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## **Into the Streets: The Residuality of 'Otherness' and Material Representation in the Cityscape**

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**Into the Streets: The Residuality of ‘Otherness’ and Material Representation in the  
Cityscape**

Addison McKown

A Thesis Presented to the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures and the  
Department of Communication and Media Studies

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## **Preface**

I have always had an innate curiosity towards culture and identification. Cultivating oneself stems from a wide array of factors, some of which are inherent in internal senses of belonging, and others are derived from external sources and circumstantial conditioning. It is the culmination of these facets, characteristics, and events that make up each person in their entirety, yet it is often one specific instance or trait that portrays individual existence to the rest of the world.

Today's world is quick to ruminate upon differences instead of shared perspectives. All too often, the discernment of reality is based on fear and disconnect rather than curiosity and understanding. It is as though we, as a collective, global society, have an inclination of separation and polarization, not collaboration and solidarity. We have become comfortable with the hegemonic dynamics of our own social and cultural milieus, creating a preference for likeness and assimilation while, simultaneously, ingraining an intolerant apprehension towards anyone and anything different from that which we already know. The known is safe while the unknown incites feelings of potential calamity. Our loyalty lies to our country and our culture without a sense of due diligence and camaraderie towards those living outside the confines of our home nations.

In the Spring of 2019, I piloted a new study abroad program for Butler University in Berlin, Germany. It was in Berlin that I forged a critical awareness of the malfeasances of othering and the consequences of fearful misunderstanding. I was submerged in a city desperately trying to find a balance between its native culture and those of an influx of forced migrants from the Middle East, and beyond. I was living in a country constantly trying to do right by its past, a past that surrounded me on every block I walked and every train I took.

Germany's history was, for me, more present than ever, and the effects thereof were crafting the country's future before my own eyes. I realized then that the world around me was not one that many people -- outside of those who lived within it -- actually recognized.

Throughout my time in Berlin and my travels throughout the rest of Germany, I began making connections between the past and present, between the differences that separate individuals and the similarities that connect us, between personal identity and cultural belonging. One of the most prominent aspects in which I saw the residuality of Germany's past and the looming implications of its present circumstances was through mediated space and artistic expression. Whether it be street art and graffiti, commissioned galleries, or public architecture, the art and design of Germany's prominent cityscapes created an inherent commentary on the socio-political standings of the population. Not only was the stark past of the nation commemorated on nearly every block, but the current struggles of the modern refugee crisis were portrayed on each street corner as well. A new evolution of humanitarian disaster was unfolding as the residuality of crises past still loomed ever-presently. I understood then that there was an entirely new story being told on the very streets that still whispered tales of the past. And that story is one I felt called to tell.

## **Introduction**

With the first-hand experience I gained from living in Berlin, I began seeking out a way to communicate the interconnected stories of its streets. Germany was struggling to balance the weight of its own past with the struggle of its true cultural identity and the unforeseen implications of rehoming millions of scared and frustrated forced migrants in the wake of global upheaval.

The proliferation of history and the age of global media has triggered disparate receptions of refugees by both the German state and the German public. Beginning in 2015, Germany became the focal point of news stories related to asylum-seekers since it was the target country for refugees primarily from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Germany has taken in nearly 1.8 million forced migrants (Dempster & Sekou, 2021). This influx has completely shifted the city's civic infrastructure and urban landscape while, simultaneously, thrusting issues surrounding identity, culture, and history into the sphere of public rhetoric.

The themes of identification and otherness continued to guide my observations of Germany's navigation of the modern refugee crisis and, additionally, in illuminating the implications of its past. I felt the overwhelming tendency towards otherness was provoking a dire disconnect amongst current municipalities, and the fear of assimilation was denouncing any chance of cultural cohesion. Meanwhile, the residuary of the Holocaust enclosed this entire dynamic, adding yet another layer to the intricate tensions of the present.

An intersectional theoretical foundation is necessary to investigate how Germany's past has influenced the current rhetorical reception of forced migrants as well as the historical shifts of identification within German culture. As Burke states in his rhetoric on *Mein Kampf*, scholars who do not closely analyze the documents of history are committing "cultural vandalism." He argued that critics have a "moral obligation" to apply their methods to those artifacts, and it is in that application where insight into the now begins to unfold (Burke, 1957).

## **Methodology**

The following thesis applies the rhetorical process of othering within German culture during three main historical shifts. German history is vast and detailed, but the historical influences

applicable to this research have occurred within the past century. I will investigate the formation and debate of belonging amid the Holocaust; otherness amid the *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) program implemented during the first few decades after the Second World War; and German identification after the fall of the Berlin wall. These three historical categories were the eras I observed encapsulated in the streets of Berlin. Their very existence was symbolized in monuments all over the city and portrayed in the architecture of every neighborhood.

After building the foundational rhetoric of othering throughout the aforementioned periods of German history, I then illustrate how means of identification and strife regarding a sense of belonging are depicted in the spatial aesthetics of cityscape, specifically in the convergence of borders and boundaries. I argue that tangible expressions of solidarity and autonomy embody a discourse that connects closely to the past. Street art serves as an ode to history, especially in Berlin. From the East Side Gallery to the graffiti-bombings of alleys and entryways, the inherent symbolism behind this artistic expression illustrates a modern commentary of acceptance, both towards the calamities of the past and the adversities of the now.

The final portion of this thesis will then explore the ways in which cultural integration and identity negotiation are unfolding within Germany today in the wake of the modern refugee crisis. A discourse surrounding the influx of forced migrants is present in the tangible cityscape, and I argue that said commentary is heavily impacted by the residuality of Germany's history, not only its very expression but in its reception as well. The material space of the cityscape is indicative of the contested belonging surrounding the social world.

## Exploring the “Other”

To begin the analysis of “othering” in Germany after the Second World War, the concept of “othering” and “otherness” must be defined and further examined. Otherness is the result of an intrinsic social process in which the hegemonic in-group establishes a common enemy amongst differing out-group(s). This occurs by “stigmatizing a difference –real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination” as visual studies scholar, Jean-François Staszak, explains (Staszak, 2009). Othering encapsulates the essence of “us versus them.” Ruth Lister, a professor of Social Policy in the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University, further defines othering as the “process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – between the more and the less powerful – and through which social distance is established and maintained” (Lister, 2004). These two categories are used to socially organize people under a hierarchical ranking, deeming identities outside of the in-group -- the “us” that includes all those belonging to a systemic group of power -- as inherently less than.

Individual worth is then determined by identification within the aforementioned hierarchical categories. Staszak further explores the social classification constitutive of the othering process as:

The creation of otherness (also called ‘othering’) consists of applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: them and us. The out-group is only coherent as a group as a result of its opposition to the in-group and its lack of identity. This lack is based upon stereotypes that are largely stigmatizing and obviously simplistic. The in-group constructs one or more others, setting itself apart and



giving itself an identity. Otherness and identity are two inseparable sides of the same coin. The Other only exists relative to the Self, and vice versa. (Staszack, 2009)

The components of identification that are emphasized as differences to be expounded as otherness include religion, national origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and skin tone. The aforementioned facets can be performed outwardly by individuals, such as a woman wearing a dress or a traveler speaking a foreign language in a different country, or they can consist of internal perceptions that shape the way in which a person navigates the world around them, such as scarcity mindsets of adults who grew up in poverty.

The idea of othering, however, is completely dependent upon the power dynamics of an institution as: “Only the dominant group is in a position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the particularity of others (their otherness) while imposing corresponding discriminatory measures” (Staszack, 2009). Some groups of others are actually the dominant group in differing social or geographical settings; their marginalization is dependent upon the hegemonic position of the given social world. This definition is the working understanding of otherness to be applied in the remainder of this analysis.

### **Material Borders**

Means of othering largely revolve around differences of origin. Origin necessitates an essence of belonging illustrated by international borders. As global politics and economies have evolved, the concept of borders has transpired with the connotation of territorial lines that mark the division of land and jurisdiction between nations. Borders, however, encapsulate a symbolic perception as well. They mark conceptual boundaries that allow “social actors” to make notional

distinctions in order to “categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space” (Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

The very existence of the relationship between tangible borders and conceptual boundaries emphasizes “the dynamic dimensions of social relations as groups compete in the production, diffusion, and institutionalization of alternative systems and principles of classifications” (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Borders and boundaries both serve as catalysts for othering in society today. The notion of borders versus boundaries, however, necessitates a critical and fundamental understanding of materialism as belonging and identification within set lines of division are contingencies of the material world.

The concept of borders and boundaries necessitates a critical and fundamental understanding of materialism. Karl Marx’s work revolves around the notion that all thoughts and ideas are productions of material conditions. In *The German Ideology* (1974), Marx wrote:

Men [humans] can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion, or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life. (Marx, 1974)

Neo-liberalism emphasizes production and consumerism as markers of success, stability, and comfort. The more one produces, the more worthy they are; the more one consumes, the more valuable they become. The way people produce their means of subsistence is not just about keeping the human body alive -- although that is still an inherent goal of existence -- but rather, the exchange of value between persons that manifests materially. It is the material conditions of existence that decisively shape personal, political, and cultural attitudes as well as individual

likes and dislikes. Additionally, in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx wrote that “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx, 1970). As a result, what exists as preconceptions of the individual mind is produced solely through interpersonal interactions in maintaining human subsistence and the consequential transformations of material surroundings.

Marx’s understanding of materialism also speaks greatly to the influences of the material conditions on the nuances of human character. An individual’s material conditions are concurrent with their mode of production, or an active and definite way to express one’s life. Of this, Marx writes that: “As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production” (Marx, 1974). The material conditions of one’s existence inextricably shape one’s entire sense of self, both in how they interact with the world and the products they generate. As a result, it is the tangible manifestations of sustenance that transform internal concepts of worth. Humans must produce to survive and said productions inherently shape the material world. In capitalistic societies, production represents both expression and value. It is within the material that meaning is both created and derived.

The aforementioned Marxist lens highlights how the material establishment of borders manifested the theoretical concept of boundaries. By creating tangible lines that divide land between nations and groups, borders inherently mark a categorization of the material world. They illustrate geographic distribution materialistically, and it is because of this transformation of material surroundings that the consciousness of human beings has also changed.

### **Social Boundaries of Belonging**

Not only do borders serve as physical confinements, but they produce a method of social classification. Certain cultural beliefs, political discourses, social practices, etc. have become restricted within the confines of borders. These characteristics, however, are only perpetuated by human consciousness; the boundaries of the material world did not construct these social norms nor directly create said diversity of perspectives. Borders serve to physically distinguish margins of territory, but it is the human consciousness that assigns meaning to the compartmentalization of the material.

Territorial borders create compartments of identification as well as symbolic boundaries of belonging that influence and perpetuate social dynamics between groups. As mentioned previously, however, otherness can only be dictated by those in power. Author Anssi Paasi writes on the discursive social practice of boundaries that borders should be understood:

[...] not merely as static lines but as sets of practices and discourses which [diffuse] into the whole of society and are not restricted to the border area. The production and reproduction of boundaries is part of the institutionalization of territories [that manifests] in numerous social (economic, cultural, administrative and political) practices and discourses that may be simultaneous and overlapping [...] Boundaries exist and gain meanings on different spatial scales, not merely at the state level, and these meanings are ultimately reproduced in local everyday life. (Paasi, 1999)

Hegemonic ideologies inherently inscribe the qualifications of in-group membership while denouncing the difference of marginalized and/or minority groups, excluding them from the context of the majority.

The conceptuality of an indigenous connection to a specific locality, in terms of the origin of birth and the ensuing influences of social conditioning, creates integral insight into defining preconceptions of belonging and space. Geographic confines and cultural heritage translate to direct considerations of citizenship; it is these temporal categorizations that necessitate value and acceptance in the social world. The material world decisively shapes and perpetuates the dynamics of power within a given context; the physicality of surroundings constructs the qualifications of belonging and, constitutively, the divergences of otherness. As Bourdieu states in *Language and Symbolic Power*, “Identity is constructed in antithesis to alterity” (Bourdieu, 1991).

Similarly, in *Definition of Man*, Burke notes that man is the “symbol-using” animal, the “inventor of the negative,” and continually “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy” (Burke, 1966). People decipher and name reality through shared meanings of symbols; it is this social construction of the material world that influences perception consciousness. Humans can only perceive the truth through shared experiences, alongside individual frames of reference. It is the creation of this social reality that culminates cultural consciousness, group ideologies, and belief systems. As previously noted, however, the interactions of people with the material world are inherently shaped by the dominant narrative of the hegemony. Culture constitutes audience perceptions on a consistent basis, reinforcing the dominant form of symbolic reading, based on those interpretations of the in-group (Burke, 1966).

Furthermore, Burke notes that it is the human condition that by naming what one is, everything it is not is also inherently defined. Language -- an arbitrary and symbolic coding of the modern, material world -- deflects “unlike” in nature (Burke, 1966). Symbol systems are uniquely human and make way for further categorization and classification in the social world.

Humans are also “moved by a sense of order” (Burke, 1966). It is the hierarchical rankings of separation and worth that incentivize organizational status, or as Burke has written, “[...] man’s skills with symbols combine with his negativity and his tendencies towards different modes of livelihood implicit in the inventions that make for divisions of labor, the result being definitions and differentiation and allocations of property protected by the negativities of the lay” (Burke, 1966).

Belonging and otherness are social inversions mediated by the material world. Identification of an in-group inherently construes the distinction of an outgroup; they are constitutive of each other, and, additionally, serve to reflect the dynamics and interactions within the material world. The following section will explore how material borders and social boundaries have transpired throughout three shifts of German history, impacting the cultural landscape of Germany’s social world.

### **Historical Context**

After the First World War, Germany found itself in a state of chaos and failure. The Weimar Republic had served as Germany’s first democratic government, yet its existence was marked by a stark oscillation between political aristocrats and a growing number of communist citizens. The defeat of the First World War resulted in hyperinflation, widespread poverty, and a desperate inclination to blame someone for the malfeasances of the Weimar Republic and the consequences of war. The public and government, alike, were yearning for a scapegoat to hold accountable.

Germany’s defeat could not be blamed on the battlefield since national pride was far too great to accept combat as the reason for failure. Instead, many rumors and theories began to

circulate that the loss of World War I was at the hands of internal betrayal. These theories became known as *Dolchstoßlegenden*, or stab-in-the-back theories (Barth, 2003). Social Democrats, Jewish people, and Communists were pegged as the perpetrators of betrayal and consequently blamed for Germany's loss of the First World War.

As Hitler came to power during the decade following the First World War, the hegemonic in-group became even more defined as a result of the conceptualization of the Aryan Race. In Nazi Germany, the term Aryan was used to refer to those who belonged in German society. Nazi leaders, "used this concept to support the idea that Germans belonged to a "master race." Furthermore, they specified that "non-Aryan" applied foremost to Jews, who were identified as the main racial threat to German society" (United States). Aryans, despite the lack of concise determiners, were Hitler's ideal in-group, an inborn and ideal race. All others, most prominently Jews, were enemies of the people and against the common good.

These out-groups were determined as others and established as the common enemy of the German people because they did not belong to the hegemony. They were different than the majority, and that, alone, was enough to place the blame, but the intensity of the Aryan othering demanded retribution for the past. Others were not just people with differences but pests that plagued the pure body of the nation. The viewpoint of the Aryan Race was not mere discrimination towards divergent groups of people nor a sense of superiority over all; their goal was to eradicate the impurities that lead to the country's downfall. As a result, the tirade against political and social others during the Holocaust lead to unceasing persecution and mass genocide.

### **After the Second World War**

When the Second World War came to a gruesome end, Germany once again found itself in defeat. This time, however, the country was not solely responsible for its reformation.

Germany's borders were reconstructed and the nation itself was also divided into four zones, each occupied by one of the victorious Allied Forces: France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Not only did these sectors mark tangible borders of separateness, but the programs implemented to rebuild each zone brought forth a shift in cultural composition and identification.

*Gastarbeiter* (Guestworker) programs became prominent initiatives to rebuild the country. These programs would employ primarily unskilled, male laborers between the ages of twenty and forty from relatively poor countries in and around Europe (Martin, 1981). They would be offered relatively high wages in exchange for one to two years of work within the German state. By 1972, nearly 2.5 million guest workers called Germany home, the majority of whom originated from Turkey or Yugoslavia (Martin, 1981). This was nearly twelve percent of the workforce at the time. Although the *Gastarbeiter* programs were initiated with temporary stays in mind, many of the migrant workers enjoyed the opportunities that rebuilding the nation provided as well as the pay. "Instead of being forced to return, guest workers obtained rights to have their dependents join them in Germany after one year's employment if they had proof of suitable housing" (Martin, 1981).

So many guest workers chose to stay in Germany, to be joined by their families, and that influx began impacting the social sphere. Germany was still reveling in the wake of the Holocaust; not only was the country reconstructing its towns and cities, but it was renegotiating its very identity. A heavy sense of shame surrounded German identification yet there was still a



palpable apprehension to others after the propaganda of the National Socialist regime.

*“Ausländer raus”* (foreigners out) became a communal battle-cry for native Germans as they demanded the removal of international workers in the 1980s (Paganoni, 1995). Despite the fact that many guest workers had moved their families to Germany and had been legal citizens for decades, the cultural differences between native Germans and migrant workers morphed into clashes over belonging.

Guest workers were never truly accepted and continually viewed as less than native Germans. Even in today’s world, they are still referred to as “guest workers,” despite taking permanent residence within the German nation. Guest workers are continuously viewed as temporary and tolerated under the interpretation that they will one day return to where they seemingly belong. Guest workers exist within the in-group and serve as aids to hegemonic ideologies, but the components of identification outweighed the merit of their work. They are first and foremost “guests,” thus inherently being labeled and viewed as social others. Guest workers are, culturally othered because of the differences in their native origins, variations in spoken language, and religious differences. As individual migrants, guest workers were inherently looked down upon, despite their efforts in rebuilding Germany after the war.

### **The Fall of the Wall**

Amid reconstruction and the influx of migrants in Gastarbeiter programs, another physical assertion of separateness unfolded across Germany. During the night of 16 August 1961, the USSR constructed a wall that completely encompassed West Berlin (Wende, 2013). This created a blockade around the US sector and heightened the already tense situation between the Soviet Union and the United States known as the Cold War. The initial wall consisted of barbed wire

and wood posts meant to seemingly keep East Berliners in the Soviet sector; it was also a blockade to prevent the influences of Western culture at bay. The consequences of communism were hitting the East hard, and many people began to flee to the West in hopes of a better, more profitable life. Checkpoints were established to monitor who crossed the border and when, and, within a few weeks of the preliminary wall going up, a daunting, concrete structure began to take its place. Seemingly overnight, Berlin became a severed city, torn in half by the USSR.

After years of ever-present tension, protests, and countless cries to tear down the Wall, its official demolition was ordered in November of 1989. For the first time in decades, Berlin was a unified city, united under its own power. The West side of the Wall was covered in graffiti as a visual outcry against its construction; the Eastside, however, was a clean slate. East Berliners were prohibited from even going near the Wall, separated from its entirety by a wide, closely monitored section of land known as the *Todesstrasse*, “Death Strip.” Soviet guards oversaw the wall, stationed with machine guns and attack dogs that could be set off at a moment’s notice. Floodlights and landmines also plagued these areas; it was almost impossible to cross. Similar to the Wall, East Berliners were always being watched and controlled by the Stasi and their vast network of informants.

While the Berlin Wall is a valuable metaphor for the type of social separation indicative of othering, a vast mental block was also present. For years to come, those from the West would view those from the East as inherently different types of individuals. Germany’s division into sectors showed the clearest separation between East and West, but this difference developed overtime under the different political regimes whereas a cultural division between Northern Germany and the southern Bavarian region has always been present.

East and West Germans as well as Berliners existed amid a constant state of otherness. They seemingly identified with the same nation, but the Berlin Wall marked the separation of similarities and convergence of differences, alike. It was a tangible border of separateness, a material marker of oppositions. The residual consequences of this social compartmentalization are still evident in the cultural landscape of cities across Germany and especially so in Berlin.

### **Mediated History in the Cityscape**

Throughout my time in Berlin and travels throughout Germany and the rest of Europe, I continued to notice how many cityscapes embodied a tangible essence of social othering from the past while perpetuating an active commentary of the social dynamics of the present. Preserving the past urges the collective society to remember a dominant story, arguably rewriting history as it is known. The process of remembering also ensures the act of forgetting, creating an absence of marginalized voices yet an overwhelming presence of the dominant perspective (Phillips, 2010). What is remembered has less to do with what happened in the past than the needs of the present; the mediated tradition of culture fosters the maintenance and even amplification of the dominant narrative. Repetitive commemoration projects how collective memory may manifest itself in the future while instigating notions of worth (Phillips, 2010). The social value of monuments, memorials, and museums affirms existing power relations while ingraining the significance of representation in the present.

In the AHRC Cultural Value Project *Understanding the Values of Arts and Culture*, authors Crossick and Kaszynska describe the essence of the aforementioned. They state, “There has been a tendency to focus on the tangible in terms of the built environment. But it also has a dimension of intangible heritage, and there are issues of identity and belonging, memory and

symbol, spiritual meanings, and cultural practices that are often bound up with place” (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016). The urban space creates a constitutive discourse surrounding the portrayal of history and the trajectory of the current social climate.

### **Urban Aesthetics: Public Art**

The material world, through a variety of expressions, interacts with the social world to perpetuate dynamics of power and historical belonging. The streets of Berlin, specifically, are covered in art, much of which reflects German history in the way that it can honor the victims of the past can remind the onlooker of the persecuted others and can keep their memory alive in the present. Although these forms of art are an ode to history, the memorials and exhibitions, themselves, which actually stand upon the street are pieces of street art, by definition. Doubly, however, the commemorative monuments are accompanied by overwhelming amounts of street art and graffiti.

Often overlooked, graffiti provides an inherent commentary on the socio-political standing of a given city. Whether this is a commentary on surveillance or an enacting of a democratic right as, politically, street art originates from the bottom-up; it is a way of creating art and providing these aesthetics to all citizens, regardless of their social, political, or economic class. It is as though the very streets within this cityscape are illustrating the residual otherness of time past since, in addition to traditional memorials and monuments, the othering transpiring within now is depicted through overwhelming amounts of street art and graffiti.

The city streets express tribute to the past while simultaneously composing a commentary of the present through public art. Authors Crossick and Kaszynska illustrate the discursive role of street art within the cityscape. They write:

The creation of public art is a different way in which artists can intervene in the urban environment. We should note the easily overlooked importance of art and music in animating and aestheticizing the public space. . . Visual arts interventions are historically most evident through the statues and monuments that convey a narrative about past and present, but recent decades have seen greater diversity in public art's role in shaping the urban environment and engaging in dialogue with it. (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016)

The intersection of city aesthetics, spatial representation, and social discourse within public art launched a series of questions for me. How does the urban landscape tell the tales of the past while crafting the plot of the future? Does the aesthetic lie within architecture and its integration of old and new? Is the aesthetic an encapsulation of the city's energy as a result of its people and culture? In order to create a better understanding of how history and belonging are expressed through the aesthetics of a cityscape, I formed my own exposition of Berlin's public art scene and the connotations, questions, and interpretations that result thereof. This is centered around two main doubles, the first being "high-art" versus "low-art"; and the second within the oscillation between cityscape aesthetics and socio-political commentary. I illustrate these doubles through an analysis of cumulative social theories, beginning with Pierre Bourdieu.

### **Social Discourse and Street Art: A Dirty Double**

Bourdieu was a French sociologist who is well-known for his focus on the dynamics of power in society. In 1979, he published *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* which made a distinct commentary on the pure aesthetic. Pure aesthetics is more likely to be found in people from the higher, hegemonic social classes because they have the time, interest, and dedication to craft such concern and appreciation over beauty and art (Bourdieu, 1979). In

contrast, the aesthetic attitudes of the lower hierarchical groups are based on everyday views, creating a more “normal” and pragmatic aesthetic. This is particularly evident in the ability to “decipher” a work of art or to understand it adequately in terms of the hegemony’s ideological standards of aesthetics.

In the history of art, rankism of society and class has long determined both how popular and respected a piece of work is and, additionally, who has access to such work (Bourdieu, 1979). An adequate interpretation therefore only exists if the observer has access to the appropriate cultural key for decoding the commentary of such a piece. In-groups exist within the hegemonic context that constructs the decoding of art; out-groups of others, however, are excluded from the material conditions that provide and shape such cultural keys. Bourdieu uses the inherent classism of aesthetics and art to conclude that one can only interpret the world from what is seen and what can be felt, a similar conclusion to Marx’s materialism.

Karl Marx crafted renowned sociopolitical commentary on capitalism and the divisions it creates in society, specifically amongst the hierarchical social rankings of the bourgeoisie, or the hegemonic in-groups of power, and the proletariat, the social others, and exploited out-groups. The material conditions that surround individual existence decisively shape the personal, political, and cultural perceptions, norms, and values (Marx et al, 1974). This is used as a tool of oppression by higher powers and further divides society amongst social milieus. It also further supports that proletarians have very little access and opportunity in the world of “fine” or “high” art by virtue of the fact that they do not have the contextual background to use as a key, they cannot adequately decipher the cultural significance of a piece of art.

In 1905, German sociologist, philosopher, and economist Max Weber published *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. At the turn of the 20th century, the people of the

bourgeoisie, the hegemonic in-group of power, and those in the fine art world were concerned by the increasing use of film and photography. The goal of fine art had always been to replicate reality as close as possible, and photography and film were going to legitimize the fine arts because it took no actual skill to create; it was mechanical, not handcrafted (Weber, 1905).

The Bourgeoisie long wanted reality to be replicated so as soon as that became readily available to more people than just those in the highest of classes, the power dynamic was thrown off. The habitual preference for the most widely recognized cultural works springs from privileged social conditions of existence (Weber, 1905). This preference then contributes to the cultural legitimacy of a piece of art and thus, its reproduction, creating a “cultural food chain” where the most powerful strata, again, eat at the top (Weber, 1905). The in-groups who determine social others are the same ones determining the value and accessibility of art. Photography and films have posed a threat to the fine arts of the bourgeoisie as the replication of reality could be achieved mechanically, thus causing the inherent value of art to undergo a total reevaluation. Those of the lower classes—social others, cultural outgroups, the proletarians-- could essentially create art through film and photography, instigating that these mediums are always the others of the art world; they are lesser than in comparison to the fine arts. This parallels how graffiti today aligns with the proletariat and also is most frequently observed as lesser than in the art world.

Street art and graffiti are used as a tool by marginalized out-groups and social others because they understand that the hegemony does not have the prior knowledge to interpret the pieces. In the same way that these groups have been largely excluded from the cultural context necessary to decode and interpret high art, street art serves as a proletarian counterpoint. The hegemony is on the outside of the inside joke, so to speak. As Emily Pugh writes in *Graffiti and*

*the Critical Power of Urban Space*, pieces of graffiti are “. . . on their own terms, crucial to understanding the relationships between their creation and the power structures that govern urban spaces in which they are created” (Pugh, 2015).

One of the most famous street artists amongst the graffiti community and the world is Banksy. He started creating street art as social rhetoric in London with the idea of art is for the people, but the people need access to the art. His work is known around the globe and very well received; he has become a favorite amongst the world of street art and the public, alike. Banksy draws with stencils, meaning his work can take seconds to make but the impact stays long after, creating another dirty double and reverting back to the idea of legitimizing fine art. Banksy mechanically reproduces his pieces instead of “hand-crafting” each and every one. On his work and on the stature of street art as a means of class discourse, Banksy says, “This is the first time the essentially bourgeois world of art has belonged to the people [...] they [pieces of street art] have been used to start revolutions and to stop wars” (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013). Street art is a negotiation of agency and adamant counter to the social implications of hegemonic otherness.

### **Mediated Expressions of Belonging**

Street art and graffiti encapsulate a counterculture resistance to the exclusion of the hegemony, but, historically, the German world of art interlinks with previous cultural shifts of belonging and otherness. Berlin is named as UNESCO’s City of Design, illustrating how big the art scene is in this city (UNESCO, 2019). This decoration comes as a culmination of its artistic past, begging with the Bauhaus right before the Second World War. Bauhaus was a world-famous design school and combined the idea of craft with art and form with function (Whitford, 1984). The rise of the Third Reich, however, denounced any creative expression outside of Nazi propaganda.



The realm of street art and creative expression in Germany was put on a relative pause during Hitler's reign but experienced a rebirth after the fall of the Berlin wall.

West Berliners used their side of the Berlin Wall in an effort to make a continuous appeal towards defacing the USSR. The wall was the symbol of the Cold War, an iron curtain continuously looming as an ode to the power of the Soviet Union (Pugh, 2015). The west side of the wall was engulfed within a melting pot of messages and illustrations, both as a blatant exercise of freedom in front of the Gorbachev administration and as a discursive act of dissent. The Wall now serves as a conglomeration of modern street art with the East Side Gallery exhibition. Nonetheless, the Berlin Wall has remained a symbol of counter-resistance and social critique towards hegemonic institutions of power.

The process of othering is, thus, prevalent within the world of street art. Street art has been used as a means for liberation and -- also -- oppression. It is both high art and low, it is permissive while, simultaneously, illegal. It influences, includes, and impacts yet is largely ignored while walking down the street all the same. It is a mirror for this society and a sponge for the community it is created within. Street art and graffiti are looked at as dirty and dangerous yet can be twisted around by the unrelenting, neo-liberal ideologies of the modern world to be worshipped as one and the same. It is everything yet nothing; a contradiction in and of itself, an incongruent variance that is reminiscent of the inversion of social othering and belonging.

### **The Modern Refugee Crisis: Material Others**

Germany's past has portrayed this oscillation between opposites as previously mentioned, but my experiences in Berlin illuminated the same sense of fluctuating paradox within present circumstances, specifically in the proliferation of the modern refugee crisis. In Germany's capital

city of Berlin, nearly one-third of the metropolitan population has a migration background -- 27.7% as opposed to the federal average of 21%, according to the 2017 Berlin Municipality (OECD, 2018). During the modern refugee crisis, Berlin admitted roughly 5% of the total number of refugees entering Germany (OECD, 2018). By definition, a refugee is “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence” (UHNCR). Refugees have no choice but to seek asylum in other nations while devastation wreaks upon their home countries. Yet the very idea of crossing international borders and seeking refuge with the boundaries of different, individual nations is an inherently complex notion.

Germany physically protects asylum seekers as the country’s borders serve as a periphery safeguard between them and the devastation of their home countries. But within those same confines, however, forced migrants are met with cultural adversity. They are socially foreign to the country, even if they legally applied for and were granted refugee status. Asylum seekers carry the attitudes and traditions of their home countries with them when they flee, creating a clash of culture and a sense of foreignness in relation to native Germans. They are subjected to xenophobic prejudices as the origin of their home borders is used to discern their worth as individuals.

The nation’s policy for admitting a significantly larger number of refugees than its European neighbors has been largely critiqued, particularly by those in the rising right-wing faction. This faction is represented politically by the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), and the AfD’s biggest success came from “challenging Angela Merkel's decision to let in around 1.3 million undocumented migrants and refugees, mainly from the Middle East, from 2015” (BBC, 2020).

Refugees who have fled to Germany, specifically to Berlin, are continuously surrounded by stark reminders of the country's dark past. They are encompassed by incessant memorialization of groups of oppressed others while struggling for their own acceptance amid an unsettling rise in Neo-Nazi tendencies. Historical memories are being actively conjured in new interpretations and opinions of the German public as forced migrants-- the modern group of social others in Germany-- apply such evocations to their present lives.

### **Contested Representation in the Cityscape**

Ideological rejection, social othering, and cultural exclusion are familiar forms of hegemonic oppression for both forced migrants and the realm of street art. In *Bin Ich Ein Berliner? Graffiti as Layered Public Archive and Socio-ecological Methodology*, authors Vasilna and Norum state:

The figure of the migrant, with its 'double absence' status of unfitting/foreigner [see Saada, 2000], constitutes at once a permanent threat and a vital constituent in the ecology of citizenship [...] Graffiti and visual representation constitute key cultural markers of those practices, revealing the manifold forms of dissensus that subvert the distribution of the sensible. (Vasilna and Norum, 2019)

The production of urban space reflects the empirical relationship between the material world and the sphere of social symbolism. What is tangibly created constitutes symbolic worth, and, as the modern refugee crisis has unfolded in today's world, cultural cityscapes are producing an inherent commentary on the sociopolitical dynamics of metropolises across the globe. In Germany, this dynamic is encompassed under the looming implication of the modern refugee crisis. For example, Rocco und seine Brüder is an artist collective that has created displays of

street art highlighting the inconsistencies of Germany's refugee reception, even taking to hanging a mannequin off the end of a crane to symbolize the battles plaguing forced migrants. Furthermore, the aforementioned popular street artist Banksy is funding safer nautical transportation for refugees traveling by sea (Berlin, 2020). Street art is being utilized as a discursive tool of creative expression amid the modern refugee crisis.

Asylum accommodation and refugee integration have become increasingly prominent amongst political, civil, and artistic debates within Germany, instigating a variety of responses from both the German public and government. Many of these reactions have been expressed through spatial representation and creative expression, such as the examples from the world of street art as previously mentioned. The following section explores the Grandhotel Cosmopolis as a rhetorical artifact that cultivates creative expression in response to the modern refugee crisis.

### **Exploring the Rhetorical "Cosmopolis"**

The Grandhotel Cosmopolis (GHC) is a specific artifact that culminates spatial and artistic representation as a rhetorical response to the refugee crisis. Located in Augsburg, Germany, the GHC combines accommodation for asylum seekers, a hotel, restaurant, and cafe all within a single, artistic space (Zill et al, 2020). The artists who designed and initiated the Grandhotel Cosmopolis aimed to create a local hub for cultural events and artistic activities while, also, providing the Bavarian government with yet another collective accommodation center to rehome the ever-growing number of asylum seekers searching for refuge within southern Germany (Wüdsch, 2016). The GHC's fundamental intention is to connect varying levels of talents and interests in a positive manner while meeting the prominent social issue of accommodating thousands of refugees.

The Grandhotel Cosmopolis serves to continuously perpetuate a “social sculpture” in the heart of Augsburg, an ode to the theory originated by Joseph Beuys during the Fluxus artistic movement. The concept of a social sculpture is based on the idea that people develop new social structures through thinking, acting, and communicating, both on an independent and collective level (Grandhotel, 2012). Beuys believed that within every human being, the creative being exists, and the Grandhotel Cosmopolis deems its core values of freedom, personal responsibility, and solidarity as testaments to Beuys expansive concepts on art and society (Grandhotel, 2012). It is within the simple dedication towards inclusion and understanding that guides the Grandhotel Cosmopolis in both its social action and artistic endeavors.

Cultivating a safe place for understanding and opportunities for connectivity are largely successful tools of the Grand Hotel Cosmopolis in correcting the dominant frame of reference in which forced migrants are viewed. Perhaps the most significant attribute of the GHC, however, is its commitment to transcending the confines of borders and to uniting diverse bodies through creative expression. The GHC writes of this fundamental view:

If we want to avoid living in a future society in which we reside in districts that are ever more strictly separated, where we are surrounded only by people like ourselves, and instead create an open society that is open to dialogue beyond the borders of social, cultural, and religious milieus, we then have to provide space for this communication.

(Grandhotel, 2012)

There must be space for the cultural exchange between native Germans and asylum seekers to transpire; no collective change of consciousness can occur without a mediated space for discourse. The communication it takes to foster understanding cannot occur until it is represented and produced in the material world. As Marx notes, it is the material conditions surrounding

existence that influence individual human consciousness (Marx, 1974). By dedicating the space for interactions and conversations between natives, refugees, and travelers, alike, the Grandhotel Cosmopolis is shaping the material world of categorization and, therefore, creating a shift in the conscious conceptions of forced migrants.

### **The Cosmopolis and the Production of Urban Space**

The Grandhotel Cosmopolis rhetorically functions further than its material establishment as previously mentioned. The structural design of the building and its spatial positioning are also fundamental aspects of the GHC's rhetorical presence as it symbolically reconceptualizes space in the social world. The material organization of this space instigates social reactions within the hotel itself and the urban cityscape of Augsburg. In order to explore this notion further, I utilized Henri Lefebvre's approaches from *The Production of Space* in which a relational conceptualization of space as a social production is posed. Lefebvre argues that space is produced based on social worth and the symbolic meanings derived thereof (Lefebvre, 1991). Space is a social product that influences the practices, perceptions, and dynamics of any specific social world; the urban cityscape is not a neutral container, but rather, a value-laden social product.

The production of space entails three distinct yet interconnected dimensions of space that are socially created and curated based on power relations. These elements are namely spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space (Lefebvre, 1991). Spatial practice refers to how society interacts within a spatial framework, defining the social characteristics of a given setting. This dimension includes the material construction of urban areas as well as the developmental practices that maintain the pre-existing power dynamics of the social world

within the physicality of the cityscape (Lefebvre, 1991). It is the landscape perpetuated by hegemonic routine and the space that which humans can readily perceive; it is the lived space, “the physical city, its maintenance, redevelopment, and the daily routines of everyday life” (Leary-Owhin, 2015).

Furthermore, representations of space are conceptualized based on the ways in which a given space is tied to relations of production (Lefebvre, 1991). This dimension operates within the construction of a system of space. It is illustrated through dominant representations of conceived space such as maps, urban development designs, and zoning plans. Representations of space are the organizational constructions of cityscapes established and sustained by hegemonic institutions of power (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre’s final dimension is representational space. Representational space is then the symbolic layering of the physical space and the space that is lived by its citizens. It encompasses the inhabited space and the associated cultural characteristics symbolized within the said landscape (Lefebvre, 1991). This is the realm in which meaning is derived from the interactions between humans and the physical space of any given social world. Representational space is the imagined space of the cityscape as portrayed in the creative interpretations and artistic representations of urban space (Lefebvre, 1991). It is a culmination of physical space and social value that often counteracts the dominant representations of space.

Using Lefebvre’s spatial triad, the rhetorical essence of the Grandhotel Cosmopolis is significantly complexed as “asylum accommodation is more than a material object that is reacted to; asylum accommodation is also a spatial practice that shapes and is shaped by a multitude of local, regional and national actors, by local residents as much as asylum seekers” (Zill et al, 2020). To establish its spatial practice, the physical construct, location, and history of the GHC

are necessitated for analysis. The actual building of the Grandhotel Cosmopolis was previously a living facility for elderly care after the Second World War and is still owned by the Diakonie, a charity organization of the Protestant church (Grandhotel, 2012). The building had been vacant for years before local artists and activists began renovating it with hopes of achieving the GHC planners' vision of a cultural co-operative. It now resembles a classic, ornate rendition of a lavish hotel from the early twentieth century and can accommodate 56 asylum seekers and 44 hotel guests, in addition to the 18 artists' studios located on-site (Zill et al, 2020). The GHC has conventionally transformed the once-abandoned building into a thriving hub of cultural exchange and creative expression.

Additionally, the GHC is located in the historic part of Augsburg's known as the inner-city district (Zill et al, 2020). This district is also home to communal city squares such as the *Rathausplatz* and is located near the Dom cathedral. The residence of the Augsburg Bishop resides nearby, surrounded by numerous care facilities of the church (Grandhotel, 2012). Yet in the center of a locale laden with traditional legacy and religious heritages is where the GHC lies, an establishment that welcomes social innovation, cultural integration, and international cohesion. In this representation of space, the Grandhotel Cosmopolis is an anomaly amid a historical landscape, creating a cultural and rhetorical disruption of space as "the Grandhotel Cosmopolis is a concrete utopia – realizing a cosmopolitan everyday culture without limits where refugees, travelers, guests, artists, and neighbors meet and are welcome" (Heber et al, 2011). The building serves as a disturbance to dominate social normalcies and amongst the contested history of belonging within the cityscape.

The Grandhotel Cosmopolis provides a unified space that combines accommodation for asylum seekers, a hotel, restaurant, café, and creative studios all under one roof (Zill et al, 2020).



Its construction integrates diverse practices and varying routines within a specifically curated physical space, one that is artistically expressive. In addition to the elaborate architecture, the GHC's very name consciously intends to steer "visitors on a glamorous and 'elitist' wrong track" through the allusion of a grand hotel (Grandhotel, 2012). The multifaceted features of an accommodation center, hotel, and studio space are meant to counter the classist rendition of a grand hotel. It is also an intentional initiative to further portray refugee accommodation in a more approachable rendition as: "This reinterpretation is meant to send a strong initial signal for an institution that is currently considered to be a burden and a disruptive factor" (Grandhotel, 2012). Its representational space serves as an act of dissent against dominant ideologies that oppress forced migrants.

As the modern refugee crisis has unfolded in today's world, cultural cityscapes are producing an inherent commentary on the sociopolitical dynamics of metropolises across the globe. Germany has received an influx of forced migrants amid this humanitarian crisis, creating a symbolic and tangible struggle between the residuary of the country's stark past and the looming negotiation of its present standings. The Grandhotel Cosmopolis is not only a rhetorical counter-response to the modern refugee crisis, but it embodies space as social production and contests the material conditions of borders and belonging. Through a Marxist approach of materialism and under the lens of Lefebvre's concept of space as a social product, the GHC serves as an embodiment of contested belonging and spatial representation in the discourse of the modern refugee crisis.

## **Conclusion**

In the Spring of 2019, I studied abroad in Berlin, Germany and became surrounded by a country

that was struggling to balance the weight of its own past, the struggle of its true cultural identity, and the unforeseen implications of rehoming millions of scared and frustrated forced migrants in the wake of global upheaval. It was in Germany that I crafted a personal awareness of the modern refugee crisis. I began listening to these people and their stories of unceasing persecution and tragic tribulations while surrounded by the looming portrayals of historical calamity. Both of these public spheres were portrayed within the cityscape, and these material representations of past and present others conveyed the power dynamics of the modern social world.

Global society currently operates in a state of fear, a collective sense of distress towards the unknown, and a prominent apprehension to differences seen and unforeseen. We have become hesitant to connect the dots of the larger picture and, instead, focus on the dissonance between ourselves and the rest of the world. Throughout history, the ideology of ‘Othering’ has taken precedence in our capacity to connect with people outside of our home borders. The residuality of this otherness is represented in the material cityscape; it is in the space of the urban streets where belonging is contested. Public street art serves as a culmination of spatial representation, social commentary, and creative expressions of belonging.

The layers of history evoked within the German streets; the commemoration of persecuted others; the mediated expressions of socially ignored out-groups; are constitutively shaping the receptive responses of the modern refugee crisis. Associated discrepancies in the material world inherently create symbolic classifications of the social world, and the manifestations of this otherness are represented in the aesthetic production of urban space. Yet in Berlin, the residuality of historical others is tangibly encapsulated within its very streets as modern processes of othering continue to transpire. The cityscape is a constant mirror between the past and the future as the cyclical dynamics of social power yet again prevail.

## Notes

This thesis serves as the intersection of my experiences abroad, the fundamental social theories and rhetorical concepts of my academic career, and my inherently curious passion for culture and social relations. It is a culmination of all three of my undergraduate areas of study -- German, Critical Communication and Media Studies, and Organizational Communication, hence where my inspiration and passion for this project came from. Because this project is rooted in German culture, it is a particularly good fit for my German major. My two other majors, however, are applicable to this project as well. These disciplines prompt scholarship to focus on the “people” side of things, to put it simply; the field analyzes the culmination of effects in society where media and the output flow of communication are used so that current states of societal trends and transmissions can be better understood and perhaps predicted, whether that be across mediums, across cultures, or across time.

As a side note, it is unfortunate that, due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to participate in the Butler Summer Institute since it had been canceled. My project was accepted, and I had hoped to conduct additional research over the summer of 2020 during this scholarship program. However, my thesis also stems from another humanities-based research project titled, “Street Art and Subvertising in Berlin – Exploring Art’s Dirty Doubles.” It was accepted by the Midwest Pop Culture Association/American Culture Association and then later presented at the corresponding academic conference in October of 2019.

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