DISCOURSE ON THE IMAGE OF VIRTUAL REALITY GRAFFITI ART: FROM PUBLIC SPACE TO VIRTUAL SPACE

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ABSTRACT

Current technological developments are characterized by various innovations, ranging from network speeds to artificial intelligence. These advancements have propelled the existence of modern technology, initially emerging as tools to assist humans in their daily lives. The use of Virtual Reality (VR) helps to display elements that do not exist in the real world, presenting them through digital media as if they were real. VR Graffiti has become a solution for artists who wish to create works without getting their hands dirty or disturbing public spaces. VR offers various conveniences by transcending physical and virtual realities. However, how do practitioners and the public view these developments? This research aims to understand the perspectives of both practitioners and the public towards VR graffiti using an imagological approach. The scope of graffiti objects analysed in this study is limited to those that are legally present. By understanding various viewpoints of practitioners towards VR graffiti, this research can provide an overview of the discourse on how VR graffiti is perceived by the general public and practitioners alike.

Keywords: Virtual Reality; Graffiti Art; Image

I.   INTRODUCTION

Current technological developments are characterized by various innovations, ranging from network speeds to artificial intelligence. These advancements have driven the existence of modern technology, initially emerging as tools to assist humans in their daily lives. Recently, for example, Artificial Intelligence has been experiencing rapid development, with techniques such as machine learning and natural language processing becoming increasingly sophisticated, enabling AI systems to recognize patterns, make decisions, and interact with humans in more complex ways.

Another technological advancement is Extended Reality (XR), which combines Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR). XR attempts to overlay the digital world onto the real world, creating more immersive digital experiences. The use of XR continues to expand across various industries such as education, healthcare, product design, entertainment, and art.

The use of XR in the art world began in 2010 when Mark Skwarek and Sander Veenhof, founders of Manifest.AR, offered the Museum of Modern Art the opportunity to use AR for artworks to be placed in the museum (Gwilt, 2018; Silva, et al. 2019; Debras, 2019; Hána, 2022). AR is used by pointing a smartphone camera at the targeted artwork, then the

AR application uses geolocation techniques and computer vision such as marker tracking or image recognition software to overlay computer-generated three-dimensional art objects, allowing viewers to see the artwork integrated into the physical location as if it were in the real world, along with deliberately embedded information that can only be accessed through the AR application.

In 2012, some graffiti artists also used AR to display the history of the famous mural site on Houston & Bowery Street in New York City, which featured the first mural by Keith Haring in 1982. The use of AR helps to display elements that do not exist in the real world and present them through digital media as if they were real.

In 2017, the use of XR in the graffiti world evolved with the application of VR. Pyksy, a graffiti artist, attempted to create digital graffiti for the first time using the Google Tilt Brush application. Creating graffiti using VR offers several advantages, including the ease of adjusting spray colour and size (Pell, 2017).

The use of Google Tilt Brush for drawing graffiti allows artists to move beyond 2D designs and implement them in 3D. In addition to AR, graffiti now also utilizes the VR world with applications specifically designed for graffiti artists, such as King spray. This application is a VR graffiti simulator that can be used by multiple players simultaneously, allowing for group use or even competitions on the Steam gaming platform. According to Store.steampowered.com, this game is designed to be

as realistic as possible, including colour, drips, lighting, and more. Artists can even modify the environment, time, and place as desired. Moreover, there is a replay feature where artists can replay their creative process to show others.

VR Graffiti has become a solution for artists who want to create works without getting their hands dirty and without disturbing public spaces. With the help of large screens, graffiti artists can still give live drawing demonstrations that can be seen by anyone. This proves that VR technology can create a limitless world for graffiti artists and does not restrict their desire for self-expression.
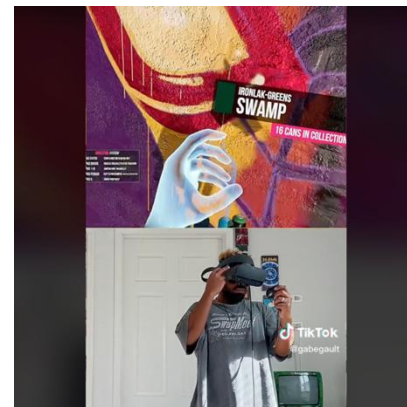

Figure I.1 Activity VR Graffiti.
Source: Google, 2023.

With the help of the Metaverse, VR Graffiti can even penetrate the digital NFT market. Gabe Gault, a digital graffiti artist, uses Oculus VR glasses and the King spray Graffiti Simulator application, publishing his work on Instagram and TikTok. Gabe even performs his actions without leaving home. Nevertheless, he has managed to sell several of his works as NFTs in digital marketplaces like OpenSea (Domínguez, et al., 2022; Marin, 2022; Parker and Khanvile, 2024).

VR offers various conveniences by transcending physical and virtual realities. However, how do practitioners and the public view these developments? Graffiti artists typically perform their actions on the streets as a means of showcasing their identity and popularity. Graffiti is the plural form of graffito, and its meaning tends to be somewhat unclear, but historically, the word refers to scratches or etchings on a surface. Some references state that graffiti was born in New York in the early 1960s along with breakdancing. Therefore, according to Bambataa, graffiti is one of the four hip-hop cultures, one of which is breakdancing (Bambataa, 2005; Iveson, et al., 2022; Kundu, 2024; Laptiste, 2024). Graffiti was initially used as a one-way communication tool that did not require feedback. Over time, graffiti began to be used as a two-way communication tool, as a form of criticism, a medium of resistance, or simply seeking self-appreciation.

Graffiti in the public view generates both support and opposition. This is because many people still see graffiti as an act of vandalism, a destructive and irresponsible action. This perception is formed due to the many acts of vandalism on the streets without going through a permitting process, thus disturbing public spaces. However, not all graffiti practitioners are vandals. Many graffiti artists try to present their work on legal media such as stickers, billboards, advertisements, or walls provided by the government to be used as graffiti media in public spaces. Similarly, VR is touted as one of the media for legal graffiti application without violating any regulations

that could harm society, especially with its various superior features.

Therefore, the researcher wants to understand how practitioners and the public view VR graffiti using an imagological approach. The scope of graffiti objects to be analysed in this study is limited to those that are legally present. By understanding various viewpoints of practitioners towards VR graffiti, this research can provide an overview of the discourse on how VR graffiti is perceived by the general public and practitioners alike.

II.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a Qualitative Descriptive Analytical approach, utilizing discourse analysis to explore public and graffiti artists' responses to the phenomenon of Virtual Reality graffiti art. The research also incorporates digital archive studies, document analysis, newspaper reviews, and secondary sources to describe the discourse based on the collected research materials.

In qualitative research, the study subjects are determined purposively (according to the researcher's needs or objectives), meaning they do not necessarily represent the entire population. In other words, purposive sampling can be defined as selecting samples based on specific considerations derived from the research objectives. Sample determination is conducted to choose informants deemed capable of providing in-depth and reliable responses regarding information and issues, to seek

concrete and comprehensive data sources about the research object.

In selecting key informants, the researcher chose individuals who self-identified and were known as graffiti artists or graffiti bombers, as well as members of the public and online communities who observed and responded to this phenomenon. The selected key informants and informants have diverse social backgrounds, so that through their responses to the VR Graffiti Art phenomenon, it is expected to provide a varied picture of their opinions and generate ideas about Virtual Reality Graffiti Art as a new form that is hoped to find solutions to problems within the graffiti sphere itself.

Data collection techniques in this study include literature review, digital archive studies such as interviews and online reviews, as well as documents from secondary data sources. Secondary data in this research is obtained through literature studies and documentation relevant to the main issues under investigation. The theoretical framework employed in this research is Imagology. Imagology provides a framework for understanding how cultural images are formed and developed within and between cultural groups. By involving cross-cultural comparisons and critical analysis, this study helps unravel the complexities of cultural representations and promotes better understanding between different cultural groups.

III. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Graffiti is currently undergoing a shift in media. Initially, graffiti was an activity of applying coloured paint to create compositions of colour, form, and volume on wall surfaces. However, the advent of new technologies has offered numerous innovations in various fields, including graffiti art. Virtual Reality graffiti art became prevalent in 2016. Virtual Reality (VR) has significantly influenced graffiti, transforming it into a novel digital art experience. VR technology offers an increasingly boundless and unrestricted graffiti creation experience.

One VR graffiti product is Kingspray Graffiti. According to an article on Virtual Reality from the monsterar.net website (November 4, 2019), Kingspray Graffiti, an art simulator game, has emerged as a breath of fresh air for graffiti art enthusiasts worldwide. True to its name, this HTC Vive game project provides access to a world where users can create graffiti art to their heart's content, whenever they wish. Importantly, the graffiti art created in this virtual environment does not damage the physical environment or disturb others.

This chapter specifically aims to analyse the responses of the public and graffiti artists to the presence of VR Graffiti in today's society. It begins by collecting responses about VR Graffiti, then analyses these responses using imagology theory, opening a discourse on the image of VR Graffiti.

A. Public Responses to Virtual Reality Graffiti Art

Graffiti is often misunderstood by some members of society. On one hand, it is undeniable that graffiti artists can create artworks through this activity. On the other hand, their medium is often public walls, which is why some people refuse to call them artists, instead labelling them as troublemakers. The act of spray-painting walls has become integral to their identity; separating graffiti artists from walls would be like asking them to draw with charcoal – essentially forcing them to cease being graffiti artists.

Many people have expressed opinions about graffiti displayed on their private walls or shop doors. In interviews conducted along Ir. H. Djuanda Street, many informants stated that graffiti on doors is detrimental to those in public spaces. Throw-up style graffiti often appears on private and public property, including building walls and shop doors. This has resulted in public unease, confusion, and anger among those living and working in these public spaces.

Figure 3.1.1: Documentation of Interview Activities and Visual Graffiti Observation
Source: Personal Documentation on Ir. H. Djuanda Street, Bandung, 2023.

While the above represents one form of graffiti, other forms are produced by graffiti artists, such as the more artistic graffiti found on Tamansari Street in Bandung. The graffiti there displays more artistic elements in terms of colour, proportion, and volume, making it more visually appealing. Additionally, as reported by Imam Hedriana (2022) on the bandungbergerak.id website, coverage of the **Indo graff day** 2022 event included interviews with graffiti artists. The conclusion drawn was that graffiti can challenge societal stigma: not all murals and graffiti are forms of vandalism or inherently negative.
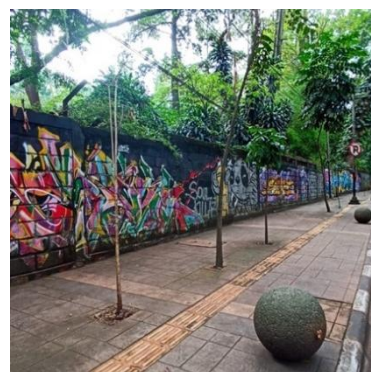

Figure 3.1.2: Visual Graffiti in Taman Sari
Source: Personal Documentation, 2023.

As mentioned earlier, a recent development in graffiti is VR technology, which offers new

possibilities for this art form by creating a new, expansive reality in the virtual world without boundaries. According to Tania Di Brita in her article "The Disappearance/Virtualisation of Graffiti and Street Art: From Urban to Institutional to Virtual Space," when graffiti and street art become fully integrated into virtual reality through evolving technological possibilities, there will no longer be unauthorized or illegal graffiti and street art. The shift to the virtual world and the fact that urbanity, heterogeneity, and fragmentation in cities are classified as dangerous make it quite logical that unauthorized graffiti and street art are relocated to a non-existent place or even disappear entirely, as these three contexts belong only to the 'urban' (Brita, 2020).

The existence of VR graffiti has also been addressed by international and national graffiti artists. For example, Gabe Gault, a graffiti artist from Los Angeles, shared his experience creating visual graffiti on the Kingspray simulator game. The created graffiti can be exported and viewed on other VR devices, and Gabe Gault also sells his works as NFTs in marketplaces like OpenSea. The elouput.com website explains that this phenomenon presents a significant opportunity for artists who won't miss the chance to sell virtual walls to those who want to acquire them, thus generating profit.
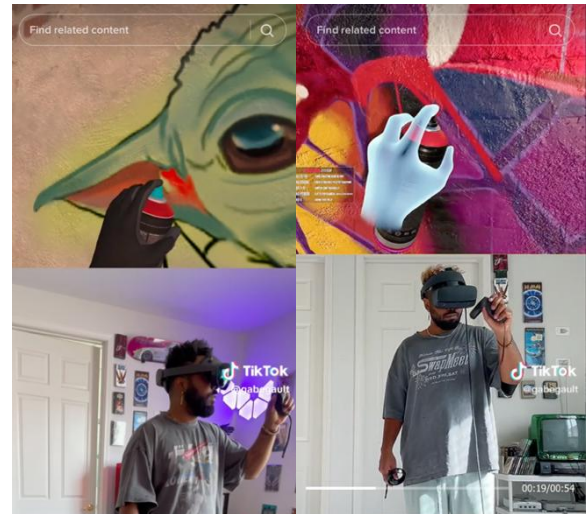

Figure 3.1.3: Gabe Gault's VR Graffiti Creation Activity
Source: Google Documentation, 2023.

Another example is an interview with Indonesian graffiti artist Dammar (NsideOne), who tried VR Graffiti at the International Meeting of Style event in Yogyakarta on May 27, 2023. Dammar shared his experience, saying, "We (graffiti artists) can practice indoors without getting hot or wet, and at any time. However, we can't find the essence or feeling of drawing graffiti outdoors." This response provides insight into how VR is perceived by graffiti artists – while there are many advantages to creating graffiti using VR, artists also cannot find the same new experiences as when drawing outdoors.

Figure 3.1.4: Documentation of VR Graffiti Activity at the Meeting of Style Event, Yogyakarta
Source: Dammar (NsideOne) Documentation, 2023.

As reported by Shanti Mathia on thespinoff.co.nz website (2022), digital graffiti will never replace real-life graffiti, just as digital painting will never replace oil painting, according to Hung (an interviewee). There is spontaneity in real-world art. "You may never know who sees the artwork you slip into a train tunnel entrance, or what," Hung says. Other insights were gathered from online community comments on social media responding to this phenomenon. Comments on Gabe Gault's TikTok account @GabrielGault, posted on January 12, 2022, included: "Instead of scribbling on people's walls (without permission), it's better to play this" and "This is what graffiti kids should do, if you don't have a private wall, play in the metaverse, better save money to buy paint for this." Other responses directed VR towards positive aspects, with one user commenting, "This is the main reason I want VR. There are no legal spots to make murals where I live," says Alice.

user2889816697599
gini baru anak gravity gak ada tembok pribadi ya main metavers mending lu tabung uang beli cat buat beli ginian
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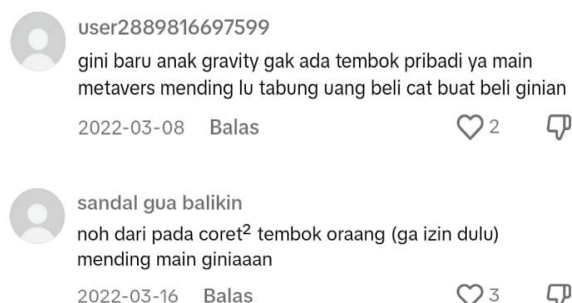2022-03-16   Balas   ♡ 3

Figure 3.1.5: Comments on Gabriel Gault's TikTok Post
Source: TikTok Social Media Documentation, 2023.

Referring to the study of imagology, signs engineered using cutting-edge technologies such as digital technology, graphic computerization, and simulation depend on the ability of advanced technology to create imagery (imagology) (Piliang, 2019). Addressing the VR Graffiti phenomenon, the imagery of VR in graffiti reflects the development of VR technology and its influence on popular culture. It also becomes a medium of expression for artists to convey ideas about technology, reality, and human experience.

IV.   CONCLUSION

The rise of Virtual Reality (VR) Graffiti marks a significant evolution in street art, blending digital innovation with traditional graffiti culture. This study explores how VR Graffiti offers new creative opportunities—such as legal, weather-independent art creation from home—and enhances accessibility through virtual platforms and NFT integration. However, while it provides a safer and more inclusive medium, it lacks key elements that define traditional graffiti: physical risk, urban interaction, and the adrenaline of illicit expression. These losses create tension between the immersive, real-world roots of graffiti and its sanitized digital counterpart. From a societal viewpoint, VR Graffiti offers a compromise between artistic freedom and legality yet raises concerns about exclusivity due to tech access limitations. The study concludes that VR Graffiti, while transformative, is best seen as a complementary tool rather than a replacement for street art. A hybrid future—combining VR, AR, and traditional methods—is likely, preserving graffiti's

cultural essence while embracing new technologies. Further research is needed to understand VR Graffiti's long-term effects on urban art, communities, and public spaces.

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