequently, their work challenges the spectator to resolve the question of what is the product of desire, who is its designer and consumer. Ultimately, if one probes those questions deeply, it may be possible to conceive alternative constructions of social and spatial representation, other than those manufactured and valorized through historic and traditional cartographic processes of mapping.

In juxtaposing icons and symbols, each example from Lesivo, Bastardilla, Guache, and Toxicómano effectively dissects the process of symbolic construction itself, by peeling away layers of ethnic, gender, and social signification embedded in the image, separating its visual features from the context in which they operate as representation. The effect is jarring to the viewer, and each work offers alternative modes through which to conceive of identity, image, status, and representation. Therefore, each aforementioned artist and collective produce a mode
of urban art with the power to *counter* the traditional cartographic framework through which social hierarchy, and by extension, social inequity, emerged.

The objective of this thesis is clear: to posit the style of urban art created post millennium by artists and collectives Bastardilla, Lesivo, Guache, and Toxicómano as counter cartography. Primarily, utilizing the framework of cartography, and thus counter cartography provides the means to consider the value of urban art beyond the narrow classification of its legal status. Second, an examination of graffiti produced post millennium should not ignore the impact of specific transformations to the urban landscape, such as increased access to telecommunications networks, the Internet, increased tourism, and the presence of millions of forcibly displaced.

Previous spatial and critical urban theories focus on street art as an “illicit” visual form, as representative of the “Other,” of iconoclasm, or as symptom of crime. While previous scholarly contributions to the field of urban studies and graffiti are significant, such as the conception of “thirdspace” by Edward Soja, and the investigation of graffiti as iconoclasm by Armando Silva, each theoretical exploration predicates itself on the assumption that street art is an ‘illicit’ art form, whether by legal classification, by rule, or by cultural custom.

In contrast, utilizing the framework of cartography and counter cartography provides the means to consider the value of urban art made by the artists central to this thesis for their ability to probe correlations among the power to engineer space according to a prevailing ideology, the social and spatial influence that associated symbols and signs have had on the cultural collective, and the role of public perception in perpetuating inequities at the core of mapped systems of stratification. Furthermore, utilizing this methodology has permit me the opportunity to highlight changes to the urban landscape, which have irrevocably altered the means, structures, and reception to urban art in Colombia.
Many artists and collectives continue to obtain success and fame through alternative networks, such as informal enterprise, social media, international collaboration, and documentary. Technological access to international networks, support, and financial resources are indicative of alternative means toward livelihood and community not previously available, and otherwise impossible through traditional state structures.\(^{301}\)

In sum, it is through the theoretical framework of cartography and counter cartography that one can fully appreciate the value of the urban art constructed by artists and collectives Bastardilla, Lesivo, Guache, and Toxicómano. Regardless of their differences, each artist and collective produce works that disrupt the viewer from reading recognizable symbols in a familiar way, and therefore provide the means for the spectator to consider the correlation between identity, image, status, and representation. Overall, when examining their work as counter cartography, it is possible to broaden the scope to analyze and interrogate sign systems underlying the construction of representational images and images of representation that correlate with processes of mapping.


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