**Does Matter Count? Site Specificity vs. Posthumanist Perspectives on Uncommissioned Street Art**

**Abstract**

While the term "site specificity" applies to a myriad of artistic practices, the question remains: Does site specificity offer the most appropriate theoretical framework for an in-depth understanding of the complexities of making visual art in "open air." The study of uncommissioned street art provides the opportunity to answer this question through a comparison of two perspectives – site specificity and a posthuman approach. The latter approach takes into account both the human and non-human factors that come together in the making of street art. I argue that only by taking a posthuman approach, and giving equal consideration to the human and non-human elements of an artistic practice, can one truly understand not only street art, but visual art in general.

**Introduction**

Physical objects, resources, and spaces have always been an essential part of visual artists' practices, though their role has been overshadowed by the humanistic tradition since the Renaissance. The humanistic perspective was reinforced with the emergence of the habitus of the charismatic artist at the beginning of the 19th Century (Bourdieu, 1993). Even my own studies of the social aspects of artistic practices have been largely focused on how human interactions produce objects of art. As my research on uncommissioned street art progressed, however, the presence of non-humans actors became more and more evident, such that ultimately, I could no longer ignore them.

Artwork has long been considered the result of human imagination, inventiveness, and often, brilliance. If one accepts that artistic surfaces - wood, walls, or canvas – have always been flat, then it is true that an artist's work is always the result of the combination of the flat material and human invention, creating an illusion of tridimensional space and volume. This begs the question: Should the analysis of art in general, and of uncommissioned street art in particular, include the material on which that art is made?

The question can be considered through various theoretical and empirical lenses. The one that seems to best suit the process is "site specificity," a concept that has gained popularity over the past two decades. In the late twentieth century, site specificity referred to a situation where a work of art was designed for a specific location, and had a relationship with that location. In the early part of this century, however, Miwon Kwon (2002) noted that since the 1970s, site specificity's paradigm has moved away from literal interpretations of the word ‘site.’

## At the same time, sociology, anthropology, criminology, and cultural studies were becoming more focused on urban culture, particularly graffiti and street art. These disciplines began to discuss definitions and classifications of graffiti and street art (Lewinsohn, 2008; Schacter, 2017), and to examine the appropriation of street art by capitalist markets (Brighenti, 2017), as well as the legal aspects of the practice (Ross, 2013; Young, 2014). Researchers in the fields of art history and theory, and in the social sciences, problematized existing definitions of art made in public space, though the role of non-human agents in this type of art remained unexamined for the most part. I contend that a thorough and systematic assessment of the relationship between humans and non-humans with regard to the making of art can broaden our comprehension of both the socio-political conditions that serve as a basis for the creation of art, and the aesthetics characteristics of the artistic practice.

An assessment of this type must begin with a radicalized version of the symmetry principle for human actions and non-human materials (Latour, 1993; Law, 2009; Farias and Bender, 2011) – a Posthuman outlook. This term has become, over the past several decades, an umbrella term that refers to various movements and schools of thought. A growing body of social theory has developed around concepts that attempt to make sense of this blurring of boundaries and to introduce hybrid, non-binary, relational modes of thinking. Among the schools of thought that fall under this Posthuman umbrella are: the feminist theory (Haraway, 2000; Fausto-Sterling, 2005; Frost, 2011; Braidotti, 2013); urbanism and geography (Thrift, 2011; Cvetinovic, Nedovic-Budic and Jean-Claude Bolaya, 2017); sociology (Smith and Jenks, 2018; Michael, 2017; Law, 2009; Latour 2005; Callon, 1999); design (Colomina and Wigley, 2017); communication studies (Bolter, 2016 ); and object-oriented philosophy (Bogost, 2012; Harman, 2005). Although these movements and schools of thoughts often have diverging outlooks and philosophies, they all agree that taking into account non-human elements is critical to the future of 21st century studies in the arts, humanities, and social sciences (Ferrando, 2013).

While many scholars in a wide range of fields have contributed to the rich discussion involving posthuman theories, there are those who question this new theoretical framing, and its potential application in the field of visual arts (Elder-Vass, 2015; Jerolmack and Tavory, 2014). This article does not, however, offer a comprehensive literature review of the extensive scholarly work related to the posthuman approach, which would require a much longer discussion. Instead it highlights the importance of analyzing visual arts practices via a hybrid mode of thinking.

My argument that non-human factors should be taken into account when analyzing artistic practices does not necessarily imply a positivistic perspective. I do not propose that researchers search for detectable regularities, “positive” data that would allow us to infer knowledge about general rules in the artistic world. I do contend, however, that there is empirical evidence to suggest that artistic (and social) practices are derived from a variable and intricate mix of human and non-human elements, which together, create art.

According to Lewinsohn, there is a good deal of crossover between the genres made in the street, even though each one is distinct in its own right. Despite these differences, this article refers to all art forms performed in the street without permission as street art. The benefit of the term is that it is narrow enough to discard other artistic practices that do not fall into this specific category (2008).

This article begins by explaining why site-specific art theories fail to truly recognize non-humans as actors. The advantages of non-binary approaches to the study of street art are introduced. Israeli case studies are then put forth in order to demonstrate the advantages of looking at this type of art through various lenses. This article seeks to move beyond an intersubjective and constructivist perspective, to one that recognizes how human and non-human agencies collaborate in the making of visual arts.

**The vulnerability of site specificity**

Since the late 1970s, the term 'site specificity' has spread throughout different cultural worlds. Today, it applies to a variety of creative areas, such as visual arts (Yuen, 2017), sound art (Pardo, 2017), theater (Birch and [Tompkins](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref%3Ddp_byline_sr_book_2?ie=UTF8&text=J.+Tompkins&search-alias=books&field-author=J.+Tompkins&sort=relevancerank) , 2012), dance (Hunter, 2015), and television production (Morgan Parmett, 2018).

Miwon Kwon (2002) suggested that it is possible to identify three paradigms relating to artists’ relationships with ‘sites’ and to debates on site specificity: the phenomenological model, the social/institutional model, and the discursive model. According to Kwon, these paradigms overlap with one another and operate simultaneously in various cultural practices, and sometimes even within an artist’s single project. In this sense, the “operative definition of the site has been transformed from a physical location – grounded, fixed, actual – to a discursive vector – ungrounded, fluid, virtual” (28-30).

As the term gained popularity, theoreticians and practitioners began to problematize the definition of site specificity (David Nash interviewed by Grande, 2001; Banai, 2002; 58 Rowe, 2004:6). Ultimately, the term became so prevalent that it has become virtually meaningless within the context of non-studio art. Still, site specificity continues to be considered both an operating logic for artistic practices and its analytical explanation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Ruth Simbao (2016) builds upon Miwon Kwon’s discursive paradigm, which defines a site not only as a physical space, but also a field of knowledge. Simbao coins the term 'radical recognition,' which, she explains, "is not just an act of recalling something that is already known, but is a re-learning in which the ‘original’ known can never be exactly recalled" (2016: 9).

Despite the differences between current definitions of site specificity, almost all of the definitions stress the process of human interpretation and reinterpretation of the artistic practice. Non-human elements of artistic practices are considered only with regard to the meaning assigned to them, and how this meaning is challenged. It is in this regard that Chypher argues, "[non-humans] are employed more as resources to be utilized towards an outcome that is heavily invested in the artist’s intentionality, intuition and interpretation" (2017).

**In favor of a posthumanist standpoint in the visual arts**

There is tremendous difficulty in pinpointing the precise point in which the line is crossed between human and non-human elements in an artistic practice. When W and Z[[2]](#footnote-2) took on their first street art project in Jerusalem, their intention was to change the city's illuminated street name signs. Not, explains W, to erase the name of the street. "We just wanted to add another layer, to give it a new significance." They experimented extensively with the signs and the materials, to determine what colors they should use, as well as the final design. "It looks simple; it's a box with two protruding screws. Inside the box there is a removable piece of Plexiglas, but when you open it you realize that it's really dirty, so you first have to clean it." The project required a true collaboration between the human element – the artists - and the non-human principles of optics, as well as the other physical agents.

Posthumanism is a term that applies to a range of contemporary theoretical positions put forward by researchers with disciplinary backgrounds in philosophy, science and technology, literary studies, critical theory, theoretical sociology, and communications. For them, posthumanism represents a series of breaks with foundational assumptions of modern Western culture. It offers a new way of understanding the human subject in relation to the natural world in general. It is in this regard that posthumanist theories claim to offer a new epistemology that is not anthropocentric, and therefore not centered in Cartesian dualism. It seeks to undermine the traditional boundaries between the human and non-human animal, biological organisms and machines, the physical and the non-physical realm (Bolter, 2016; Law, 2009; Latour 2005; Haraway, 2000). This non-dualistic and decentered conception of the social leads to a multilayered appreciation of reality that is as comprehensive and inclusive as possible.

This paper does not try to follow one specific posthumanist theory step by step. Rather, the purpose is to show the advantages of thinking about art through a non-dualistic perspective. That said, one should acknowledge that for the purpose of analyzing social processes, one of the most helpful posthumanist perspectives is the actor-network theory: a diverse family of analysis methods that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as continuously generated effects of the webs of relations within which they are located (Latour, 2005; Cerulo, 2009; Law, 2009). In doing so, this approach draws attention to the disparate components that make up the social crisscross, as well as to the different constituents that compose the artistic phenomena.

**What is involved in uncommissioned street art networks?**

Researching street art made without permission is wrought with challenges. It is a heterogeneous world that includes many aesthetic styles; in addition, secrecy is one of its salient characteristics, due to the fact that it is only marginally legal. This article is based on a study of 25 male and female street artists working in three major cities in Israel. All of the artists generously agreed to participate in it. At the time the research was conducted, they were 20-28 years old. One of the artists noted during a conversation: "Yesterday at Lalo's store, we were just talking about who we are. We came to the conclusion that we are all good guys."

The data was collected from a variety of sources.[[3]](#footnote-3) Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant. The artists gave me access to their black books (sketch notebooks), allowing me to appreciate not only their own work but also the works of their peers. Some of them also permitted me to visit their studios. Other sources were: the Capzule gallery and store in Tel Aviv, which sells graffiti sprays and other equipment, the Broken Fingaz Crew’s store in Haifa, clandestine exhibitions, exhibitions held in galleries specializing in urban art, the artists’ personal websites, and reviews published in local magazines.

Uncommissioned street art involves multiple relationships between a multitude of entities, while also linking local urban realities and transnational cultural, social, and political forces. Street art research must be spatially and temporally adapted to global artistic flows, as well as to local socio-political constructs and cultural identities.

Bearing in mind that actor-network explanations need a defined context (Farías and Bender, 2011), it can be said that since the beginning of the 2000s, the popularity of street art has spread relatively quickly in Israel's three main cities: Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem. Although, street art was also present in Israel before the turn of the century, international and transnational flows have played a central role on the flourishing of the practice in Israel. The international flow brought neoliberal policies (Maman, 2017), while the transnational flow carried with it both new artistic ideas and anti-neoliberal ideologies (Yulia Shevchenko & Sara Helman, 2017).

These flows met a State that facilitates the entrenchment of neoliberal interests, and a local political and economic leadership eager to increase these actions (Maron and Shalev, 2017). It was these factors, in a society split into ethnic and national groups, with a growing local civil society, which made up the setting within which street art has prospered. The last 30 years have witnessed forces that contest the symbolic and institutional contours and boundaries of the State of Israel. These diverse struggles – religious, national, gender-based, economic, and ethnic – are about equality, recognition, and redefining the collective (Ben-Porat and Turner, 2011; Shafir and Peled 2002). They are manifested in the growing political and public activism of different socio-cultural sectors in Israel: the second and third generations of Jews who arrived in the 1950s from Arab countries, Palestinian Israelis, the feminist and LGBT movements, immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and more recently, second-generation Ethiopian Jewish immigrants (Ben-Eliezer, 2015).

The cities of Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem are venues (natural or urban territories) with material constitutional elements (built environment, urban structures, etc.), wherein a variety of human artistic actors collaborate with non-humans actors. The latter are an assortment of disparate forces: legal regulations, corporations, ideologies, gender, city planning and policies, weather, painting materials, the Internet, books, magazines, and urban surfaces (walls, pipes, poles, street ads, billboards, electrical boxes, sidewalks, pavements). All of these non-human actors have potential roles in artistic actions.

Based on a content analysis of research, as well as legislative, operational, and media data, it is clear that only through certain figurations in networks are certain elements able to take on the role of an actor; in other words, what Callon defines as translation (1999: 185), a network which configures ontologies. As in other areas of social action, it is difficult to differentiate between why the agents get involved in the action, and what exactly they do. The differentiation between them is an analytical construct that allows us to deepen our understanding of the social being.

**Why make street art?**

Uncommissioned street art can be seen as part of a rapidly growing phenomenon in Israel and elsewhere: Artists engaging in timely issues by moving their art beyond the safe confines of the studio, into the unpredictable public space (Schacter, 2013).

The rise of a powerful neoliberal economic order has led to an alliance between creative economies and the art world, encouraging a mixture of art and capitalism (Kester, 2011; Sholette, 2010). In contrast, post-studio artists seek to promote communal activism and awareness of pressing social issues. They aim to restore collective social engagement in a shared space (Bishop, 2012; Ferrell, 2016).

Since the 1970s, a variety of practices that put forward the concept of communal ownership of public space have emerged, beginning with graffiti, American muralism,[[4]](#footnote-4) social justice, and community art. Other artistic forms soon gained popularity, among them relational aesthetics, social practice (art), and most recently, ‘artivism.’[[5]](#footnote-5) These practices offer a different articulation of modern art, highlighting the capacity of aesthetic experiences to transform our perceptions, and to challenge cognitive, social, or political conventions (Kester, 2011; Thompson, 2012).

Graffiti has been defined as both a socio-political dialogue and a confrontational gesture (Krause Knight, 2008). In fact, this applies to all styles of uncommissioned street art, which share similar cultural, social, and political aims (McCormick, 2010). The artists interviewed for this study revealed awareness of their political agency and the potential political impact of their work. Sag/Segan,[[6]](#footnote-6) who moved to Jerusalem to study at the Hebrew University, explains this further:

Although I'd done street art before, my university studies brought me closer to situations I did not understand… The university is directly across from Sheikh Jarrah.[[7]](#footnote-7) How can you be indifferent to that? In general, Jerusalem is full of poor people, addicts… You can close your eyes to it all, but indifference is something I don't want to be part of. […] I joined political activist groups and continued doing art in the streets. These are different channels of action that share an understanding that behind the laws are biased interests.

Sag/Sgan's testimony suggests his ideological and artistic commitments are based on a network of human and non-human components. While he does not live in Sheikh Jarrah, he sees Sheikh Jarrah's urban landscape, topography, and buildings. He may walk in the streets of the neighborhood, but his knowledge about the property disputes comes from newspapers, websites, tv news, and documentary films – materials that offer explanations about what happens in occupied East Jerusalem or on the other side of the Green Line. These non-human elements shape both his politics and his artwork just as much as human ones. In other words, his consciousness is the result of a variety of equal forces that have an impact upon him.

**Basic Foundations of Street Art**

Uncommissioned street art in Israel is largely the result of three basic foundations: the demarketization of urban public space, the democratization of art, and the. All of these are made up of mixed collaboration.

**Demarketization of Urban Public Space**: Neoliberal economics and the appropriation of public space by the capitalist economy have not eluded Israeli public space (Maman 2017; Swirski et al., 2014; Ram, 2008). Often, this appropriation is presented as being for the public benefit, while, in fact, it results in gentrification, privatization, and marginalization of minorities, which can further aggravate the harm inflicted by social and economic asymmetry (Raunig, 2007). In recent years, neoliberal forces have reincarnated their ideologies into a new type of policy, with similar results: ‘global cities makeovers,’ designed to attract global capital while allowing for the displacement of communities repelled by capital accumulation.[[8]](#footnote-8) (Curran and Breitbach, 2010).

The emergence of uncommissioned street art in Israel can be seen as a dialectical, transnational argument against this strong neoliberal tide. Israeli street artists are reclaiming public space, which, in their eyes, has been colonized by big corporations. *Klone***[[9]](#footnote-9)** sees his work as an antidote to advertising pollution:

If I could, I'd paint on many more billboards. It bothers me that they want to force us to buy things. Buy this and buy that, buy, buy, buy! And all without asking my permission. My work is composed of images that don't market anything. They’re not advertising posters or commercials or marketing films. Viewers can be indifferent to my work, but if they do notice it, they might say: 'Wow! A picture that doesn't sell anything,' and then start thinking about the situation.

Billboards, street advertisements, and other such uses of public space that prompt this type of street art often involve many non-human elements. It certainly begins with a network of artists, but other major elements include: a growing number of surfaces that bother them, urban policies, national regulations, and an audience that may or may not see and appreciate the works of art.

A street artist's first interaction might be with a massive billboard; they may be irritated by its conspicuous size and prominent placement, as well as by the copy written on it. The advertising is there because it is legally permissible: a type of regulation that comes along with a growing marketization of the public space induced by Neoliberal policies. This space, in a street artist's mind, can be "rescued" by art that directly confronts issues of social justice.In other words, non-humans motivate the artistic action; therefore they are social actors. In Latour’s words, "Anything that modifies a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor" (2005:71). Aside from the commercialization of the public space, a variety of public policies, regulations, and socio-cultural barriers take part in the configuration of the artistic practice. One of the most salient elements of this practice is what the artists themselves have defined as the beautification of poor neighborhoods.

**Democratization of art**: In a democracy, assets like art are meant to be open to the people. In reality, however, a substantial amount of art is still inaccessible. Art in outdoor locations, infused with social criticism, challenges the conventionaldivision between public and private space (Douglas, 2006).

Israeli street artists say they see the streets as an open gallery that allows them to communicate with the common people, and to give those people free access to art. As *Know Hope*[[10]](#footnote-10) puts it:

At some point, I understood that I could make my work on the street, a common ground where the people are and where you become part of a collective. For me, that means having an ongoing conversation with my surroundings. Accessibility has become one of the most important factors of my work in the streets.

An interesting mix of actors plays a role in the network that makes up *Know Hope's* surroundings: aesthetic ideology (artistic style), political ideology (democratization and demarketization), inequality in municipal services (marginalized and largely neglected neighborhoods), unattended and dull buildings, a potential audience, and legal restrictions. The existence of these elements in one area, in essence, are what prompt *Know Hope* to take action to beautify the city, in her eyes, by producing art.

*Segan* agrees that street art is about adding beauty to the neighborhood. “Here was a plain grey wall, a boring wall. Now it’s a colorful wall with a life of its own. It makes walking through the street more enjoyable.”

Beautification is also an anti-urban alienation act. In the eyes of the artists, making art for everyone restores the human communication silenced by powerful capitalist forces. “Anybody can look at street art and enjoy it,” explains *Sonic Boom.*[[11]](#footnote-11) “Homeless people, a 60-year-old, an immigrant who doesn't understand Hebrew.” All these individuals, who do not have day-to-day interaction with *Sonic Boom*, make up a non-human construct defined as her audience.

**Red lines logic**: There is a consensus of sorts among street artists regarding the question of where they should not work. They agree, for example, not to create street art on private property. On one hand, rules such as this clarify the limits of the artistic networks. On the other hand, they emphasize the political logic of the networks. Obviously, this consensus is the result of conversations and common elaborations between the human actors, but it also involves additional, non-human actors.

The agreed-upon rule to ‘not mess with private property’ seemingly conflicts to at least some extent with the artists' battle against the appropriation of public space. However, the artists we interviewed noted that the rule applies only to the assets of ‘ordinary’ citizens. Thus, although the accepted definition of private property extends to property owned by legal entities, which may include corporations, Israeli street artists do not necessarily see the property of corporations as off-limits. Spray painting the property of a private individual, however, is deemed ‘offensive.’ In fact, it would actually have the opposite effect of most street artists' intention to establish new channels of communication with ‘ordinary’ people.

Some Israeli street artists have created additional restrictions for themselves. *Klone*, for example, explains that aside from not painting “on someone’s clean door"… I don't spray on synagogues, churches, or mosques.” *Sgan* has his own red lines: “I don't spray on living creatures or plants. I don't spray on other people’s property, except for graffiti created by others, which is in line with the rules.” Israeli street artists also avoid small shop windows, so as not to harm the income of ‘ordinary’ people.

From a constructivist perspective, it seems artists decide on their own which surfaces they prefer to paint. On the other hand, one might say that the surfaces are a priori classified in categories that are not related to the artists, yet are respected by them. Thus, for example, the artists do not consider a religious institution or an individual's property fair game, and they are, in essence, allowing non-human actors to determine the conditions of their artistic practice.

Many of the artists also actively avoid making art in affluent neighborhoods. *Aefo[[12]](#footnote-12)* explains: “I don't go into [wealthy neighborhoods like] Ramat Aviv or Denya. I don't want to give [the residents of these neighborhoods] the opportunity to establish any relationship with my art, for good or for bad. They are definitely not my audience.” The exclusion of wealthy neighborhoods is consistent with the logic of the practice of street art, since at least one segment of the artists' intended audience are those who do not have access to established art.

The exclusion of wealthy areas also signifies the artists' opposition to the creation of artistic networks, both human and non-human, that would generate both interactions with artists as well as works of art in these neighborhoods.

**How is street art created?**

Throughout the interviews with the street artists, it became clear that their entire networks of both human and non-human actors are potential actants in their work. These include the surfaces on which they work, the legal and regulatory frameworks that compel their work, their human relationships (which have changed as a result of the Internet), and more.

Street art made at night is a general category that includes a variety of artistic practices. Those who make this art compete with each other for work areas. This can lead to human rivalries, as well as to entanglements between humans and three non-human entities: the surface (to be painted), space, and regulatory restrictions.

Since street art is usually on the edge of legality (Ross, 2013; Young, 2014), some of the salient aspects of the activity are shaped by the regulatory framework: artists (humans) go out to paint late at night because of the legal regulations (non-human). The illegality actant not only determines the time of the activity, but also affects the associated human relationships.

Street art is mostly a group activity. One might think that artists choose to work with those with whom they have an artistic affinity and common artistic goals. These elements, however, are not enough; the loyalty component is also a major factor. Street artists want to be sure they can trust their partners if a police officer or a municipal inspector shows up. As *Robat[[13]](#footnote-13)* noted, "I prefer painting with someone I can trust to make the right decisions. When I'm alone, I start feeling paranoid." Many artists feel the same way, even though they can go months, or even years, without coming into contact with any enforcement authorities.

# For many female street artists, the insecurity of the street at night is another non-human actor. These women not only face the restrictions of the law (which men face as well), but also, the restraints historically imposed upon women in urban spaces at night. Nighttime is perceived as synonymous with danger (Condon et al., 2007; Sweet and Ortiz Escalante, 2015). The fear they feel stems not only from actual danger, but also from a socially-constructed feeling that has been internalized by women (Day, 2001). This fear leads to two different results, both of which characterize women’s initiation into the practice of street art: self-confinement and the way they practice their art.

# It can take some women as long as one full year before they are prepared to go out to work in situ. This self-confinement is often a result of their fear of the street and the night. Additionally, although most of them admitted that they would prefer to go out alone or with female partners, some nevertheless go out with male artists in order to reduce their concern about a violent incident, and the likelihood of becoming a victim to one.

The way females practice street art is often connected to both location and time. They tend to paint quickly, so that they can finish their work before getting caught. The fact that they are outside also has an impact on their work. Masha explained, for example, that stenciling is more complicated than she thought it would be. “If it's windy you cannot manage to draw a precise line. If the stencil is made from several layers and you are alone, it is really frustrating." Masha's description demonstrates the array of forces involved in her practice, and how influential the non-human forces are in that practice. These include: the weather, the kind of paint used, the surface, and the stencil board.

In other words, the objects involved in street art are crucial to its execution. The final work depends on both the proficiency of the artists as well as inanimate objects such as the type of cap on his or her spray can. Keos[[14]](#footnote-14) began painting when she was in high school in the early 2000s, and at that time it was almost impossible for her to obtain the special aerosol caps needed for street art. "I used to take my mother's deodorant caps and return them covered with paint. That always drove her crazy!"

The non-human components of street art actually influenced the decision of many artists we interviewed to begin the artistic practice. For some, it was the discovery of other works of street art during visits abroad. Sgan explained: “When I was seventeen I liked to draw characters very much… a year later I visited New York with my grandmother, where I saw a lot of things. It was New York of the first decade of the twenty-first century, so a lot of things had disappeared by then, but I could appreciate the Williamsburg artistic scene and the work of many "bombers," all which really influenced me." Masha first saw street art when she discovered Bansky’s work while an art student in London. "I really fell in love with this art, especially with Banksy's work. I started to plan what I would do immediately after returning to Israel."

*Klone* learned about street art for the first time in a magazine, and then started searching for more information on the Internet. Israeli street artists still read the now-online versions of journals such as *Juxtapoz Magazine*, *StyleFile Graffiti Magazine*, and *Graphotism Magazine*.

The Internet, in fact, has become one of the main sources of knowledge for potential and practicing street artists in Israel.[[15]](#footnote-15) Indeed, as *Robat* has pointed out, "We must continually update our knowledge; we need to know what is going on in other places." As with other social dimensions, the Internet allows users to travel through time and space, and thus to extend their knowledge and their social networks (Harvey, 1991; Castells, 1999; Castells, 2009; Sassen, 2012).

**Digital agency**

The development of web-based applications has certainly strengthened the materiality of the digital age (Bolter, 2016: 6-7), which plays a decisive role in many aspects of street art. This is particularly true for three main aspects of the practice: the enduringness of the work of art itself, the association between artist and work of art, and the dissemination of the practice. (Indeed, the digital revolution affects almost all visual art practices, but is particularly relevant to street art.)

In the past, the evanescenceof uncommissioned street art was taken for granted as a fact. While photographs of street art were sometimes reproduced in a printed journal or book, and videos might be recorded for a documentary film, there were not many of these photos or videos, and the books and films that included them were not particularly accessible to the general public.

During the last 20 years, however, the Internet has become a central repository for numerous images of street art. This has stimulated two parallel and interesting outgrowths: On one hand, it accelerated a rupture of sorts between the human artists and the objects they created. These creations became free objects of appreciation that could be enjoyed by anyone, anywhere. These include not only works of arts, but also artistic manifestos and countless videos that teach the skills of street art. These materials can be converted into tangible works of art through a sequence of steps that go from material-to-human-to-material; all these elements must be present in order to generate a work of art through this process. On the other hand, deterritorialization (Giddens, 1990; Tomlinson, 1999; Eriksen, 2014) has allowed for virtual encounters between people in remote locations around the world, and has encouraged global networks of artistic production (MacDowall and Souza, 2018).

The impact of the digital age can be seen throughout the world of street art. Broken Fingaz Crew's website**[[16]](#footnote-16)** includes 28 links to websites of different types of artists (not only street artists) from Israel and abroad. Mobile applications allow users to be in constant communication with each other as they go about their daily lives, and thus to maintain social relationships rather than feeling displaced (Bolter, 2016: 6-7). Images gain popularity as they are transmitted throughout cyberspace, allowing for an unprecedented dissemination of aesthetic conventions without human regulation. Interestingly, the immense amount of material about street art that can be found online actually contributes to calls for legalization of the practice.

Through the Internet, uncommissioned street art has gained tremendous recognition beyond just the artistic scene over the last decade. In many cities, this type of art has evolved from being considered something that defiles public space to a work of art that beautifies public space. Cities are now proud of their street art, and local councils around the world have arranged special "legal walls" on which artists are allowed to paint. In his analysis of the New York graffiti scene, Snyder explains: "Legal walls [have become] essential to the progression of the art form… many pieces done today are done on legal walls on which writers have been granted permission to paint by the building owner" (2009: 97).

Artists in Portugal, for example, have been granted permission to paint graffiti on the Elevador da Gloria funicular railway line the district .In Israel too, shop owners have allowed, and even commissioned, proficient artists to paint the facades of their stores. Recently, a new form of street art has surged around the world: "walls festivals." These are events organized by independent, local cultural entrepreneurs in an effort to revive an urban area. In most cases, these festivals include street artists, as well as live performances of musicians and theater workers. They might be funded by municipal authorities and building owners. In 2018, walls festivals were held in the Israeli cities of Haifa[[17]](#footnote-17) and Jerusalem.[[18]](#footnote-18) These private initiatives have created an alternative strategic path for influencing a neighborhood's development and forging its global reputation as a creative cluster. The agency and relationships of the human and non-human actors are plotted by association at different layers of decision-making (top-down urban planning, interest-based transformations and bottom-up participatory/urban design activities).

International practices such as "wall festivals" have come to Israel as a result of the Internet. Local promoters have adopted them; thus, the Internet, urban surfaces, artists, and audiences became actants that connected in a variety of ways to create an artistic event with the potential to stabilize an artistic network. That local event itself then was publicized on an Internet site that was accessible to other potential actants throughout the world.

At some point, another potential actor might join the artistic network: influential business stakeholders who want to use their economic and political dominance to buy highly valuable real estate for cheap (Papen, 2015). What in the eyes of investors is an economic opportunity might be, in the eyes of artists and local cultural promoters, a non-human agent [economic capital] that interferes with the already established artistic network. In other words, the operationalization of the economic investment might be a life-changing factor in the artistic collaboration. On what extent a new factor affects existing networks? only after implementing a meticulous empirical research we will able to know.

**Conclusions**

This article is the result of careful observation of uncommissioned street artists. Their stories and the places I've visited with them made it clear to me that "matter matters." It was this understanding that led me to look for an alternative to site specificity, a theory that does not taken into account the significant role non-human elements play in an artistic practice. While human beings remain a key component within the realm of posthumanism, the posthuman approach establishes a new interpretation of social interactions, in which animals, objects, texts, symbols, nature, organizations, events, concepts, inequalities, and geographical arrangements may be significant actors (Callon, 1999; Latour, 1996; Cerulo, 2009; Law, 2009; Farías and Bender, 2011).

The actor-network approach describes the enactment of materially and discursively heterogeneous relations that produce and reshuffle all kinds of actors. This consolidation should not be confused with the lifespan of the artistic network. As in other areas of social and cultural worlds, artistic networks are subject to changes. As I show, actors may arise from different origins: multiple policy levels, technological innovation, a new aesthetic idea, a cultural motivator, or economic investors. And they can disappear in the same manner. We cannot anticipate what kind of effect may generate a change in one or several agents, human or non-human. We must remain perceptive about new actors, i.e. new collaborations, as they may signify a modification in the ontological position of the artistic network.

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1. For example, Kathryn Yuen (2017), Toronto’s Nuit Blanche: Site-Specificity, Spectacle, and Spectatorship. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. W and Z are pseudonyms. Anonymity was assured for each participant, although they gave me permission to disclose their tags. A tag is a street artist’s signature. There are personal tags and also crews' tags. If artists are associated with a crew, they might also include the crew’s name or initials. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The empirical data was collected according to the accepted case study methodology involving multiple sources of information (Creswell 2007: 73-77). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. American muralism was a legal art form that originated during the 1960s in the barrios, i.e., the Spanish-speaking neighborhoods in the U.S., as part of the Chicano movement (Latorre 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Artivism is a new term coined in recent years, meaning the practice of promoting political agendas by means of art. As well as using traditional mediums such as film and music to raise awareness or promote change, artivists may employ [culture jamming](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_jamming) and [street art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Street_art), [spoken word](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spoken_word), [protesting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protesting), and [activism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Activism) (Guerra et al. 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Two variations of the same artist's tag. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Sheikh Jarrah is a [Palestinian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_people) neighborhood in [East Jerusalem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Jerusalem) founded in 1865, which gradually became the residential hub of Jerusalem's Muslim elite, including the [al-Husayni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Husayni) family. After the [1948 Arab-Israeli War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Arab-Israeli_War), it straddled the no-man's land between [Jordanian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan)-held East Jerusalem and [Israeli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel)-held West Jerusalem, until the neighborhood was occupied by Israel in the 1967 [Six-Day War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six-Day_War). It is currently the focus of a number of property and nationalist disputes between Palestinians and Israelis. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Examples of global cities makeovers in Israel: Tel Aviv-Yafo is now known as the "nonstop city" and the "Start-up city," Netanya is the "Israeli Riviera," Holon is the "Children's City." [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Artist's tag. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Artist's tag. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Artist's tag. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Artist's tag. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Artist’s tag [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Artist’s tag [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. According to the Israel Internet Association 87% of Israel's population uses the Internet. <https://en.isoc.org.il/>. Retrieved: [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. https://brokenfingaz.com/category/travelling/ [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. https://www.wallsfestival.com/ [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTwiFquk2Jo [↑](#footnote-ref-18)