

'Different Folks, Different Strokes': goINDIGO 2022's « Creators vs Academics »

Discussion Round

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1. Introduction

During the first discussion round of goINDIGO 2022, which took place on Thursday, 12 May and was called *Creators vs Academics*, four local graffiti creators were invited to consider a series of (potentially provocative) statements in discussion with symposium participants (joining in-person and online). The statements, compiled by Geert Verhoeven in consultation with Samuel Merrill, were:

- Academia CHANGES graffiti
- Graffiti MUST be recorded
- ALL graffiti are archive-worthy
- Decontextualisation MATTERS
- Graffiti NEED categorisation
- Digital media are ESSENTIAL

The four attending graffiti creators agreed to participate following their contact and invitation via Instagram. When introducing themselves, each conveyed their own, often close, relationship to the Donaukanal as well as their different levels of experience and exposure within Vienna's wider graffiti scene. **JANER ONE** (active since 2012), for instance, took hope from doing graffiti in “tough times” and identified the Donaukanal as a really big playground—“it does not have many rules, and the few rules it has, you must pick up by yourself”—and a site of graffiti history. **MANUEL SKIRL** (active since 2006) meanwhile recounted how the openness and inclusiveness of the Donaukanal offered the chance to begin creating and, in time, to develop a personal style in “more artistic” directions. **SERT** (active since

2009) highlighted moving to Vienna partly to be close to the Donaukanal after growing up in a “pretty small village” in the countryside. **SNUF**'s (active since 2012) first piece was at the prestigious Donaukanal, the “best art gallery of the city with almost daily changing exhibitions”. Each of the four brought their personal, ‘inside’ perspectives to the discussion of the selected statements that is recorded in the following text. This text is not, however, a verbatim nor sequential account of that discussion. Firstly, although retaining the ‘feel’ of the discussion has been prioritised, the text has been edited for readability, and some superfluous content removed. Secondly, as is often the way with the most exploratory of dialogues, the main topic of conversation shifted quickly and regularly. Thus, although the six statements were originally detailed by Merrill (in his capacity as moderator) following a preamble at the start of the discussion round, in this text these statements (and their more detailed elaborations) have been chronologically redeployed to structure the text in a manner that might better serve the reader. The reordering of the transcription in this way means that in some places the text does not always flow consecutively in the way it did during the discussion. These places are indicated by [...] and they do not only represent hops forward, but also hops backward in time.

Finally, it is essential to know that all authors—of which none was a minor—have read this text and confirmed in writing that they were fine with their statements. This agreement notwithstanding, one must understand that these statements were raised in a lively discussion and must also be understood and treated this way.

2. Discussion Preamble

Samuel Merrill: I want to start by thanking Geert and the INDIGO team for the opportunity to moderate this discussion session, the title of which got me super excited. My excitement stems from a tension that I have felt on and off since I started researching the heritagisation of graffiti and street art as a master student. Namely, that my academic study of street art and graffiti was somehow, contributing to the broader social and cultural re-evaluation of these phenomena in ways that might not always be desired by those creating them.

This tension is usefully further conveyed by two quotes. One from bell hooks, borrowed from black feminist theory, and another from one of New York's founding figures of subcultural graffiti, PHASE 2. This is the first quote:

"When we write about the experience of a group to which we don't belong, we should think about the ethics of our actions and considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce or perpetuate domination." (hooks, 1989, 43)

This quote comes from a very specific context that I would argue has much wider salience beyond just the context of what bell hooks was writing about. The second quote from PHASE 2:

"This is our community, this is our nation, our contribution to the world, it's our job to preserve it, ensure it and nurture it - not someone else's." (cited by MacDonald, 2001, 176)

We might also actually add a third quote from DRAX (20 years later), cited by Theo Kindynis whose work on graffiti archaeology is conducted from the perspective of an academic with experience of the writing scene. This is the quote that he cites in a recent paper entitled Graffiti Archaeology (in which he refers to a lot of earlier tags discovered in certain corners of the London Underground):

"It's only a couple of names... but it's also memories, a story of identity, distant screams for recognition, frozen in time then fleetingly glanced before they are 'finally' consigned to history. Shit like this isn't everyone's cup of tea, but for those of us that give a fuck this is our archeology. This is OUR fucking history." (cited in Kindynis, 2019, 25)

The aim of today's discussion is to explore some of this and other associated tensions in relation to INDIGO's focus on documentation, archiving and dissemination. To guide and spark this discussion, Geert and I came up with a series of potentially provocative statements that should match the somehow polarising title of the whole discussion session. These statements were chosen with the hope of bringing into focus points of disagreement, but hopefully also points of agreement and consensus between those that create graffiti and those that study it.

[...]

Academia CHANGES Graffiti

Academic research, including documentation and archiving initiatives, changes graffiti. We can recognise that the 'academisation' of graffiti can lend it new values and widen the populations that value it. Does the long-term preservation (in situ or via digital records) undermine the ephemerality that traditionally underpinned the creation of graffiti? We might also consider whether the new audiences, that graffiti's academisation creates, are wanted by those who create graffiti. In other words, are these new audiences in line with the audiences that the creators are seeking? Many of their creations, although placed in public spaces use—as Alex Hale remarked in yesterday's key note—"languages which were not written for us" (see Hale in this volume). In turn, does academically orientated digital documentation and archiving influence the sorts of graffiti that are created, where they are created and how they are created? So, do graffiti documentation projects like INDIGO enhance, smooth, or alter certain characteristics of graffiti? What might be the consequences of graffiti's academic translation?

[...]

Samuel Merrill: how do you feel about people studying your artwork from an academic perspective?

MANUEL SKIRL: Weird, weird.

< *Laughter* >

MANUEL SKIRL: No, I mean, you [academics] take this very, very seriously and also it's really somewhat charming and I blush a little bit. I think that, whatever we do, feeling it meaningful or not meaningful, could create some meaning, but on the other end, it's just logic or the way things go that when you do something that can be considered culture or part of a culture it's getting saved or preserved for the next generations. That somebody who is educated and feels art or images or language and image language must be preserved for the next generation. So, we understand history as it's going on. It just makes sense, you know, but on the other hand, and I can speak for myself, but also for many other people that I know, that it's not so much meaning in there other than just this colourful bird, for example.

JANER ONE: A lot of times. Yeah. Like 99% of the time.

MANUEL SKIRL: Some people put meaning or some message or something they want to transport for the audience or viewers. But the graffiti we know, and we are talking about is very strongly connected to hip hop in the first place and to this like way of doing it, that started in the United States and was very connected to gang culture and the visualisation of crime activity in certain areas. Then it was transported over to Europe and completely messed up actually from this context, the way to just ego and group identity and showing their activity.

JANER ONE: And also, what about this sentence: Academia changes graffiti? It depends on what do you mean by change? What about graffiti are you changing in your opinion?

Geert Verhoeven: Can I give you an example?

MANUEL SKIRL: Yeah.

Geert Verhoeven: If you know that we are going to photograph whatever appears at Donaukanal, are you going to paint more or other stuff when you know this or not?

MANUEL SKIRL: If you know it, yes. But you know, it's me and him that you're asking, and we are talking about a big group of people where a lot of them, I can be sure about that don't really care what you're doing. So, if they don't see it and if they don't consume it, or if they don't see there is a big audience consuming that, and they feel subconsciously or consciously their potential in this field as well, it won't change what they do and how they do it.

JANER ONE: Yeah. They do it anyways. They are tied to society. They will do it. They do it as a sort of a protest against society.

Geert Verhoeven: But it's not like, for instance, in one year, our database comes online. And then you can look for your own works. Would you, now knowing this, feel the urge to paint more so you would have more of your stuff appearing, or not?

JANER ONE: Well, maybe for the very last layer, because it's on top of everything, then you would see it forever. If it's the last layer, then you would see it very long. It is the first thing everyone would see and it's preserved there. If I know it's the very last picture taken, then that would make me do something really big, maybe, but other than that...

MANUEL SKIRL: Have you seen the picture already?

JANER ONE: I've only seen visualisations of models and stories and so on. What it maybe will look like.

MANUEL SKIRL: I feel like I'm not well prepared against you here.

JANER ONE: Don't worry. Sorry, what I wanted to say: this statement "academia changes graffiti" for me, it's about the way I understood this sentence first was like graffiti writers give the paintings different value than academia has. That makes sense to me. If you are looking through an academic lens, then you have a different set of values, right?

SNUF: I'd like to add something to that. I've just been here a couple of minutes, but I already can say, I'm pretty sure that you take more time looking at the graffiti than it took the guy painting.

< *Laughter* >

Samuel Merrill: we've been here two and a half days, so yeah, you're probably right.

< *Laughter* >

SNUF: So that might be like, okay, you kind of decide already. You interpret the kind of meaning that the guy painting might not even have intentionally put there. That doesn't necessarily have to be something bad, but...

JANER ONE: Yeah, in that sense, it changes graffiti.

[...]

SERT: I would like to say that a lot of academics are doing graffiti. I painted the floors with nurses. It's not like there are academics and on the other side, there is graffiti. It's people that are doing graffiti. People are free, but it's pretty much mixed up. It's not a strict line, I would say. There are also a lot of people studying art or studying graphic design who are doing graffiti. They know what they're doing in their job and they bring that to the graffiti sometimes. But also, the people I know who started graphic design paint classic graffiti, and they just paint the name, and there's no meaning mostly.

Liljana Radošević: What I wanted to say from where I stand as an art historian, as that person that goes around and gives meaning to everything that is meaningless. What I noticed for the past 20 years is that it's very hard to have just one point of view and analyse everything from that [point of view]. For me it made more sense to analyse it from two different perspectives. The first one is the culture. So, graffiti culture in general, or graffiti culture in a particular city. Because culture as such has changed, and the graffiti creators notice that. Nowadays, we have lots of graffiti writers or street artists finishing either high school,

artistic high schools or universities. And that, even though they might be doing traditional graffiti and doing only letters, still changes their perception. And this changes the culture. In the nineties or late eighties, you still had graffiti writers who probably had maybe just a primary school education and were from different social status. And throughout the 1990s, it changed. So, culture itself is changing, but still, there are rules. So, if you look at it from this cultural point of view, you can say, yes, it should be ephemeral. Yes, it should be done without permission. Yes, we shouldn't be really intervening that much because we are not really part of the culture, but when you look at it from the personal point of view, from different artist's point of view, you realise that they're human beings who are developing, who are growing. They're finishing university. They're getting jobs, they're getting their families. These are all normal human processes through which they're changing their ideas of what they're doing, and their values. They're growing and growing in every possible way. So, when you look at it from that perspective, yes sometimes they want their art pieces to be preserved, and yes, they might want to make it a job. And yes, they might want to mix it up a little bit with street art, and then you don't really know if he or she's a graffiti writer or street artist. And then, when you compare it, it seems that the personal values are not really fitting the cultural values of graffiti. And then on top of it, you have us academics who are trying to squeeze all of these things into particular drawers making them more understandable. So, hopefully this made sense, but there are two different perspectives to this: the individual point of view, as a human being and the culture point of view as a graffiti culture.

MANUEL SKIRL: Can I add something there? I really don't think that that's something that makes graffiti or street art special because I'm also pretty sure that most of the people who created art or valuable historical objects or whatnot we see today in museums, not all of them knew what kind of impact they will have or what kind of value they were creating. I don't want to compare us to people who did hieroglyphs or so but if you see the parallels there, I think most of them just wanted to make their king or their pharaoh happy, but just didn't get any bread at the end of the day. And that value we have today for it is something completely else. And it's so enormous, right, and I think it's pretty much the

same today. And also, with the fact that graffiti might have been something for lower layers of society, young people, kids from really bad neighbourhoods and stuff like that. And today, it became something for the broad field. That's something that is maybe true if you see the transportation of graffiti from the United States over to Europe, especially in countries like Austria, we don't really have bad neighbourhoods, and we don't have ghetto behaviour or territorial behaviour and I think that's just what also happened with everything all around hip hop and all around youth cultures, because whoever has resources, money, or, the wish to be authentic is copying from criminals or dodgy people from one generation before. This is always the thing which we find authentic. And everybody wants to have a piece of this cake, I guess. So, I see kids now, running around like people who I would have considered drug dealers 10 years ago. And it's totally normal fashion today. No problem. And the same thing, I think, went with graffiti when we were small kids. I can just talk for myself, I was searching for something which is super cool, breaking some rules, going over some borders and has some artistic parts as well, and I found this is just right for myself.

Liljana Radošević: Yeah. I think this part, the last part you said, this is what keeps graffiti culture alive because every new generation wants to do exactly that. Just from their personal point of view, they want to change something. They want to do something.

MANUEL SKIRL: Be somebody.

Liljana Radošević: Yeah. And this is what keeps it going. This new influx of this fresh, positive energy keeps the graffiti culture going. And then you have the ones that kind of already rolled the wave, and then they want to go into another part of their lives. But, you know, it's still kind of coming in. It's still coming in.

MANUEL SKIRL: I think it's this classical thing again, talking for myself and for many, many people in Vienna that I know who are between like 25 and 35. Many of them put a lot of effort, love and time, incredible amounts of effort, love and time into this. And to try to get something out of it when this phase of life ends, when you discover the world and try

to check out the boundaries and you just want to see what's left from it. And people find very different, interesting approaches in doing that or not doing that.

Liljana Radošević: Yeah. You still have the culture that survives, but then within the culture, you have the individual, as I said.

MANUEL SKIRL: You need to eat something as well.

Liljana Radošević: Yeah. You still have like two different streams, which you can't really always overlap.

Samuel Merrill: You mentioned authenticity there.

MANUEL SKIRL: You're still here.

Samuel Merrill: Yeah. You mentioned authenticity.

[...]

Samuel Merrill: Maybe this links into our second statement. I mean, what about when people get seriously attached to your work. Does that somehow diminish something about the work, your authenticity. Is it artificially preserved?

[...]

Graffiti MUST be Recorded

Projects like INDIGO assume that graffiti must or at least should be recorded for the future, partly because of graffiti's traditional ephemerality. They also reflect the new-found possibilities provided by digital technologies and media to carry out such recording at ever-increasing scales. At the same time, these technologies and media reformulate time, creating a kind of ever-expanding now with consequences for the turnover and transience of graffiti. Do the academics involved in such projects consider the possible unintended consequences of the imperative to record graffiti? Who should be responsible for recording graffiti? What do creators think about their work being documented, digitally archived, and preserved? There's obviously some recent evidence, including that presented by Rita Amor Garcia yesterday (see Amor Garcia in this volume), which suggests that graffiti creators might be changing their attitude with respect



Figure 1. Graffiti from 2009 from the Donaukanal. Photo by Massimiliano Carloni.

to this. Are archaeologists, heritage practitioners and archivists new belligerents within the so-called 'war on graffiti', or are they potential allies? Do they help creators beat the buff, or are they the buff reformulated?

[...]

Samuel Merrill: There is this assumption about the importance of ephemerality or whether ephemerality within the scene is just a consequence of the nature of reality, right? This is a kind of preservation in a sense. Do you see that as changing how long your works can last? And when you

think about your works disappearing very quickly. If they stay long, that's good. If they don't, they go, that's fine. Is it like that? Are you kind of attached to them disappearing? Do you want them to disappear or not?

JANER ONE: For me personally, I try to learn as fast as possible to not give a damn about what happens after because the moment you let it get to you, you are an easy target for other people. And if you speak that out to people, they know it, and it's only trouble...

Samuel Merrill: It's going to go quickly.

JANER ONE: In my opinion, it was always the most clever way to not appear targeted by everything

MANUEL SKIRL: Yeah. If you do work in public space, I think you must go along with public opinion and public stuff happening there. So, it's not yours, right? It belongs to the nature of things happening there, and you shouldn't get too attached to it. But I think secretly, we are all a little bit attached to this. Of course, we want to have our stuff be visible or consumable for trespassers or people.

SERT: I mean, of course, if you paint something, you want it to last long. But if you paint it on a legal wall, it's part of the game, and will be gone someday. Maybe tomorrow, maybe the day after tomorrow, who knows.

Samuel Merrill: What about when people get seriously attached to your work. Does that somehow diminish something about the work, your authenticity?

JANER ONE: It depends on your own values. Different folks, different strokes, right? The graffiti community is very diverse. You can find your own group. I always knew what kind of people I'm looking for and never dealt with shady people. And there are definitely shady people, also in the graffiti scene.

Samuel Merrill: And these pieces that were shown yesterday on the tour. Potentially the oldest pieces that are still there on the Donaukanal from 2009, up high in certain places. Cause these are places that have been essentially within this environment embedded with value because they're older, right? They're still there from 2009. And the idea is that they're still, maybe because they're partly less accessible because they're higher up and hard to get. But I mean...

Massimiliano Carloni: For example, this one...

< Displays the photo (Figure 1) on his smart phone >.

MANUEL SKIRL: This is an area where you would need a ladder, a really high ladder, like five metres or more. These are, after they are done, harder to access, but also, in this case, it's a very, very respected person. Within the scene, nobody would cover it. Those people who would actually go to Donaukanal with a ladder to create something, they are all in the knowledge of "This is not something you should cover". And the things that are added to it, the "cris" letters, the little things, they are by some younger people without the necessary education to know that you shouldn't go over that and they also climbed the fence. You can see that this person climbed the fence.

JANER ONE: It's a very self-regulatory community, you know.

Samuel Merrill: What if that kind of respect was kind of artificially imposed on something much more recent somehow? Is everything worthy of preservation?

[...]

ALL Graffiti are Archive-worthy

Graffiti has been recorded in many ways by many different actors, from creators themselves to law enforcement agencies and to different extents throughout the past. But society's digitisation is now allowing that documentation to be carried out at increasing scales. Now, many graffiti digitisation projects take a maximalist approach. INDIGO aims to document graffiti, including that originating from so-called 'toys'—less experienced or skilled creators. Now, is this kind of Mr. Brainwash-esque approach sustainable, not least in terms of the environmental consequences of excessive data creation, but also in terms of their labour intensiveness? What can be gained from obsessively recording graffiti as moments of passing time? Does academic value lie in the accumulation of records? What do creators think of this approach? What should the criteria for inclusion in digital graffiti archives be? And in particular, how do creators feel about the documentation of the creations of those who may not have made their name yet. To riff George Orwell: all marks are equal, but are some marks more equal than others?

Samuel Merrill: INDIGO is essentially recording a whole

sway of the channel and everything that's there. And I think there must be opinions, and I should stress, you [the creators] are doing a lot of the talking, which is great, but this is also for opinions from the other side of this so-called polarised debate, right? So, is there a sense that we should be looking to preserve all graffiti? It's clear that, like you really nicely described, there are certain pieces that are very well respected for various different reasons, individuals, or maybe because they are early pieces and those who are maybe unaware of that kind of respect, breaking those rules. You mentioned...

MANUEL SKIRL: Yeah. But also those people are important because if they wouldn't destroy the valuable pieces, there would be very good pieces all over the place. Nobody would touch them. And there would be no ongoing stuff anymore. I realised that after being super angry at those people, when you create big pieces and you carry hundreds of litres of paint to this place and you make something after a few days, people would add something to it or even destroy your thing. It really belongs to everybody.

JANER ONE: It's also understandable. Lots of work, the logistics. It's really heavy stuff. We have to carry a lot. It's not an easy job to paint *<laughs>*. It's really hard. It's really demanding on your body as well.

Geert Verhoeven: One of the problems we have is the following: So now we follow many of you on Instagram, right? Or we go along the channel and certainly Stefan, when he sees something new, we photograph it. He knows mostly everything by heart.

JANER ONE: *<quietly>* Yeah, Stefan is crazy.

Geert Verhoeven: And one of the things that we are missing right now are the small tags, the Antifa symbols and so on. The idea is really to photograph everything. But at this moment we are missing these small graffiti. So, we are looking for ways to get better at this. But do you see this as valuable to record? A small tag, an Antifa symbol or "Kurz is an idiot"?

MANUEL SKIRL: Ten years ago, I would've answered with no, but now with yes, definitely. I also started to appreciate

graffiti, which is from non-hip-hop or non-graffiti-scene-people much, much more. Stuff that looks like good fun, or like emotions, people who just write some bullshit.

< Laughter >

JANER ONE: Yeah, like children painting.

MANUEL SKIRL: Stuff that would've been in the last row of the bus. I really appreciate this much more now because I think it just makes sense after a decade of looking at letters and typography and calligraphy. Your brain wants something else and something new.

Geert Verhoeven: Because one of the problems we have right now, when we look at all our photographs: it's all these nice pieces, right? But I always thought, okay, in graffiti you can find a lot of socio-political criticism. But this you don't see from your pieces. This you see in the small Antifa symbols and the small tags.

MANUEL SKIRL: There are also Antifa pieces, but the whole piece thing is more deeply connected with the hip hop culture and with what I called before, ego declaration or showing how much you and your group can do, where they can do it, how difficult and dangerous these actions are and showing everybody pretty clear that these were the same people by a combination of letters representing your actions.

JANER ONE: There are different motivations for people doing stuff like this. It's just a very powerful tool to be seen, or you're just reclaiming the space. You don't have to ask anyone. It's also sort of an ethical question in that regard because who in the first place says you can't do anything anywhere? Who was it? Why would someone take it away from you? So some people are like: "Okay, I'm just going to decide for myself that nobody decided it for me, I'm just going to do it." And for me, every graffiti is archive-worthy. I've always been that way. Because who am I to judge what someone else values? If someone thinks it's archive-worthy, then yes. Another thing: for academics, it's very important to archive everything because then you are maybe in the process of doing it, you find something out and then you

need to go back or need to connect thoughts.

MANUEL SKIRL: Maybe it starts mattering after some time. For some reason, you can't see now.

Martin de la Iglesia: I think the most important thing is that the criteria for inclusion must be clear. I'm perfectly fine when somebody takes photographs and says: Okay, these are the best pieces on Donaukanal or similar. But then it has to be clear what 'the best' means for this person.

JANER ONE: Yeah, what are the definitions?

Martin de la Iglesia: It has to be made explicit. So it could be that this person maybe dislikes the colour yellow. So he only takes photos of red pieces and whatever. But if I don't know that, then I get the wrong impression from these photographs. So it's okay to be selective, but then I, as an academic, have to know what the criteria for selection are. And only then I can arrive at conclusions.

MANUEL SKIRL: I think you can send 100 people to Donaukanal and have them take pictures of the 100 best things they see and you will get totally different things. There's also so many small things like tiles, little stickers and funny, urban knitting and stuff like that, you can find a lot of different things.

Martin de la Iglesia: It would be cool to send 100 people there and then take the things that most people took photos of.

MANUEL SKIRL: And that's the most proven art <ironically>. Or the biggest and most colourful ones.

JANER ONE: Yeah, I think aesthetics do have a science behind.

MANUEL SKIRL: That's okay because people have different tastes, so different graffiti I guess, also can add something. Even if you don't like everything or most of the things that are there on Donaukanal, you can still find something that you like if you're searching for it.

Liljana Radošević: You mentioned that taking over the public space is one of the most interesting, most activating things for graffiti writers. And I think from what I've learned so far is that we are constantly being persuaded by the city governments that we can't use public spaces. The thing is, if we are paying taxes, we are supposed to be able to use our public space, but you can't really use it without permission for anything anymore. And, for example, in Belgrade, if you want to organise a protest, you actually need permission to organise protest, and then you get police escort for the protest. It kind of beats the purpose of the protest. So, I think the things that are happening, in our public space without permission are actually very important on this social level because they remind us that we should be able to use our public space, whether you like it or not, we should be able to negotiate with each other about certain things. And another point that I wanted to make about all graffiti is archive-worthy. Then we go back to the individual because in cultural studies it's usually said that the results you get are basically the added-up things of the personal background of the researcher. So basically you kind of start from your position in life as I don't know, art historian or archaeologist or sociologist, and then you add an extra Master of Arts and then you did things in your final work which will be an overall product of overall things that you collected throughout the time. So I think, when it comes to archiving graffiti, it's basically that. I love tags, for example, I've always taken photos of the tags and most of the researchers I have met over the years have kind of given up on researching graffiti. They never really love tags and they still don't like it and they never collected it.

JANER ONE: That's crazy to me!

Liljana Radošević: Yeah. And without tags, you wouldn't have anything else.

JANER ONE: Yeah, because if you want to be interested in graffiti, you want to preserve or write something academic about it, you really can't ignore the tagging. Because everything stems from the tag. Even the big, powerful commercial paintings, they started with tagging.

Liljana Radošević: No [spray] can control without tags.

JANER ONE: And it says all about the skills. If you want to find out if someone is good, you just give him a can and a skinny cap and let him do a tag. It's a very easy way to find out if someone is good.

Liljana Radošević: And we go back to the point who is archiving what, and when, and in which way. We go back to the individual. Every graffiti writer and street artist, this individual that develops over the time. Researchers are also developing over time. And it's just not possible to archive everything all the time, unless you are a really big team constantly working 24/7 and at a certain point just some of the things don't get archived. We have to deal with that.

MANUEL SKIRL: That's completely impossible. For some stuff you would need to get permission from certain companies to enter their photo library. They don't even archive everything because like where metro or commuter trains or trams will get cleaned, they don't take pictures of everything. And they wouldn't let you have it either. There are abandoned buildings, tunnels, sewer systems where you just don't get to archive. And if the original creator hasn't archived it, then it's nowhere.

JANER ONE: If you know what kind of thing you want to look up, then you could install CCTV.

< Laughter >

MANUEL SKIRL: [Documenting] everything in public space is already ridiculous. It's always just a fraction.

Liljana Radošević: Absolutely. You always have to make a choice. For example, recently, I had to make a choice because my phone was dying. I couldn't really photograph everything. So that was like a technical reason for me not archiving everything. I think it's almost impossible. And maybe this is the thing that we really shouldn't strive for, archiving everything.

Samuel Merrill: That statement isn't about archiving everything, but it's about acknowledging and accepting that everything might be archive-worthy. But I think there were

a couple of points of that discussion, which I might just try and focus on a little bit because I think they actually lead us into this fourth statement. If I might try and artificially force us towards the decontextualisation statement. One was about the acceptance of the development or the flow of careers, both within the graffiti scene or within the academic scene within graffiti circles or academic circles. I recognise, for instance, that in this respect street art is the opposite way round, right? In some way, street art is a gateway drug for academics, right? People start and then over the years you maybe end up and you are starting to understand and read and appreciate.

JANER ONE: It's easier to consume.

MANUEL SKIRL: There are literal academics because graffiti writers would also be from every different social filter space, especially. And some of them just started as straight graffiti writers. And I think you have a fraction there, which would appreciate any graffiti or letter related thing much more over some, images that are consumable much easier, maybe also just because it's consumable much easier. And that gives you this feeling of being like a little bit more unique if you're after that also the same with music, right?

Decontextualisation MATTERS

All documentation involves decontextualisation. John Berger (1980) reminds us that we need to be sensitive to the new context of interpretation added to private photographs when they become public. What might this mean in projects like at INDIGO? What does broadening public access do, especially when we might be talking about the older collections of creators themselves, which forms of documentation involve least decontextualisation or what strategies can lessen the impact of decontextualisation? When is decontextualisation the most problematic, perhaps when we find the tags of deceased writers on the interior design of fast-food joints. At the same time, with graffiti and street increasingly viewed online, as much in the street, are things like time-lapse photography, 3D scans, VR, augmented reality solutions as decontextualising as we might think.

Samuel Merrill: That's one of the things that I'd like to push you along because okay, there's individuals, we always got

to break this down on an individual basis and there'll always be individuals who are both academics and writers and they're maybe harder to put into the boxes that we're trying to deal with. But I think it's that kind of cultural capital, that kind of "Oh yeah, I fucking understand tags. I'm really down with it. I understand what's going on here." But what do we feel? How do we feel about the point when everyone gets it? Does that diminish the value of it somehow? And this comes back to authenticity maybe. And maybe that gets to what we're talking about when we're talking about decontextualisation of taking everything out of where it was originally from. In a sense moving it away from its origins. Another thing was how you all individually kind of beautifully captured how all marks are worthy of archiving because they are actually not separate, right? They all work in this big ecosystem. The tag on the piece from 2009 is important because otherwise the whole thing breaks down, everything just gets stopped. And that somehow is maybe also part of the decontextualisation thing because when a lot of the recording or archiving techniques are being used, many of the projects we've been discussing are really about separating out pieces and understanding, you know, kind of watching the history of certain spaces and certain contributions. Earlier there was this question about what, are we talking about with 'decontextualisation'? So I wanna make sure that that's a bit clearer and mostly it relates to is something lost when something is taken away from the Donaukanal. A photograph is placed in a new position, a piece is maybe even physically moved. And that's that thing, but there's a little bit of a bridge somehow between that and the decoding translation practice going on in academia, which is people sitting down and trying to say: "Well, you can understand the beauty of tags", for instance. How does that make anyone in this room feel, these kinds of statements?

MANUEL SKIRL: I think it's just normal because we need to judge everything. We need to judge the value of everything and to keep the context with it. For me in graffiti, it matters a lot. I mean, just to make it very simple, along the position or the spot on the street of a piece or some artwork makes a lot of difference and not having this in the documentation, it already loses a lot of its value. For me personally, seeing some graffiti up at some roof or at some position where I can't really understand how it could have been put there.

If it has some magic to it. That's only really possible if you see it with your own eyes on the street. And if you can turn around and have all this context. Also people who are doing big murals and artwork, and they relate to the area or they give some connection to the architectural features or just the use of the building itself. Stuff like that. So there's a lot of factors which can change the view, the sense or the value of a tag, graffiti, art-piece, whatever that can get lost when we just have a sheer photo of it.

Geert Verhoeven: If you think about our [INDIGO's] end product. What we envision to do at the end of the project is to really allow people to virtually walk along the Donaukanal so that they see in a virtual environment where you placed your tag or whatever. So you think that's valuable? More valuable than just showing them the photograph without context?

JANER ONE: I think you can do both. If you have the resources to do both, maybe it would be nice to have both because some people like to consume differently.

MANUEL SKIRL: I think no one knows what's normal in the future.

JANER ONE: On Instagram, you only see [Graffiti] without context, oftentimes.

MANUEL SKIRL: Maybe in two years, if you don't have 3D holographic stuff, nobody's going to watch it.

< *Laughter* >

JANER ONE: Maybe VR is mandatory. Yeah. Maybe.

Geert Verhoeven: When you don't take photographs of your stuff for Instagram, then you lose that context. Right?

JANER ONE: It depends. It depends on how good of a photographer you are as well. Because if you are a good photographer, you are mindful of the context and some pieces only are the way they look because of the wall. Oftentimes the spot determines how the piece flows.

MANUEL SKIRL: If you have a beautiful scenery. I can only, again talk for myself, but I'm sure that the other guys are doing that as well. You go to some abandoned building and you see some really nice rusty spots where you can already imagine what you are doing and even holding my phone there to see how big I'm going to paint. To have the perfect end result. And because the end result isn't paint on the wall, right? It's the photo on my phone. Because that's everything that's left for me.

JANER ONE: I think you can all agree that size matters. So when you put something there that is relatable, that you know how big it is in real life, like a person walking by your piece. This gives some context and it puts everything in perspective. And for example, for a rooftop, it wouldn't make sense to just take a picture of the rooftop. At first [one would photograph] maybe where you can see the height, get some sense. The second picture already shows it from farther, where you can take in the whole...

MANUEL SKIRL: Scenic shots. Yeah. They became much more important. Also since the resolution of photos got higher. If you see graffiti documentation from the nineties, you would only have the sheer piece.

JANER ONE: Yeah maybe even cut out with scissors.

MANUEL SKIRL: You were already happy when they had a decent resolution. And also how bright you can make pictures. The more it went back, the more scenic shots of graffiti with all the area and all the surroundings became fashion.

Liljana Radošević: I was taking photos during 1990s and my main reason for taking only one photo of the piece and just like trying to fit it all in without needing to take another shot was because it was expensive, and I didn't have money. When I was like nineteen I didn't have money to actually buy 10 films and develop the films and develop the photos and then document them in different ways. I knew I had only one shot and that was it.

MANUEL SKIRL: Now of course we take 100 pictures of something and then we sit at home alone on the couch and

delete 99 of them.

JANER ONE: Yeah. That's like taking the perfect selfie <laughs>.

MANUEL SKIRL: I really appreciate having that.

Samuel Merrill: It's very interesting about the framing of your shots. I'm just wondering how often the square is becoming more and more the kind of canvas.

JANER ONE: Yeah. That's a big thing about social media and one of the biggest downsides.

Chiara Ricci: I agree about the risk of decontextualised graffiti, if you just take a picture, but I think that finally it is a risk you have, whenever you want to preserve something. I'm working in a conservation centre. So, if I preserve something from the past, it is not in that time and it's not in that site. Something you can do at your best is to provide tools to people, to understand it, to contextualise. We have an Egyptian museum in Torino, of course we are not Egypt. If I want to explain to a kid what a mummy is, I must give him or her some tools. And I think in a way it can be the same also with digital archives and graffiti. Of course, we have to take a little part of the reality that it's so complex and fascinating and provide as many tools as we can to contextualise. So I think it's a risk, but it's always a risk whenever you want to preserve something that is just a little part of the reality of the world. So if you think about our museums and connections, they are vulnerable. I think all of us can agree with that. And we are doing the same. We are just taking a little part. And what makes a good exhibition, a good collection in a museum or a bad one is how many tools you provide, maybe to the visitor to understand, and to interpret something like that.

MANUEL SKIRL: I think it's good when you have done a little fraction of it, that gives a good image of the variety from what it's representing.

Chiara Ricci: Now if I think of the past and the object from the past, they're just a fraction of their reality. And they came to us because someone made a choice. So whenever

you say all graffiti is archive-worthy. Yes, but someone will decide what to archive and what to not archive. It's the same what happened in the past.

JANER ONE: Yeah, the publisher always has the last word, right?

MANUEL SKIRL: It's always the person who is financing that thing who has the last word.

Chiara Ricci: But I don't think it's a bad thing in a total sense. I mean, it's over, history goes on and what we bring from the past to the future, it's part of our identity. So, in a way, I think it's a good point.

JANER ONE: Yeah. But decontextualisation definitely matters.

Chiara Ricci: It's a big, big risk, yeah. And I agree if you see something you don't know, also with paintings, you see Mona Lisa and you expect something super big. And then it's... I was super deceived when I saw Mona Lisa.

< *Laughter* >

Jona Schlegel: Are you considering actually changing the medium, with what you're recording, like going to do a video rather than photograph your work.

JANER ONE: Yeah, definitely, that's worth it. But it's way harder to take a very good video. So to make it look appealing, you are your biggest critic. With videos, it's easy to make a still and all the cameras still with a very interesting frame it's way easier. But, yeah, videos add more depth. They have more layers. There's more multisensory stimulation going on. Videos definitely help.

MANUEL SKIRL: Yeah, that's really nicely said JANER ONE but I still have to crush it. I think personally it makes sense to document or capture something in video when it moves. If it doesn't it is probably more the still image for me. If you're talking about moving objects, like trains or something, then yeah, definitely. If you're talking about process videos of somebody painting something. Definitely. But if

it's a still object, I would prefer a photo.

JANER ONE: Yeah, that makes sense.

SNUF: For most graffiti there's also this one point where you're supposed to look at it. Most of the time it's straight up from the centre and front. But it doesn't make sense to look at it from straight down up from the wall where you don't see 95% of the piece.

JANER ONE: Yeah. Well, it's super flashy, but yeah, it's actually a still piece. It looks wacky, so yeah. Sometimes.

MANUEL SKIRL: Yeah.

JANER ONE: You're trying to make it amazing and it's bull-shit though.

Geert Verhoeven: I wanted to pick up on what MANUEL SKIRL said because it really struck me that you said for you then the final photograph is the goal, right? So, but the coming home of smartphones and cameras, digital cameras, did you change the canvas? I mean, whole Donaukanal is your canvas where you paint, so to say, did you change your locations for your paint because of the way you can take photographs of it.

MANUEL SKIRL: Yes, definitely all the way. So, first I want to mention that I don't paint on Donaukanal anymore because I have techniques developed, which are not able to put on very rough walls. And I also need some time and I don't like the locations there anymore. I really like when my art, my piece, whatever, is in an environment where there is nothing else that can be connected to it. So no other tag, no other graffiti in the very best case. Not even a colour I don't like. So I'm really into the scenic photo and results. I've been doing this for 15 years now, being really just into the photo as an end result and that makes it maybe also much easier to let go from the actual piece in the real world because when you go to other countries or places that are hardly accessible, never going to see them anymore by yourself. And it's also, I think, very good to let go on it and just leave it for whoever looks at it and have your photos for yourself.

JANER ONE: I have also done some actions, purposefully where I knew I wouldn't take a camera with me just to have the moment for me, so also very humbly in a way.

Geert Verhoeven: So, is it correct that you say that you're doing it less out of an antisocial initiative, but more to make something arty, which you can photograph?

MANUEL SKIRL: This depends. I like both and it gives me more freedom to do something very ugly, very emotional. We would just emotionally mess something up or just have some fun. And then on the other side to give your very best into something very artistic and valuable for many people. The one thing gives me good vibes for the other thing. So, both are very important for me.

Francisca Fernández Merino [Online]: Would video also be a good option when the research is about graffiti audiences, to better represent the real-life experience?

Samuel Merrill: I think this is also a little bit what I was imagining in some cases as an audience of graffiti. You don't approach it from that perspective of the perfect shot. It's very rare, especially at Donaukanal, that you would pop out of the channel or walk along the edge and get the perfect shot. The question which we are getting at is if there is some value in videoing both from a research perspective or maybe to capture the moment of encounter as it will actually be in the real world for many of your artworks, right? Any thoughts on this?

Liljana Radošević: For me, that's like a photogrammetry system. You take as many photos as you can, meaning that each person takes it like a graffiti writer. Or a person who is archiving it, a person who is just walking by the channel and takes a shot and puts it on Instagram. The more photos you have, the more options you have to get, like the full image, the full impression of this particular piece.

Samuel Merrill: Okay. I agree with that, but I'm now thinking back to our tour yesterday and I want to push a bit on that because this was a tour designed for people interested in graffiti and street art from an academic or research perspective. And, of course, we moved through that space

pretty consistently and people were adopting positions where they could see the whole piece for sure. But there was never this moment when I thought someone was backing so close to the edge of the channel, just to get the view.

MANUEL SKIRL: Yeah. Trust me. I did.

Samuel Merrill: That's what I'm interested in!

MANUEL SKIRL: With another person holding you to get the photo. And then you had this wide-angle lens on the new phone and you thought: all this water in my jeans.

Samuel Merrill: That's fascinating to me because that's a perspective of the image, the perfect image to be a personal keepsake or to go on social media. This might be almost impossible for the people who are visiting the Donaukanal, or at least they might not take the opportunity to hold onto my arm. I want to see this as the creator's story, but this is just a reflection.

MANUEL SKIRL: For some people it doesn't matter at all. Some people wouldn't take pictures, for some people it's really important. It's as different as the graffiti.

JANER ONE: Yeah, it's still subjective.

Samuel Merrill: We can't generalise about this stuff. Every single discussion point that we've had today was "Well, sometimes this, sometimes that". It's completely the same with everything in life. Isn't it?

MANUEL SKIRL: Balance.

Graffiti Need CATEGORISATION

As yesterday's keynote reminded us, graffiti are 'unruly subjects' (see Hale in this volume). Humans like to sort things out. As such, maybe graffiti automatically invites this kind of categorisation, but does it need it? Should we be seeking to tame something like graffiti by categorising it. The graffiti and street art scenes make sense to those who directly engage with them and are made sense of by an array of sometimes competing terms. But with graffiti and street art's recontextualisation within the academic world, not least by archiving and documentation projects,

there's a need to translate these terms for wider consumption. Indeed. There have been several efforts about developing graffiti thesauri in different settings in order to characterise different types and elements of graffiti. But as Bowker and Star (1999) stress: all classification, processes and systems are deeply political. They reflect unequal power relations, and they can thus produce both advantage, but also suffering. What are the politics of metadata management with respect to graffiti? Is it even possible to categorise and structure something like graffiti, which has grown so organically without, or within formal stylistic restrictions. Can graffiti terms, styles and creators be put in boxes that neatly define them? How do creators feel about having their work and themselves being put in boxes?

Samuel Merrill: If we can't generalise, can we categorise? Can we say, this is this, and this is that?

JANER ONE: You definitely can, but you have to be aware of the implications.

MANUEL SKIRL: I'm really sure that we need to judge or to be able to judge everything. That's why categorising is super important. And we all know there are these factors of good and bad graffiti, which are actually super idiotic but our brain rolls like this. If it has more colours, if it has more arrows, if its spot is more dangerous or harder to reach, or if you have been the first person to get this idea, if you did something special, if the quality and the readability of your letters is decent. These are all factors that give it a specific value. These days, of course, also social media: How much likes? How much followers? blah, blah, blah. All this together creates the value of your work. And why is that? Because people want to value everything. They want to know. Are you a good dancer? Are you a bad cowboy? Are you a good graffiti writer? And which position do you take in this scene? So they can value it because people are not self-confident and not believing enough in their own senses and in their own judgement. They need others to help them with it.

JANER ONE: We need to compare the whole time.

MANUEL SKIRL: Yes, it's very essential.

JANER ONE: But again in my opinion, you have to be aware

of the implications. Be aware of what you leave out if you categorise something.

Samuel Merrill: That's coming through, the point, that actually nothing can be left out in a way. Because it's through those comparisons that we categorise. It's that classic kind of relation of "this is good because that is bad".

MANUEL SKIRL: No, this is good because it plays after the rules that it wins. So that's also what I needed to learn or what I wanted to learn when I started graffiti: How to be a cool graffiti writer. So you got to do it like this and you got to do it like that. And then you got to look who are the coolest guys and do what they did. Copy this proven concept and try to push it to the next level. Until I got bored of it and started to think about what I actually wanted to do. But most, I would say nearly all, of the people who are doing something artistic, are thinking with this concept.

SERT: The whole categorisation started in the early eighties or late seventies in New York. You do a tag, you do a throw-up, you do a piece and it's still like this today. I also worked many years in these categories. I make a tag with a marker or a can in two seconds, I make a throw-up in two minutes and do a piece in six hours. You work in all these categories, especially when it comes to styles. You can categorise, for example, "bubble style", "wild style". The scene-people get pretty bored of all the traditional styles. Like you mentioned, the shape has to be like this and every form of the letter must have the same thickness. But now there's a movement called anti-style and they don't paint like this. Their style looks anaesthetic, just to break the boundaries and to do something new. At first, I also didn't like it pretty much but over the years I think it also has its value. And even if I don't like the style personally, I don't think it looks that good, but who am I to judge if it has a value? It has the same value as mine, at least.

JANER ONE: It also doesn't say anything about if you are professional or not. You could have figured out the whole subway system and know every security checkpoint and still paint shit. That's the fun thing about it.

MANUEL SKIRL: I would still respect you.

< *Laughter* >

JANER ONE: Yeah, exactly. That's the thing. I have met writers who are so clever and really well prepared and still paint shit. And that's funny.

MANUEL SKIRL: I think also with this anti-style it's very normal. A new generation, taking something to the next level, which does not necessarily have to be better but just something else that brings new factors which are highly valued. And then it's getting in a direction we don't understand.

JANER ONE: What I have to admit is that anti-style is way better suited for sarcastic messages because the piece itself already is sarcastic. It's way better at letting the inner child out, in my opinion, because by following these very serious graffiti rules you're putting yourself into a drawer. You want to keep the same width, there are rules, aesthetic rules that work. They've proven to work. But this anti-style approach is giving you more freedom and it is way better for letting the inner child out. Letting the paint out and trying it.

MANUEL SKIRL: Yeah. I also like it a lot. I had some difficulties to get attached to what the newest generation in Vienna does, but now I see it really differently. And I see that these kids have a lot of fun.

JANER ONE: Yeah.

MANUEL SKIRL: I think it's very valuable when it makes you laugh. It doesn't matter why. It just brings you some good emotions. Also, I think popular music and popular art is always connected to how the most people feel and what the most people like. So, for example, popular rap from when I was twenty or so was super different from popular rap today. And I think that's not because these were the best rappers, but because the most people felt this way. Most people identified with that music. And if you look at the economy, when I was young, it was uprising and everything was possible. Reaching for the stars. And we also do our art like this. We really try to find something that we want to do and put it to the next level and be somebody with it. What

I observe today with the new generation of graffiti writers is that they grow up really differently with less prosperity and also the art, the music, the tattooing and all the cultural streams next to each other represent this for me.

JANER ONE: The tattooing is a big factor actually.

MANUEL SKIRL: If you don't feel confident you don't feel it because you're not with this stream. And then you get old.

< *Laughter* >

JANER ONE: Yeah definitely. You get a vibe also from the tattooing. I think it was way more unlikely to see someone with a face tattoo. Some graffiti writers were really reckless, they also at some point grabbed a tattoo machine from Amazon, the most bullshit thing you could ever buy. But they started doing it on themselves and on their friends and they're having fun with it. And that's also a vibe. I would never do this myself, but I can appreciate people who do it.

Samuel Merrill: I think your reflection on the generational difference is quite interesting. I wasn't aware that the move to marking oneself within the scene is generational.

JANER ONE: Yeah. It's definitely something a lot of people who were graffiti writers turned into. A lot of them got into doing this, because it's also lettering, also always words in between and it's very familiar.

MANUEL SKIRL: Yeah. Hands down, it is just a really good way to make a living. There are much, much more people who would pay you for a tattoo than for a graffiti in their apartment or something like that.

[...]

Jona Schlegel: You were also talking about doing a tag, a throw-up, a piece and so on. If you put your piece on social media and write something like "this is a piece with this and that style". Would someone else say exactly the same? I'm so new to this culture and I think I'm not having the eye for it yet.

MANUEL SKIRL: So, there are different categories of graffiti. There's wild style, ignorant style or anti-style. Also, every single one of these have different names in different countries. So, what we call anti-style in Paris they say style enfant, or kids' style and it's super complicated. And then, there is also the question: what is this for you? And if this is a mixed creation out of those things. But again, we need somehow these words and these terms to describe something, to categorise it, but that does not necessarily mean that everything is something or is can, without doubt, be put into some of these categories. All graffiti artists, street artist or whatever are taking parts of every of those categories and areas and put together what they want from it.

JANER ONE: I think when you're start as an artist it's very important to understand different disciplines and categories. But as an artist, it can only hinder you to categorise stuff. So, it's definitely a different approach whether you're an artist or an academic. As an artist yourself, you don't want to exclude people from your work. Saying this is only for people who appreciate this is not helpful.

Jona Schlegel: So, this would not throw you off?

JANER ONE: No, there are books of graffiti writers who are very famous, and they also categorise because it definitely helps.

MANUEL SKIRL: Describing something to somebody who can't see it, right?

JANER ONE: Do it. Definitely do it.

MANUEL SKIRL: When I talk about artists with him [JANER ONE] and we are not having our phones right at hand we are describing with the terms we just called stupid. We said they boundary you, they take away your freedom of how to put something, but we still use them. We still know what we mean because it makes it easier to understand what you're talking about. Especially when you try to make something visual into words. Or if you talk about something super abstract and try to give the other person the image of what you're talking about. For that we need these words.

JANER ONE: Yeah. Language is really important to exchange information, but it has its limits. Art is not about words. Art is about experiencing.

MANUEL SKIRL: I stopped categorising my own stuff to put myself out of the danger of people telling me this is not that and this is not that.

JANER ONE: Exactly.

< Laughter >

MANUEL SKIRL: You get confronted with a lot of people, especially if you work in a public space, you get public opinion and people will tell me "This is not art. My seven year old daughter could do this" And I'm always like "Yeah, I never claimed anything else." I don't say this is art. I don't say this is street art. I don't say this is good. So I don't use any of those things for my own stuff. But for others, of course, I use it to make the person I'm communicating with understand what I'm talking about.

[...]

Samuel Merrill: Maybe subconsciously I was looking at my watch, but I don't know, but we are close to, if not past, the designated time and I'm also conscious of overdoing it. This sixth statement, I think we actually smashed that at various different points in the conversation. So I'm not going to force it...

Digital Media Are ESSENTIAL

Over recent decades, digital media, and in particular social media have reformulated the graffiti and street art scene. Corporate social media platforms, perhaps most notably Instagram, have provided creators with opportunities to simultaneously document, but also distribute their work globally. In this way, graffiti fame has become increasingly disassociated from physical works. The imperative for creators to continuously 'get up', maybe have been reduced even as the dynamics of these platforms and their reliance on economies of attention may have also driven the increased turnover of graffiti and street art. So what might be the implications of these technologies and me-

dia for creators' efforts in this respect, but also in terms of their efforts to remain anonymous. Are the graffiti-related benefits of social media only incidental to the profit-orientated priorities of these corporate platforms? And how does this undermine the anti-corporate traditions of graffiti cultures while reflecting also the privatisation of an increasingly precarious physical, but also digital public realm. How is graffiti-related data used and monetised by corporate social media platforms? What works are promoted by platform algorithms and how does this influence decisions related to insitu or by-record preservation, but also arguably the kind of works that are created in the first place. And what vulnerabilities might we think of more generally in terms of these technologies, in terms of things going obsolete—software, metadata schemes, ontologies, etc. At the same time, what potentials might digital technology and media offer those academic initiatives that partner with creators? What of digital crowdsourcing or crowd tagging strategies. Would the graffiti creators here be willing for instance, to tag their works on social media for INDIGO using specific hashtags? What might be the potential of linked open data initiatives and initiatives like Wikidata projects? Could creators imagine a future where they are comfortable becoming Wikidata?

Jona Schlegel: I just wanna ask something on that digital part. So, if you would have the opportunity to have a 3D environment and your piece in this environment, would you then pick the perfect spots where an audience should see your piece? Would that be interesting for you?

MANUEL SKIRL: That's actually something that just occurred because there's a new function on the newest phones, which have some laser sensors. So you would be able to scan the whole thing. Some very good artists from Vienna use this technique to create posts on Instagram where it's possible to move around. And he would literally scan for hours, not just this piece, but also the wall right next to it, the floor with all the rotten leaves. He literally made a little digital diorama. This really popped out for me. I was really amazed how he did that and everybody's thinking about like really highly technical equipment. And whoever is ignoring that is going to lose some audience if they care or not, doesn't matter, but that that's going to happen for sure.

Geert Verhoeven: This was Jakob, right.

MANUEL SKIRL: Yes, exactly.

SERT: I go back to the question. I think all of us replaced a piece on Donaukanal. Of course we would choose the best spot, where the most people see it.

JANER ONE: Yeah. The spot also tells a lot about how the person thinks. When you walk upstairs and you do a tag. The first thing people see is the tag. If you do something there, no one can escape. You know what I mean? You can't turn left or right on the stairs. So you will see the piece. It says a lot about the person, which spots they paint.

MANUEL SKIRL: And also some people would tag on spots where nobody would do it because just the fact that nobody would do it makes them special.

JANER: Yeah.

MANUEL SKIRL: So you see everybody's doing the same. You try to make something different. And then there is stuff that actually doesn't make sense, but just makes sense because it doesn't make sense.

< Laughter >

SERT: Or, for example, on the opposite of flex another wall, just above the water. There's a spot where almost no one wants to paint. That's why I want to paint it. Because I know when I paint there it lasts longer.

MANUEL SKIRL: That's nature balancing itself out somehow.

JANER: And I also think that digital media is broad. When we think about digital media most think about social media, but there's a lot more depth to it. Some people, for example, tried a lot with VR. I think the possibilities here are endless. And yeah, I also agree with MANUEL SKIRL, whoever doesn't jump on that train will be lost in the future to some degree.

MANUEL SKIRL: Not lost!

< Laughter >

JANER: No, not lost, but you lose impact. It's definitely a new avenue that shouldn't be dismissed out of petty reasons.

Samuel Merrill: Now I'm starting to think we've got two more comments and then maybe we wrap-up after that and we take any other conversation...I think there'll be some beers somewhere, hopefully.

Geert Verhoeven: I want to ask if you see this as a kind of contradiction. So on the one hand you want to be famous on social media, have the likes and very impactful posts, but on the other hand, I suppose most of you guys still don't want to be known in general by your full name. So you want to be anonymously famous more or less.

MANUEL SKIRL: Yeah. You want to have the good part of being famous, but not the responsibility.

< Laughter >

JANER: Yeah. That's perfectly said. That's what's so awesome about Banksy.

Samuel Merrill: That's true for academics as well.

< Laughter >

MANUEL SKIRL: We all just want the same thing.

Geert Verhoeven: I would like to add another question, if I may. We use social media, like Facebook, Instagram or Meta, one of the biggest companies now in the world, not known for taking privacy very seriously. Do you consider this when you are uploading there?

MANUEL SKIRL: You should yeah.

JANER: Definitely, yeah. But we still do it, right? It's the same with a selfie, but it's way more troublesome than it is

in all honesty. But yeah, since the NSA scandal and Edward Snowden and so on, everybody's aware of it, but at the same time, it's also a very integral part of our society. It's weird, but you get weird looks when you say you don't have social media.

MANUEL SKIRL: And also we often justify it for ourselves with "Who am I? I'm not so interesting for whoever", right? But together we are interesting because you can get meta-data out of that. This already happens big time, right?

SERT: I want people to know my graffiti not to know my name or my face or whatever. It's about graffiti. Also my Instagram count is just like graffiti, no face, no name, whatever. Because it's not about that.

JANER: It's also definitely a cultural aspect. In the scene you get a lot of authenticity by staying away with your face...

MANUEL SKIRL: Staying anonymous.

JANER: Yeah, staying anonymous. It's definitely a factor. Trying to be mysterious when you are younger helps in that scene.

[...]

MANUEL SKIRL: I think I'm drifting away from the actual question all the time.

< Laughter >

Samuel Merrill: Well, you've been drifting constantly towards new questions, which is probably why we could stay for a very long time and hear a lot more fascinating insights on these things that we are outside in many respects. But to wrap this up, I find this, an extremely positive experience to actually get in the same room and talk about these things. And I think it's very, very easy and it happens very, very often that this kind of space and dialogue isn't sufficient in research projects. It is there to some degree, but it isn't expanded and doesn't continue. So, I thank you all for this conversation. It was very fun to moderate it. I think we can all mutually congratulate ourselves with a beer and a short round of applause if we want.

< Applause >

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