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Cinematic street art? Exploring the limits of the philosophy of street art¹

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Abstract. As artforms, film and street art seem incompatible. Contra this incompatibility, I investigate their combination: *cinematic street art*. Two promising cases are the artworks *MUTO* and *Repopulate*, but I argue neither is suitable. *MUTO* only counts if I accept the transparency thesis, the claim that photographs allow us to literally see their depicta. *Repopulate* only counts if we reject Noel Carroll's requirement that a cinematic performance token isn't itself an artwork. However, these imperfect cases demonstrate what is required in order to have cinematic street art: the artwork is a 1) a consensual artwork that 2) does not merely use street art as imagery or 3) merely use the street as a performance space. I introduce two hypothetical artworks inspired by this approach and discuss their merits, as well as their pitfalls relevant to my own desiderata. As such, this article serves as the foment for broader discussion within the philosophy of street art.

Keywords: film-philosophy, street art, experimental film, transparency.

PRESS PLAY

On July 25, 2019, Twitter was ablaze as independent entertainment company and hipster darling A24 cryptically tweeted a video with six of their films each listed with a respective set of coordinates. Entitled *Public Access*, A24 led a campaign that brought a select few of their acclaimed films to the places they were set in via massive white billboards, all free of charge (Sicurella [2019]). The creative publicity stunt not only capitalized on the unique sense of space that many of their films are imbued with, the films were situated in such a way that it is reminiscent of an adjacent artform: street art. Yet, philosophers of street art, the few that there are presently, have neglected discussing the intersection between street art and film.

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The disparate methods of production for these artforms might feel incongruous, given that we often associate street art with graffiti, stencils, and sculptures and film with site-specific projection and two-dimensionality. Despite their appearances, I argue street art and film are not incompatible. On the contrary, the combination of street art and film yields a *sui generis* artform that I term *cinematic street art*.

The concept of cinematic street art is motivated by three conditions. First, street art is an essentially aconsensual artform, or artform wherein the artist does not seek consent from the property owner where the art is placed. Furthermore, street art makes the street internal to the artwork's meaning, such that removing an artwork from the street undermines its artistic integrity. Second, the street is not merely imagery in our analysis of cinematic street art. One may say that films about street art like *Murs Murs* or *MUTO* count as cinematic street art, but underlying this analysis is the assumption that photographs are necessarily transparent objects – which they are not. Third, cinematic street art does not *merely* use the street as a performance space. These conditions are the basis for a few cinematic street artworks that I propose, though my putatively ideal candidates become contentious upon closer inspection. My theoretical foray is thus an outline, inspired by the discourses on the philosophy of street art and film, of a *sui generis* artform that we may have yet to encounter.

I begin by evaluating what philosophers have said about street art so far.

THE ESSENCE OF STREET ART

Riggle contends that «an artwork is *street art* if, and only if, its material use of the street is internal to its meaning» (Riggle [2010]: 246; italics original). The definition joins two claims: street art must make *material use* of the street and this material use is *internal*, or essential, to how the artwork functions in space. An artist utilizes the material street by binding the very existence of the

artwork to the street, such that its removal would compromise the artwork's integrity. The most obvious examples of this are graffiti artworks, which literally adhere to the street that the artist paints them on; the same may be said of wheat-paste, ceramics, and wallpapering. By contrast, a painting produced in a studio on a canvas and subsequently hung in an alley would not satisfy either of Riggle's requirements, since it would not make use of the street nor make meaning from it. If this painting were removed from the street and hung instead in an art gallery, it would retain its meaning and effect; the same can be said of commercial art and advertisements (Ibid.). A prominent and paradigmatic example of street painting, according to Riggle, is Invader, the Paris-based street artist who has now *invaded* 65 cities and 33 countries (<https://urban-nation.com/artist/invader/>). The remarkable art he produces is not always located on the physical street, yet it is generally uncontested as street art².

Of course, street art encapsulates more than conventional media. Seed-bombing, the practice of planting packets of flower seeds into neglected spaces, is widely considered by aestheticians to be street art (see e.g. Bacharach [2016]; Willard [2016]). Its titular cousin, yarn-bombing, similarly beautifies unappealing spaces with knit fabrics (e.g. bike rack cozies). In each of these approaches, the artwork makes use of the *material* street rather than simply being placed on it. The street itself becomes a potent source of meaning for the artwork, hence satisfying Riggle's internality requirement. This also entails that when an artwork created for the street is removed from it, then a portion of its effect is lost, for artwork in the street «outstrips the power of its manifest aesthetic properties» (Riggle [2010]: 250). The term «street» itself, however, has been obscured by the presence of street art not spatially located in the

² A quick search on Google of the «top 10 most famous street-artists» consistently yields Invader, among others. This in itself is not indicative of their philosophical status as street artists, but it demonstrates that there is a consensus among the general public on what street art looks like.



Banksus Militus Ratus on display at the London Natural History Museum. Source: <https://banksyexplained.com/issue/banksy-rat-business-and-pest-modernism/>.

street. Banksy, the most well-known working street artist, epitomized this conundrum with his 2004 piece *Banksus Militus Ratus*, placed inside the London Natural History museum without permission. *Banksus Militus Ratus* is undoubtedly street art in the eyes of aestheticians for its activist functions and subversive properties (Bacharach [2016]), but it poses a problem for those who rely on street art existing in the street. Riggle himself is aporetic when defining the notion of street. He explains that, in order for a space to count as the street, «people must treat it as the street» (Riggle [2010]: 255). This is intuitive enough, but Riggle muddies his own waters by adding that treating a space as the street presupposes «maintain[ing] a vague constellation of practical attitudes toward [the street]» (Ibid.)³. Riggle identifies, as it were,

³ Public approbation also plays a key role in defining the relationship between public and street art. When the public enjoys the effect of a given piece of street art, they are much less likely to remove it from the space it is presented in. Conversely, if the public dislikes what has been created, people may be motivated to seek its removal through the local agencies or take it upon themselves. On the street, an artwork's impact or resonance with the surrounding community is measured by the length of time it stays up. This is a marked contrast from public art, which, ironically, cares not for the public's initial or continued approval. Since public art is usually commissioned by bureaucratic authorities and protected by law, its effect cannot be predicated on its ability to remain unscathed –

the constellation of street art but not the constitutive stars. To obviate such vagueness, Sondra Bacharach (2016) looks to an attendant phenomenon of street art.

Bacharach posits *aconsensuality* as the determinant of street art. *Aconsensuality*, unlike *consensuality* or *non-consensuality*, refrains from seeking consent from a party (Bacharach [2016]: 486). A party, *x*, commits *aconsensual* act *z* when they do not ask the other party (or parties), *y*, for their permission to engage in said act. By contrast, if party *x* was denied permission from party *y* to engage in *z* act, but proceeded to engage in *z* act, this would be *non-consensual*. According to Bacharach, *aconsensuality* is the framework that we employ for measuring the status of a street art artwork, as well as how we delineate public art from street art⁴. Artworks that go through the bureaucratic authorities in government and receive funding from those sources have been publicly sanctioned, whereas street art circumvents this entire process and often exploits it. Bacharach explicates her taxonomy further through a four-step method of street art production that integrates *aconsensuality*:

- (1) These works are subject to alterations and destruction, and hence street artists accept the resulting ephemerality of their works;
- (2) these works are often illegal;
- (3) street artists have a strong incentive to remain anonymous...
- (4) if street artists strive to make defiant and subversive art, art that falls outside of the mainstream, then it should come as no surprise that their work is often deeply antithetical to the art world. (Ibid.: 487)

To illustrate this method, Bacharach turns to the case of Barry McGee, a street artist that the city of Sydney commissioned to produce public art. Accused of being a sell-out, McGee created both

it is expected to be.

⁴ Chackal observes that illegality and illicitness are just as, or even more so, integral to the function of street art as is the street. Chackal's account marks these two variables as «co-constitutive» since illegal street artworks are *de facto* contradictory to social conventions (Chackal [2016]: 363).

the commissioned artwork as well as an aconsensual one, reestablishing his *bona fides* as a street artist in the community (Ibid.: 488). Bacharach does not believe aconsensual art is inextricably linked to illegality (Ibid.: 481); in other words, one could theoretically make street art that is aconsensual but not illegal⁵. There is reason to be concerned about the epistemic conditions of such a concept. If I judge an artwork to be street art because of its apparent context but later ascertain that it was commissioned by the local government, then should it be incumbent upon me to revise my belief about what type of street art it is? Though one may find it undesirable to do so, I will bite the bullet for the sake of argument and assert that we should.

While the contextual definition of “the street” may remain obscure, undoubtedly borne of the ever-expanding canon of street art, taken together Bacharach and Riggle provide a sturdy enough foundation on which we can build out the case for cinematic street.

ACONSENSUALITY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC TRANSPARENCY

Ask people interested in street art what they envision if you say “cinematic street art” and likely

⁵ The proposition that aconsensuality and illegality are individual is contentious. Baldini points out that the assumption is oxymoronic since aconsensuality conceptually implies de jure regulatory violations of a given space (Baldini [2018]: 14). Private property is designated in legal documents, so to produce an aconsensual artwork, which Bacharach says occurs on private property, entails that the artist violates the city’s regulations for private property (Bacharach [2016]: 486). But there is a response to this criticism. In 2009, the Brazilian government passed legislation that legalized street art in cases where consent by the property owners was given to the artist (Young [2012]). We can imagine a similar case wherein a city or state level government passed a law sanctioning all street art, but forewent the consent proviso. Street artists would now be empowered to produce artworks in any space, including private properties, without legal repercussions; this does not have any bearing on aconsensuality. In effect, an artist could still produce the artwork aconsensually but not violate the legal statutes of the city.

all will mention *MUTO*. *MUTO* (2008)⁶ is a short-film by the street artist Blu, a renowned street artist famous for his intricately painted murals and animated shorts⁷. These shorts all utilize the street in the same way – that is, the street becomes an individual frame of animation for the video⁸. Blu individually paints an image, photographs it, paints over it, and paints the same image a few inches ahead of the previous. The tedious process yields an astonishing reward for viewers but poses a dilemma for philosophers. First, encountering street art *in the wild* is an intuitively distinct phenomenological experience from encountering street art on Instagram. What Riggle (2010) articulates as an «unsolicited aesthetic injection» – that moment of happening upon street art on an otherwise ordinary walk – is incomparable to the phenomenological event of finding a picture of street art on the internet. The short-film is also not located in physical space. Each example supplied herein or in the extant street art literature assumes *a priori* that street art begins and ends on the street. For if the conception of a street artwork was not the street, then its genealogical essence would be of another kind. Components of a street artwork (such as stencils for spray painting, knitted fabrics for yarn bombing) may be created beforehand, but the product is only realized in the street. The converse is true of *MUTO*. The street artwork paintings in Blu’s short-film are components analogous to stencils, *ad hoc* tools for the creation of an artwork. *MUTO* brilliantly utilizes one medium, street art, to generate a product in another, film. But, dissimilar to street art, *MUTO* does not become a film until *after* it has been on the street. Not until all of the still frames are organized chronologically in editing software is the film realized. If street art is conceived in the street, then cinematic street art is as well. Since *MUTO* does not become a film until *after* the

⁶ *MUTO* is available here: <https://youtu.be/uuGaqLT-gO4>.

⁷ Blu’s body of work is available here: <http://blublu.org/b/category/news/>.

⁸ Street artists, such as the Broken Fingaz collective in Israel, have since reused Blu’s technique for their own artworks: <https://vimeo.com/10555187>.



Two stills from Blu's short film *MUTO*. Source: *MUTO* (2008). Screenshots by the author.

street, the cinematographic element of it cannot be a component of a street artwork. This might account for why Riggall (2010) and Baldini (2021), who identify *MUTO* as street art, make a conflation in labelling *MUTO* as street art when it is a film *about* street art⁹.

But *MUTO*'s status is much more precarious viewed through the lens of Bacharach's framework. Should we accept Bacharach's view that

⁹ My choice of wording here may provoke some criticism. *MUTO* is not necessarily *about* street art in the same way that Varda's *Mur Murs* (1981) or Silver's *Style Wars* (1983) is. In those documentary films, street art is the subject that the filmmakers choose in order to engage broader discourses about society. By contrast, street art is the object in *MUTO*.

street art broadly is aconsensual, we would have to accept that each individual artwork must be aconsensual. Given this, *MUTO* would need to itself be an aconsensually-produced film. What is the issue with this? I could necessarily concede that Blu produced his individual artworks, the frames of each painting, without consent from the property owners, therefore each artwork is street art in itself. This is irrelevant, however, since the aconsensuality of these artworks does not apply to the film – aconsensuality is not a transferable property as elucidated by Bacharach. The aconsensuality of an artwork is inextricably linked to it and cannot apply to any other artwork by proxy, such as a photograph taken of an aconsensual artwork.

A natural solution to this may be to invoke Kendall Walton's transparency thesis. The transparency thesis holds that photographs uniquely enable viewers to see objects as they exist in the space they inhabit. Unlike paintings, where the artist acts as an intermediary between an object and the image, the photograph's contents are unimpeachable (Walton [1984]: 261). If I take a photograph of cars I see passing by on the freeway, then the photograph will represent the cars passing by on the freeway as they are – it counterfactually depends on it (Currie [1996]: 53). Now, if I were to paint the same image that I previously photographed, I have the liberty to modify how the cars appear as much or as little as I like. Perhaps I wish to paint each car blue in my scene, even as the assortment of car colours in the freeway is more varied. My intervention in this instance, a freedom that any artist may exercise in their artwork, indicates that we are independent of the situation we are representing when painting. Therefore, according to Kendall Walton's transparency thesis, when I see a photograph of cars passing by on the freeway, or of my great-great-grandmother who is long deceased, I am seeing those objects themselves (Walton [1984]: 251). The argument as such is that if photographs are transparent, then there is no aconsensuality to be transferred between Blu's street artworks and *MUTO*: the photograph, by virtue of being seen through, is aconsensual.

This is a tempting solution, but it necessitates that I back a theory proven dubious. Neither photographs nor the moving image contains the necessary spatial egocentric information, or knowledge about the location of objects in space and time ascertained through our perception, to be transparent (Currie [1995])¹⁰. Unlike a prosthetic seeing device (a telescope), photographs cannot give us the same spatial egocentric information any bodily or prosthetic seeing device can (Ibid.: 65; see also Cohen, Meskin [2004]). Without such information, photographs cannot be transparent and are therefore not things we merely see through. Here the distinction I wish to draw is not that cinematic street art is ontologically transparent, for this would require a far deeper exploration of the subject, but that cinematic street art is not transparent in *our analysis* of it¹¹. Artworks themselves, such as *MUTO*, do not presuppose the transparency thesis, thus any stipulation that cinematic street art must not presuppose transparency is irrelevant. However, what I glean from this line of inquiry is that cinematic street art involves more than imagery. We cannot reliably individuate cinematic street art from cinema if use of imagery is the sole condition, therefore I need further conditions. These conditions will become evident as I continue to analyze other street artworks.

PERFORMANCE IN STREET ART

At first glance, the most intuitive and parsimonious solution for cinematic street art would be to project a film onto the street. Far from the unwieldy devices they were a century ago, projectors are now a highly compact and generally affordable means to watch video on any space. Why could I not project Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru* onto an alleyway in Queens and label that cinematic street art? Similar to a knitted yarn-piece

that is then attached to a street pole, someone skeptical of my argument thus far could say that *Ikiru* is an ingredient of the artwork but not yet the artwork until it is placed in the street. If this were the case, then *voila* – I have achieved cinematic street art! The problem here is that this counterargument assumes that *Ikiru* is meaningful by virtue of being projected outside of the cinema. In fact, no unique artistic work occurs because projecting *Ikiru* itself does not make the street internal to the film's function. You have repurposed pre-existing art without meaningfully utilizing it, rendering it vapid as a unique artwork. Any film not produced with exclusively with the intention of internalizing a site into the film's meaning thus cannot be street art.

This negates the preceding A24 Public Access case as street art. Let's disregard for the sake of argument that the Public Access screenings are permitted and therefore consensual; that that granted, the films themselves do not make the street essential to their meaning. In an interview with Forbes, an A24 marketing executive stated that the decision was made in part because A24 films «are rooted in a sense of place» (Dawson [2019]). Showing A24's films on billboards in their respective environments democratizes the art, similar to street art, and engenders immersion. Yet, the environmental complementarity is just that: a compliment. Their films in and out of the billboard projection spaces utilize the same template. Cinematic street art requires that we find a film that transforms the space it inhabits akin to the methods that other street artworks do, or more broadly that we find a means to transform a space cinematically.

In 2009, the art collective Sweatshoppe premiered a new technology that allowed them to create the illusion of painting with video¹². With each stroke, a piece of the image emerges from the surface it is placed on, eventually coalescing into a single image or video. The technology behind their work involves a tracking software project-

¹⁰ There are other refutations to the Transparency thesis that I will not discuss for my limited purposes, including Carroll's (2008) argument against aesthetic disinterest.

¹¹ I wish to thank an anonymous referee for bringing this distinction to my attention.

¹² My thanks to Sondra Bacharach for bringing this collective to my attention.



A Sweatshoppe video painting performance. Screenshot captured by author.

ing prefabricated images when certain movements occur. Take, for example, Sweatshoppe's *Repopulate* (2013) in the occupied territory of Palestine¹³. Sweatshoppe member Blake Shaw travels to various historical locations in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Jaffa, and *paints* videos of refugees, symbolically «return[ing] the image of the refugees to their ancestral homes». The spatiality of the *Repopulate* video paintings gain purchase in the artwork's meaning. Only by situating these specific films in these specific locations do the video paintings become a compelling symbolic protest. They are also placed aconsensually, even if they incur no material consequences for the spaces they are placed in.

So far, this seems to be the ideal candidate for cinematic street art – until I reference Noel Carroll's ontology of film. Carroll enumerates five requirements for determining how a film must function to exist as film: (1) as a detached display, (2) to give the impression of movement, (3) be a performance token generated by a template, (4) performance tokens are not themselves artworks, and (5) be two-dimensional (Carroll [2008]: 73). Sweatshoppe's approach fulfils (1), (2), (3), and (5), but is antithetical to (4). Let us elaborate on

¹³ A video of Sweatshoppe's work available here: <https://vimeo.com/65691265>.

this definition piecemeal. The notion of *detached display* is an intuitive extension of spatial egocentricity. When we perceive an object in space normally, we ascertain spatial egocentric information about said object in relation to us that we use to orient ourselves toward it. Film is «phenomenologically detached», even if the camera interacts with the space around it (Ibid.: 57). When we watch a movie, we anticipate movement to occur in the film; this expectation is rational for a viewer to have given the nature of the *moving* image itself. However, it is perfectly reasonable that a filmmaker may exploit this human inclination for their own ends. Because we must account for static films, Carroll's second requirement presupposes that we *anticipate* movement when watching a film, rather than categorically assume it (Ibid.: 61).

Though it evolved into a distinct artform by the mid-1910s, theatre and film both belong to the «multiple-instance» type of art (Ibid.: 64). Each instance, or performance, of the art is designated as a token experience; however, these token performances are produced entirely differently. Motion picture *performance* is a referent for the use of a *template* – DVD, Blu-Ray, film reel, VHS, streamed video – to show a movie, whereas a token performance for the theatre is an *interpretation* of a play, a «recipe» as Carroll insightfully describes it (Ibid.: 66)¹⁴. When a theatregoer witnessed Laurence Olivier performing in a rendition of *Hamlet* at the Globe Theatre, they witnessed the performance token of Shakespeare's text as interpreted by Olivier; in this instance, the interpretation is the artwork. When a moviegoer witnessed a performance token of Olivier as Hamlet in his film adaptation of the play, the performance token was generated from a film reel template; in this instance, the film

¹⁴ Arthur Danto discusses the significant role that actors play in delineating a film from a theatre performance. He writes: «In a movie, a role belongs to the person who plays it in the sense that were another to play the so-called same role, it would be in a different *work*. So the fact that films use actors ought not to mislead us into thinking of film as an essentially performative art inasmuch as nothing counts as a different performance of the same work» (Danto [1985]: 107; italics original).

reel was the artwork. Thus, requirements three and four acknowledge that film «performance tokens» (a screening of a film) are generated from a template (DVD) and, unlike theatrical performance tokens, these tokens are not artworks unto themselves. Yet, one class of counterexample, the mechanical figurine, appears to fit all the requirements (Ibid.: 72). Something like the mechanized Jack Sparrow that peeks out of a barrel on the Pirates of the Caribbean ride in Disneyland still fits the bill, yet no one acquainted even in the most tangential way with film would defend mechanical figurines as film. To avoid this objection, the final requirement enumerated by Carroll stipulates that a motion picture must be *two-dimensional*.

The videos of Palestinian refugees in *Repopulate* are each performance tokens from a template, the template being a projection or light transmission that is tracked by the sensors in the paint roller. What then negates (4) is the interjection of the painting performance itself. Part of the video painting's aesthetic value is that the video is revealed through an unpredictable combination of strokes. In *Repopulate*, Shaw pushes his roller at random, eventually coalescing into a painted block that reveals the face of a refugee. In order for video painting to conform with (4), each performance token would need to be an exact replication of the previous – this is infeasible in Sweatshoppe's approach. Moreover, a hypothetical performance token of this variety would betray the core experience of video painting as an unpredictable multimedia spectacle. Such as it is, I need not be committed to Carroll's ontology wholesale in order to clarify the point. Insofar as one grants each performance token is not in itself an artwork, the point stands and leaves room for the acolytes of Cavell, Danto, and Bazin, among other prominent film philosophers and theorists, to hash out the finer details of film art.

THE POSSIBILITY OF CINEMATIC STREET ART

I have stipulated thus far that the constitutive stars of the cinematic street art constellation

include, but are not limited to: an 1) aconsensual artwork that 2) does not merely use street art as imagery or 3) merely use the street as a performance space. If we concede the desiderata of cinematic street art that I have laid out, then I have suggestions for two feasible, and practical, approaches for cinematic street art: site-specific projected films and primitive moving image devices. I conclude by addressing some criticisms of my argument stemming from these hypothetical approaches.

Suppose that rather than projecting an existing film on the street, like *Ikiru*, I projected a film intentionally created for a specific space. Say, for example, that there is a brick apartment building in Queens that I choose to make an artwork for. Every night, I notice that the man living in apartment 4A opens his window to get some fresh air. For a week, I project a video that I have made onto the window of apartment 4A. In it, a man falls out of the apartment and towards the ground, and the token is repeated in a thirty-second loop from the template movie I created; call this *Falling Man*. The street is internal to the cinematic artwork's meaning in this scenario, both in its temporality and its dedicated use in the street, it checks every one of Carroll's boxes, and it can be produced aconsensually. However, even in this example it is not clear that the street is transformed in the relevant sense. Indeed, LED throwies or sugar art, artworks that do not alter the surface, still hang from the street or adhere to it. Such artworks supply a fair counterpoint to concerns that street art necessarily transforms the space it inhabits, but do not account for the breadth of street art practises. In protest of defence contractors developing laser weapons, the legendary collective Graffiti Research Lab (GRL) designed a laser projection device called *L.A.S.E.R. Tag* (2007)¹⁵. In layman's terms, a high-powered projector recreates images that a person draws with a laser by tracking the movements of the laser with a computer program, creating the illusion of draw-

¹⁵ Their artwork and website is available here: <http://www.graffitiresearchlab.com/blog/projects/laser-tag/#video>

ing with a laser. Street art of this variety reworks our concept of the medium with cutting-edge technology. If one denies that GRL's *L.A.S.E.R. Tag* is street art just because of its methods, they risk dispensing of the avant-garde ethos of street art. To push the point further, I make the projection *even more* site-specific. Imagine that a man had actually jumped out of apartment 4A five years ago, thus the projection invokes the cultural consciousness and memory for its artistic ends¹⁶. Though I do not see this proviso as mutually exclusive to cinematic street art, the thought clarifies the myriad ways that I render cinematic street art creatively without abandoning my desiderata.

The remaining candidates for us to consider are two primitive forms of film: the zoetrope and the Mutoscope. Both devices rely on a manual crank that the operator spins in order to imbue still images with a sense of motion. The zoetrope is a cylindrical device inserted with images or 3D models that is viewed through a slit, while the Mutoscope is a coin-operated device that plays a reel of images in succession, like a flip book, viewed through a private window. A zoetrope created for and installed on the street fits the bill for cinematic street art. Although a sceptic may counter that the zoetrope is three-dimensional and therefore contradictory to Carroll's requirement (5), the image produced from the zoetrope itself is two-dimensional. A movie playing in the cinema is witnessed in a three-dimensional space, yet we do not say that the film itself exists three-dimensionally. Mutoscopes could similarly be installed in the street. The sceptic might also offer the concern that neither of these artworks are subversive, one of the vital characteristics of street art that Baldini (2018; 2021) observes. Subjectivity plays a serious role in subversiveness. What is subversive is contextually-dependent, Ásta (2013) tells us, but something as antiquated and rare as a zoetrope or Mutoscope, especially located in the street, is generally unconventional. To what extent placing these devices in the street is subversive is up for debate, but I find it intuitive and uncontro-



Wheel of Life (1870) Zoetrope at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures.

versial to claim that a zoetrope on the street subverts norms. Of pertinence to our discussion is Bill Brand's *Masstransiscope*, a 1980 public artwork installed in the New York subway tunnels. The artwork consists of 300 feet of individual frames placed on the tunnel wall opposite the train, with a barrier in between that has 228 individual slits and fluorescent lighting to illuminate the frames. As the train moves through the tunnel, the gorgeous metamorphosis of shapes animates and brings aesthetic value to an otherwise mundane subway ride¹⁷. Had *Masstransiscope* not been funded by government programs and permitted,

¹⁶ My thanks to Nicholas Riggle for making this point.

¹⁷ Brand thoroughly documents the making of *Masstransiscope* on his website here: <https://www.billbrand.net/public-art>.

it would accord with the standards I set forth for cinematic street art.

Setting aside these minor concerns, a much graver one threatens the theoretical integrity of *Falling Man* and street zoetropes. Carroll designed his fourth requirement, a performance token must not be an artwork unto itself, in order to delineate theatre and film. A film retains its phenomenal meaning in spite of its placement, whereas the venue of a theatre performance token bears on its phenomenal meaning. In the same vein, street artworks make phenomenal meaning from the street, indicating that street art appears more allied with theatre than film. But if this is the case, then it is unclear how *Falling Man* and the like do not run afoul of Carroll's fourth criterion¹⁸. The desiderata are also in tension because of this. As the transformation of the street and site-specificity of an artwork increases, the less cinematic it can be, for these phenomena make the work more obviously a performance¹⁹.

¹⁸ My thanks to an anonymous referee for illuminating this point.

¹⁹ Andrea Baldini here might suggest I endorse his performance-centered ontology of street art. His theory holds that we appreciate not so much the product of the street artist's action but instead their «generative actions», an application of Davies' (2004) theory of art as performance (Baldini [2021]: 290). I may notice a tag placed at the highest point on a bridge or behind heavily secured barriers and wonder, how did someone manage to get up there? Perhaps I witness an intricate tag conspicuously placed in a populated location and ponder, how did this artist manage to avoid arrest? Tacit in each of these queries is an appreciation of the performance involved in the production of an artwork. Contra Baldini, performance-based ontology regards the street art work-product as ancillary to the performance and favors a narrow breed of the diverse medium. In virtue of endorsing an ontology that assumes that appreciation is derived from the performance, the work-product simply becomes the manifestation of this performance. Baldini himself labels street artworks as «traces revealing a street artist's activity», traces of an activity that «an appreciator can imaginatively reconstruct» when viewing an artwork (Ibid.: 291). Theorizing street art artworks as traces accommodates those street artworks that are unconcerned with the aesthetic value of their product, viz. graffiti. Conveni-

The tension between my desiderata indicates that we still have much to discuss when it comes to the philosophy of street art. But rather than lament this tension as the downfall of my argument, I see it as the foment for a refined theory of street art and its theoretical limits. In endeavouring to answer one question, what film's place in street art is, many more have taken its place. I have suggested multiple hypothetical and actual examples of cinematic street art that heretofore were not conceptualized as such, and disputed other examples that one may have initially demarcated as cinematic street art. But the paucity of examples that I can reference may indicate that this artform is just nascent. The particular approach I set forth, combined with the recent advent of consumer film technologies, create a high bar for artists to clear before they have cinematic street art, which is why this article best serves as a springboard for further discussion.

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ently, Baldini often supplements his ontology with myriad examples of graffiti, rather than a broad selection from the medium. When we introduce Blu's monolithic murals or Shelly Miller's breathtaking sugar paintings into the discussion, there is unmistakably an aesthetic appreciation working in tandem with performance appreciation. Therefore, Baldini's ontology is predisposed towards a genus of street art, not the species itself.

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