



8-1994

## The Embeddedness of Community Cultural Institutions: Wall Art in Social Context

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Stern, Mark J.; Amrofel, Laura; Dyer, Gina; and Wolk, Alison, "The Embeddedness of Community Cultural Institutions: Wall Art in Social Context" (1994). *The Embeddedness of Community Cultural Institutions: Wall Art in Social Context*. 1.

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# The Embeddedness of Community Cultural Institutions: Wall Art in Social Context

## Abstract

This paper uses the findings of a pilot study of wall art in two Philadelphia neighborhoods to examine how community art is embedded in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. During the summer of 1994, three SIAP research assistants—Laura Amrofel, Gina Abrevaya Dyer, and Alison Wolkhung out in the neighborhoods around two wall murals (one in South Philadelphia, one in West Philadelphia), talked to residents, and observed the way the spaces around the murals were used. They found that the impact of the murals on their neighborhoods was connected to the demography and ecology of the community, but not in a simple way, and in fact was more complex than current theories of art and society suggest. The authors concluded that the role of a wall mural could not be separated from its specific community context—a phenomenon they described as "embeddedness."

## Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Place and Environment | Social and Behavioral Sciences

## Comments

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**Working Paper #2**

**The Embeddedness of Community Cultural Institutions: Wall Art in Social Context**

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**Gina Dyer**

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**Social Impact of the Arts Project**

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**In Collaboration with the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance**

**Cathy Coate, Executive Director**

**August 1994**

David Halle's study of the uses of art within American homes, *Inside Culture*, made the point that scholars have opened up a huge gap between theories about the relationship of art and society and their empirical foundation. This paper, we hope, will help close this gap by using a small research project on wall murals in Philadelphia to address the diverse ways in which art can impact people's lives.

In some ways, the "theory" we want to propose is an exercise in making a virtue out of necessity. During the project, we constantly found ourselves trying to compare apples and oranges. A set of hypotheses that we developed in one community appeared to have no carry-over to another. Although we could "make sense" of the role of the wall murals within the context of each community, what struck us was how much this sense could not be separated from its specific community context.

The phrase we use to describe this phenomenon is "embeddedness." Theories of the impact of art on society should not look for broad overarching explanations. Rather, we need to examine the diverse ways in which art and culture are incorporated into people's everyday lives. These will necessarily be complex relationships. Just as urban ethnographers have been impressed by the diversity of the cultural life of communities, so we should find the same variety in the ways in which people use art.

This is just the opposite, of course, of what has happened. "Critical theory" approaches to arts and society, whether derived from the Frankfurt School or from Pierre Bourdieu's work, have specialized in articulating theories that rarely take account of the interactions of a variety of factors in people's appreciation of art. The Frankfurt school saw art as either supporting oppression or liberation and judged a work of art's social worth based on its contribution to liberation. Bourdieu, whose perspective is now the dominant voice in the sociology of art, used the concept of "cultural capital" to argue that esthetic judgments reinforce existing social hierarchies. Although the heterogeneity of American cultural life has brought about calls for a "non-holistic" theory of cultural

capital (cf. Hall), Bourdieu's view of the role of arts and culture as a means of reinforcing social distinctions continues to enjoy popularity.

In his study of art in people's houses, Halle examined three predominantly white communities in the New York metropolitan area which were differentiated by social class and ethnicity and found an array of similarities and differences across neighborhoods. An extension of his method would require the rounding up of the "usual suspects" of sociological inquiry. In addition to social class and ethnicity, we would expect the relationship of art and society to be influenced by individual differences, family and domestic groups, secondary groups (perhaps differentiated by age as in Gans "peer group society"), and community differences.

For example, one afternoon while my research team and I were interviewing in a South Philadelphia neighborhood, in a matter of twenty minutes we spoke with two residents about a wall mosaic in the neighborhood park (bocci park). One, an eighty-year old white man on whose house the mosaic was constructed, was positive about the park (when asked if he liked it, he replied "sure"), but spent most of the interview complaining about kid's making too much noise and how the bocci turf in front of the mosaic let water into his basement. The other, a thirtyish white, college-educated woman waxed eloquently on how the mosaic evoked the cultural context of the area (a kind of Italian village) and saw the park and the mosaic as central to the community's life and identity. Although these two informants lived less than 100 yards from one another they were separated by social class, gender, age, education, and proximity to the mosaic. Most of these elements probably played a role in determining their reaction to this example of public art. Any method which aims at a drastic reductionism is bound to lose a lot of the social reality of this situation.

Thus, the call for understanding the social impact of art as "embedded" has a methodological and a theoretical side. On the one hand, it calls for a theory of art and

society which does not reduce the complexity of social organization to a few elements, at least not prematurely. On the other hand, it requires a set of methods which allow one to disentangle all of the dimensions of social organization when explaining social reality.

The current project certainly does not meet this standard. But as we spent a couple of months observing wall art and talking to people about its importance, we were able to make the case (at least to ourselves) that what we were observing was a good deal more complex than what current theories of art and society suggest.

### **Description of Project**

The wall art project took place during the summer of 1994. It began with a commitment to review the literature on art and society and to initiate one or more pilot projects to test out methods for a fuller examination of the topic. We fixed on wall murals because the literature on the topic was a microcosm of the literature on art and society. Although the empirical base was thin, a variety of exaggerated claims had been made about wall murals. On the practical side, wall murals--their advocates claimed--helped prevent graffiti. More broadly, a number of writers claimed that wall murals could be a path of individual transformation, individual mobility, and community development, all again with only slim empirical bases.

We decided then to exam wall art in two neighborhoods in Philadelphia. We chose two neighborhoods--one predominantly white, the other predominantly black--which provided us with a variety of social circumstances and housing. One neighborhood, Powelton-Mantua--a section of West Philadelphia--has recently gained notoriety because it was the site for Elijah Anderson's *Street Wise*. As Anderson explained, the community includes an enclave of middle-class whites, many of whom work or study at one of the neighboring universities, a long-standing black middle and working class, and a substantial population that is black and poor. It also was one of the neighborhoods in which the Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network (PAGN) has been most

active over the years. [It would be good to get the 1990 census tract data on both neighborhoods to fill out these thumbnail sketches].

The other neighborhood we chose was a section of South Philadelphia bounded by the Delaware River on the East and by Washington, Broad, and South Streets. Although it was predominantly white, it included two public housing projects, one large and one small, which were overwhelmingly black. Although the neighborhood's identity is determined by its long-time working class white residents, many white professionals have moved into the neighborhood because of its proximity to Center City. The neighborhood is home for a number of established cultural institutions as well as many of the commercial establishments of the Italian community made famous by the *Rocky* series.<sup>1</sup> A number of Asians, many connected to commercial establishments in the "Italian" market, are also visible in the area.

The project occurred in three parts. First, we mapped the neighborhoods to identify significant institutions and the location of wall art. Second, we identified a set of murals for participant observation. Eventually, three sites (two in South Philadelphia and one in Powelton) were included in this stage of the project. Finally, we conducted a set of informal interviews with residents about their perception of the wall art in their community, the quality-of-life in their community, and any connections they saw between the two. Altogether about 40 (?) individuals were interviewed at the sites.

### **Community Differences**

During the first stage of the project, we conducted walking and driving tours of the two communities. During these windshield surveys we identified the location of

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<sup>1</sup>Indeed, I must note that during our field work one of the most famous of these institutions, Palumbos Restaurant, caught fire and was destroyed. Although the owners claimed that they had no insurance, the Philadelphia fire marshal and neighborhood opinion supported a belief that the fire was "suspicious" and that the intentional torching of Palumbo's was a serious breach of the community's moral code.

murals in the two neighborhoods. Altogether we found x murals in South Philadelphia and y in Powelton-Mantua.

The difference was striking. With the exception of the two murals that we chose to study, virtually all the other wall art in South Philadelphia was either commercial or quasi-commercial in nature. For example, a number of stores on South Street included a mural as part of their facades and one of the most striking murals--of a set of body builders--was located behind a small storefront gym.

Powelton-Mantua, however, was honeycombed with murals. Although we chose to study an outstanding and monumental example, there were literally a dozen other murals we could have chosen ranging from a small park adjacent to a public housing project to a two-block long landscape on an industrial building.

Part of the disparity was a result of official policy. A large number of the murals in Powelton-Mantua were painted by the PAGN. Mantua was one of the first neighborhoods to boast a PAGN mural and over the years, PAGN has returned repeatedly to the area. In fact, one mural had been completed just weeks before we began the project.

The disparity speaks as well to some social differences of class and race. The map of the Powelton reveals that murals occur throughout the community except for a square bounded by Spring Garden, Powelton, 33rd and 38th Streets. This anomaly is no accident. This is the solidly middle-class section of Powelton-Mantua, an area in which the typical row homes of the community give way to stately Victorian singles and twins. Indeed, one of our informants, who lives in this section made the point that although she generally likes wall art, it might be that wall art carries a negative designation; Wall art may identify a neighborhood as one that *needs* it. Thus, although murals may improve the areas in which they are painted, they also send a message that the area needs improvement.



Race also plays a role. The middle-class area of Powelton is also the section with the fewest African-Americans. In addition, in both study areas, black sections have more murals than do white areas. One of our informants confirmed that middle-class and white residents more often resist murals than working-class, poor, and black residents.

Thus, even at this very broad level, the relationship of wall art to community development is not as straightforward as some theorists would claim. We gained a greater insight into the social dynamics around wall art, however, through the intensive examination of a set of murals in our study areas.

### **The Murals and Their Neighborhoods**

Three murals were the focus of this project. I will refer to them as Bocci Park, the Pocket Park., and The Kid. Although we conducted observations and interviews at all three sites, we were able to devote more time to Bocci Park and The Kid than to Pocket Park.

#### ***Bocci Park***

This mural was the one most fully studied during the project. It was a small corner park that had previously been the site of a community health facility. During the 1970s, the city had converted it to a park with a variety of tables and benches, a bocci turf, and a tile mural that evoked a Mediterranean peasant village.

Because of its design and siting, Bocci Park served as a stage for the neighborhood. It could be approached from any direction. Indeed, a number of informants who spent many hours in the park (particularly a group of elderly Italian men) spoke explicitly about the surveillance role they served and its contribution to the security of the neighborhood. "We're a close community. We know everybody; that's your protection. You've got to know everybody and be friendly."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> field notes, interview b-17, 18 July 1994.

In exchange for this service, another group--young college-educated professionals--actually took care of park. This set of individuals--who were referred to by one of our informants as "the liberals"--added site improvements and regularly cleaned up the park. Indeed, whereas the regulars did not have much to say about the mural, it was the newer residents who saw it as evocative of the cultural roots of the neighborhood and central to its identity. There was a certain irony in this because the regulars *were* Italian and the newer residents were not.

### ***The Pocket Park***

The integration of Bocci Park and its mural contrasted sharply with the experience of a similar park and mural just a few blocks away. The Pocket Park was adjacent to an established community arts center. In contrast to Bocci Park, this site was mid-block, so that it could be entered only from one side and was surrounded on two sides by residences and on the third side by the arts center. The mural--a large colorful landscape--was painted on the side of the arts center.

Although cooler and more shaded than Bocci Park, the Pocket Park was virtually deserted during the hot summer days of 1994. Rather, it had become a night-time park as evidenced by beer bottle tops and a variety of other litter observed on the site. According to one informant, the park had also evolved into a location for crack use.

Our research experience in the neighborhood contrasted sharply with that in Bocci Park. We were met with surveillance and friendliness in Bocci Park, but in the Pocket Park, people ignored us or were outright hostile. A number of residents in the area refused to speak with us and we observed more public displays of hostility--barking Dobermans, people yelling at each other--than at other sites.

### ***The Kid***

The Kid, located in Powelton, differs from the two South Philadelphia sites in a number of respects. First, the mural is monumental; it consists of the image of an African-American boy with his arm raised that covers the side of a three-story building. Second, it is not associated with a public space. In fact, the adjoining lot is a private, community-based self-help project (a car wash).. Third, because of the lack of public space and its proximity to a busy commercial street, The Kid is viewed most often by car. In this respect, the size of the mural and its location support one another.

These factors may have affected how residents' relate to the mural as well. Although we again found widespread agreement that the mural was an important part of the community, residents' were more likely to see the mural not as an expression of pride in their neighborhood, but a *nonspatial pride in their ethnic group*. As we've noted, there were ethnic sentiments expressed in South Philadelphia as well (although not by Italians), but these were connected with a sense of place--and at that a sense of place with relatively strict limits.<sup>3</sup>

Residents connected their feelings about the mural to the community group that ran the car wash. This group--"House of Clowns" is a voluntary group that in addition to the car wash , runs a soup kitchen and provides a range of other services for black men within the community. The group sells "memberships" in the car wash which carry the right to a certain number of car washes. More importantly, membership serve as a means through which the clientele--older "middle-class" black men--can express their commitment to the neighborhood and the problems faced by younger black men. We observed a lot of interaction between the "members" and the "workers" at the car wash, very little of which was instrumental. Rather, the members seemed to use their affiliation

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<sup>3</sup> For example, one of our informants in Bocci Park contrasted his neighborhood another just two blocks away.

to send a double message; first that they are successful and second that they feel a responsibility to give something back to their people.<sup>4</sup>

This message of self-help and role-modeling was consistent with the theme of the mural. As one of us noted in her notes:

It is my opinion that the mural was synonymous with the activity in the car wash. The car wash . . . also works towards serving the community. The presence of the car wash seems to make the mural wall an attractive site to paint a mural. On the flip side, the themes of the mural, as the car wash manager informed us, was embodied by those who work t and support the car wash. In essence, a symbiotic relationship exists between the mural and the people who are working towards building the community by working at the car wash, contributing financially, or volunteering to help with the community service program; the mural gives guidance to the community and the car wash fulfills the hope of the mural.

The Kid is an expression of ethnic pride for most of our informants--one with a clear didactic purpose. Men affiliated with the car wash--either as "members" or "workers"--expressed a clear "line" on this connection. Other residents, too, saw the mural in symbolic terms. As one of us wrote in her field notes:

When we asked people if and why they liked the mural and what they thought of the subject, people consistently told us that the small boy was inspirational, showing things like "even if your small, you can conquer anything. Also several of the interviewees and the people who approached us made it clear that their favorite murals were not only the ones who had people in them, but the ones they could identify with: "no offense, I'd rather see some black people [on the murals]," said a 19 year old African American female.

Indeed, as we examined the murals of Powelton we found that the theme of racial pride, rather than the expression an identification with a specific piece of turf was common. One set of murals which were portraits of black personalities. The most impressive of these was a three-story rendering of singer Patti LaBelle. In addition,

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<sup>4</sup> For one analysis of this double message, see Mause, *The Gift*.

another group of murals examined the African and Southern American heritage of black Philadelphians.

This nonspatial element of community identity had implications, however, for residents' perception of the role of the wall art in improving their neighborhood. As we've noted, the sense of place promoted successfully by Bocci Park and unsuccessfully by the Pocket Park was connected with people's perception of the security or lack thereof of their neighborhood. In other words, the wall art was connected to a set of ideas and sentiments they felt about their immediate surroundings.

In contrast, there was not much carryover from the feelings about The Kid to residents' feelings about their neighborhood. Although individuals at the car wash were quick to draw parallels between the self-help ideology of the establishment and the mural, other residents did not draw a connection:

When we framed a question by asking if the neighborhood changed since the mural had gone up, those who had lived in Powelton and were unaffiliated with the car wash told us "what goes on, goes on," "you see the same things; [the mural] doesn't change anything."

Indeed, a killing which occurred within a block of The Kid during the time of our study underlined the gap between the aspirations embodied in the car wash and mural and the reality of community life.

Thus, the relationship between the wall art and community identity in Bocci Park and at the Kid bristled with irony. In South Philadelphia, there was little ideological content to the art or explicit expression of its community role, but it was central to a generally unarticulated belief-system of neighborhood identity, defense, and security. In contrast, in Powelton there was an explicit ideology of black self-help and pride that was captured by the mural, but its connection with the actual life of the neighborhood was weak.

This contrast between unarticulated belief and explicit ideology was reinforced by different views of time. The mural in Bocci Park resonated with residents view of a glorious past. The park had been dedicated to a local politician and members of the community frequently contrasted the quality of the neighborhood in the past with its present decline. By comparison, in Powelton, The Kid's purpose was to contrast a difficult present with the promise of a better future.

The mural in Powelton portrays a little boy who motivates his viewers to do good in the form of striving and setting goals for the *future*. . . . In South Philadelphia, on the other hand, the mural honors a man who as a politician did good things for his community in the *past*. Each of these messages fits well in their respective communities.

These very different views of time were present throughout our research in the two areas. In South Philadelphia, although residents seemed proud of their community, there were constant references to actual or threatened neighborhood decline. The presence of African-Americans, renters, even noisy children occasioned contrasts with the way things used to be. In Powelton, optimism about the future provided residents a means of overlooking some of the undesirable features of the present. Thus, different conceptualizations of time linked each mural to its neighborhood.

In short, although wall art had an impact on each community, the nature of that impact was a good deal more complex than theories of community art would have led us to believe. The relationship of art and society can only be sorted out within the highly complex relationship of time and space, peer-group interactions, and larger ethnic solidarity.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has examined a pilot study of wall art in two Philadelphia neighborhoods as a means of examining some of the dimensions in which community art is embedded in the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

Through a set of observations and interviews, we have concluded that examples of the wall art examined did have an impact on their communities, but that this impact was conditioned by the communities themselves. Within a few blocks of each other, we studied two murals that had strong, but extremely different, impacts on their neighborhoods. In one, the wall art and its park became a center for community life that was viewed positively by a wide range of different groups within the neighborhood. In the other, the wall art and its park had become the center of community tension; the space was apparently used most intensively after-hours for drinking, carrying on, and perhaps drug use.

Both of these examples contrasted sharply with the experience in West Philadelphia where the mural and the community group with which it was associated served a largely ideological purpose in the neighborhood. Yet, in spite of this positive ideological message, residents did not see a larger community impact on the area immediately around the mural.

In spite of the obvious shortcomings of this study, we have uncovered a rather complex set of factors that contribute to the social impact of wall art on our study areas. Yet, our analysis has remained simple. Just a few variables--ethnicity, social class, and age--have framed most of our comparisons and contrasts. Therefore, in this conclusion, we would like to expand our to discussion to examine a wider range of ways in which people are involved in the arts and the range of social factors that might be included in a fuller examination of the social impact of community art.

The purpose of this exercise is to embed the wall art in its social context. Connected with this task, we want to embed the analysis of community art in urban

studies as a discipline. Therefore, we will use the basic elements of urban community studies--individuals, families, secondary groups, gender, age, territoriality, class, and race--to organize our discussion.

### ***Individuals and Families***

Not surprisingly, in light of our dominant ethos, Americans imagine art to have a dramatic, transformative impact on individuals. Indeed, some communitarians have complained that we don't understand the role of art in our society because of our disproportionate commitment to individualism (cf. Bellah)

Yet, the data on arts participation tells a different story. A relatively small proportion of the population--whatever its class background--are actively involved in the arts and even among that minority, the degree of participation is relatively low. Indeed, although the informants in our study generally thought art was good for their community, few could identify a way in which they were individually effected by art.

Yet, part of the lack of evidence on the individual impact of arts may be a function of the time-frame used. Most Americans are not currently involved in the arts, but if we examine participation *across the life-cycle*, it is clear that individuals have participated at some point during their lives. Indeed, given the importance of art in our myths of individualism, most of us probably have a story to tell about how arts has or has not influenced our life--stories of fulfillment in our youth, about life decisions made, about the discovery of unexpected talents, or simply stories about pleasurable hours spent in an interesting activity. An examination of individuals' *life histories* and the arts could trace these connections across time.

We want to suggest that life-history provides one way in which individuals relate to art. Two friends go to an art exhibit at the museum. One had considered going to an art institute after high school, but had decided to play it safe and go to college instead; the



other had never thought of herself as an artist until she began to take classes in a community arts program the year before. Whatever else they bring to the exhibit in the way of "cultural capital," their reaction and participation in arts activities are likely to be effected by these past and current experiences. A study that mapped life histories and their presence and absence in different social groups would add to our understanding of how time influences participation in the arts.

Implicit in the previous discussion is the critical role played by art and culture in the transition to adulthood. In addition to how we use the arts to construct our personality, art and culture are related to the occupational and career choices made by young people. Indeed, a recent editorial in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* suggested that it was immoral or at least dysfunctional to encourage young people to go into the arts (Randall, 1994). Yet, as Buchmann's study of changes in the transition to adulthood suggests, the impact of postmodernism has destructured this transition.<sup>5</sup> The path from school to work, from family of origin to family of procreation, and from dependency to independence is not as straightforward or predictable as it was three or four decades ago. If tourism and the hospitality industries are going to be as central to twenty-first century urban economies as their proponents suggest, toward what jobs should we point our children?

After all, the evaporation of the old industrial economy appears to have constructed a new life-cycle stage during one's late twenties and early thirties as an extension of adolescence (what some commentators label the X generation <sup>6</sup>). Certainly this is a life-cycle stage in which individuals are more likely to have involvement in the arts as producers and consumers.

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<sup>5</sup>Marlis Buchmann, *The Script of Life in Modern Society: Entry into Adulthood in a Changing World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> A sort of age-defined counterpart to exurbia, the extension of suburbs into the rural hinterland.

A related issue influences relationship between generations. The arts have a rather contradictory relationship to our images of social mobility. On the one hand, involvement in the arts is a means of upward mobility. All of those years of piano lessons, dance lessons, and arts camps that parents pay for each year are presumably seen as part of a strategy to prepare young people to succeed in the world.

Yet, the economic aspect of mobility related to the arts is a bit more problematic. After all, more artists, actors, and dancers probably earn a living waiting on tables than pursuing their vocation. The ideal-typical parent presumably wants a child who after years of arts lessons, decides to become a physician and join a Main Line arts center. But, of course, some kids don't get it; they think they really are the next Picasso or Olivier or Fountaine. This confronts parents with the difficult decision of how to manage the situation. Do they confront the kid with his or her delusions? Do they support them guardedly? Are they swallowed up by them as well, becoming the stereotypical stage parent. An understanding of this set of dynamics would allow us to link the arts more precisely to family dynamics and the problems young people have in sorting out their lives in the post-industrial economy.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Peer Groups, Gender and Territory***

This examination of the social impact of wall art owes a great debt to some of the classic ethnographies of urban communities--from Herbert Gans, Eliot Liebow, and Gerald Suttles to Elijah Anderson and William H. Whyte. Yet, we've only been able to use the most rudimentary aspects of their analyses of urban communities.

For example, all of these studies have emphasized the importance of age- and gender-segmented peer groups in the organization of urban communities. Yet, we have

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<sup>7</sup> See Mark J. Stern, *Postmodernism and the Service Economy*.

only identified one example of the impact of peer-groups in the current study (the evocation of Italian ancestry by young non-Italians in Bocci Park). Certainly, there are more examples of the relationships between peer groups that we need to study.

The relationship of the wall art to graffiti, for example, needs to be understood in the context of peer group relationships. Proponents of wall art have made the case that it reduces graffiti and can serve to "convert" potential criminals to a legitimate pursuit. Certainly in every one of our study areas, a number of informants made the argument that wall art was an effective antidote to wall writing.

Yet, mixed with these accounts is an often thinly-veiled admiration of the quality and creativity of the "graffiti artists." So we may ask, why is wall art better than graffiti? The answer to this question probably does not lie simply in the aesthetic quality of the work. After all, if we compare the average "children's mural" with some of the more sophisticated wall writing ( a cut above the "tagging" which now dominates graffiti in Philadelphia), purely aesthetic criteria might give the nod to the wall writers.

The answer lies in how "legitimate" the art is, that is, how it is legitimated by adult oversight. When wall art is legitimated by a wage, by adult supervision, and as a penalty for past wall writing, it reinforces adults' faith in the durability of the moral order. The same "old heads" that used to provide job opportunities and role models for ghetto youth were probably not above cracking a few heads if they saw someone messing up their house.<sup>8</sup>

These comments may appear to romanticize the wall writers, which is not our intent. Our point is simply that the preferability of wall art to wall writing is not self-evident. It is part of the moral order to which different individuals and groups subscribe

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<sup>8</sup> Elijah Anderson, *Street Wise*.

to varying extents. Thus, the role of community and public art is embedded in these moral judgments which provide a potential field for social inquiry.

Gender, too, should enter into this study. We made a self-conscious effort to balance our interviews between males and females. The fact that the vast majority of our informants were men, then, suggests something about gender differences in the control of urban space and the use of art. For example, the assumption is that virtually all wall writers are male; commentators rarely apologize for using male pronouns when describing them. Yet, all three "legitimate" mural painters to whom we spoke during our project were women. Certainly, differences between men and women concerning behavior and attitudes toward community art merit some attention.

### ***Community, Class, and Ethnicity***

Much of this paper has been concerned with the ways in which wall art is embedded in how people define their communities. Yet, the results are more suggestive of a set of further research questions than confirmatory. Suttles and Hunter have suggested the categories of *defended communities* and *communities of limited liability* to describe different attitudes that individuals and groups use to describe their relationship to territory. On the one hand, defended communities have "eyes and ears"; community residents take an aggressive stance toward protecting their neighborhood. On the other hand, in communities of limited liability, individuals are more likely to look out for their private welfare, accepting that violations of community standards are likely to go unchallenged. The contrast we found between Bocci Park and The Kid captures this difference between an aggressive and a fatalistic stance toward the violation of moral standards. Yet, there is clearly more going on than we have uncovered.

For example, there is the issue of boundaries. We did not pursue the issue of how art is used to define the boundaries between different territories, yet the existing literature would lead us to believe that any visible marker is critical to this process. To the extent wall art becomes a landmark it can serve either to define the center of a territory (the houses around the mural) or to demarcate boundaries ("the other side of the mural").

Wall art can relate as well to a variety of stances toward the ecology of the city. For some, the arts might serve as a means of identifying with the immediate neighborhood or community. Others might use arts and culture to identify with a non-spatially defined group, as we found in the pride that African-Americans felt toward The Kid. Whether this attitude extends across an entire city or even crosses class and racial boundaries is worth investigation.

In an earlier paper, we found that the relationship between city-wide and community-based arts programs was more complex than it often appears. Stern and Seifert suggested that community arts may be connected with the "social capital" of a community, that is, with the commitment that members of the community feel toward one another.<sup>9</sup> The current paper supports the position that there are sets of community resources that are reinforced by wall art, although the nature of these resources vary from neighborhood.

At least since Wirth wrote his classic essay, cities have been defined by their size, density, and heterogeneity.<sup>10</sup> Yet, these qualities which require individuals to cooperate and identify with groups also provokes suspicion and predatory behavior. *Differences* in culture or moral order are consistently mistaken as the lack of culture or morals, as two or more communities view one another as intimate strangers.

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<sup>9</sup> Mark J. Stern and Susan C. Seifert, "Individual Participation and Community Arts Groups: A Quantitative Analysis of Philadelphia," Working Paper #1, Social Impact of the Arts Project, School of Social Work (July 1994).

<sup>10</sup> L. Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life."

Yet, as an alternative, this problem can be viewed as an opportunity. This study finds that the different communities we studied do have a positive view of community art that is embedded in their particular view of their community and its relationship to the rest of the city. What is lacking is a common language through which these positive feelings can be understood across groups. To the extent that arts and culture can simultaneously connect to the "city trenches" that we have constructed for ourselves and to a vision that transcends these trenches, it may provide a *lingua franca* through which we can reach an understanding not only of the barriers that separate us, but of the morality and humanity which draw us together. This task may not be as dramatic and simple as that usually evoked by the discussion of the arts and society, but it need not be any less profound.