Graffiti and Heritage: Co-Creating Stories for Inclusive Cities. Example of the Zilvermeeuw in Amsterdam

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Abstract

In 2015, the Zilvermeeuw metro in Amsterdam had its last ride and was taken out of circulation. Two wagons of this metro set have been restored and conserved to become an A-status heritage object. In the restoration process, the graffiti that covered the wagons was removed and the project to make graffiti a part of the Zilvermeeuw's story failed. In line with research considering graffiti as cultural (intangible) heritage and focusing on the meaningful relationship between graffiti and the urban fabric, this paper uses the case of the Zilvermeeuw to illustrate the tensions between heritage authorities and a counterculture such as graffiti. Showing that heritage is about creating a narrative, the paper uses graffiti as a case to emphasise the need for community involvement to achieve fair co-creation of the city.

Introduction[1]

During the Second World War, US soldiers started drawing a small character, its nose peeking on top of a fence or wall, with the writing 'Kilroy was here'. This small graffiti spread with the advancement of the Allies and was helping the troops' morale, as they could see that allied soldiers had been there before. Today, this 'Kilroy was here' graffiti is famous worldwide and is a piece of history. It is engraved on the World War II Memorial in Washington DC, as it now embodies all the US soldiers who served during this war (see Figure 1). This is a good example of how graffiti can become heritage as it holds cultural and historical significance.

Figure 1. *Kilroy Was Here. Engraving on the Washington DC WWII Memorial:* Washington DC 2006. Photograph by: Luis Rubio, via Wikimedia Commons.

Since its modern origins in the 1960s USA (though it goes way back, see Armstrong 2019; Lemoine 2012; MacDowall 2006; Pereira 2005), graffiti (here understood as any painted, sprayed, or written illegal inscription on the urban fabric) is the expression of people from low-class neighbourhoods, who often paint the city walls to escape boredom and to affirm their presence in the cityscape as a marginalised and rebellious population in a time of crisis (Evans 2014; Lemoine 2012). In the Netherlands, graffiti boomed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, mainly alongside the punk and squatting movements (Dutch Graffiti Library 2019; Middel 2016). In these times characterised by the nuclear threat, economic crisis, and a 'no

future' spirit, "*writing was freedom*" (Middel 2016). On the outside walls of the squats, one could find political slogans, as writing was also a way to make your presence and protest visible in the public space. Indeed, graffiti emerged first in city centres, where "*the message tegen de gevestigde orde*" [translation: *"against the established order"*] could be best seen (Imagine IC et al. 2020, 146). So, marginalised groups such as squatters, feminists, or hooligans took on the graffiti culture to spread their ideas and mark their presence in the streets.

With the growth of the movement throughout the world, different styles appeared, codes and symbols developed, and graffiti became a culture with its own references, social codes, and communities (Evans 2014; Forster et al. 2012; Merrill 2015; Snyder 2006). The places where writers (or 'graffiti writers', people who do graffiti) painted gradually became spaces where their knowledge was exchanged. At the same time, they developed a special relationship with the urban fabric, 'owning' it by writing their names on it. Graffiti writers are both challenged by the urban fabric and challenge it, looking for original locations to spray to get peer recognition. This can also be seen in the extreme case of urban climbing in the practice of 'pixação' in Brazil (for example in Campos and Leal 2021; Lamazares 2017; Larruscahim 2014; TX NOW 2014).

In the context of the dynamic relationship between graffiti and the urban space, this paper is interested in the tensions between graffiti and urban heritage policies. Focusing on the importance of graffiti in socio-cultural urban contexts, including the metro network, this contribution wishes to fuel the debate about the place of non-traditional forms of cultural heritage in current heritage-making processes. Specifically, the article focuses on the co-creation of heritage and the city, understood as a lasting and meaningful collaboration of actors and the involvement of citizens, inviting them to create their city and its historical narrative together. The case of the Zilvermeeuw metro in Amsterdam crystallises the tensions between traditional and non-traditional forms of heritage while triggering a discussion on the role of the heritage expert (as either a person or an institution). Drawing on heritage and urban studies, this analysis aims to understand the extent to which graffiti is cultural heritage, and how it can contribute to a more just co-creation of the city.

Theoretical framework
Heritage and discourse on heritage
The conceptualisation of 'heritage' in the present paper owes to Smith and her pivotal work *Uses of Heritage* (2006). Smith argues that what we

call heritage are actually discourses about heritage (2006). They have a self-realising role because our discourses shape heritage, which in turn shapes our discourses about heritage. Among these discourses, she notably identifies a hegemonic, dominant 'authorised heritage discourse' (AHD), meaning that some types of heritages are privileged over others. The AHD takes root in 19th-century national narratives that sustain and legitimise the nation-state; consequently, it focuses on national and elitist heritage at the expense of local and working-class heritage. As such, the AHD is intertwined with identity issues.

The AHD also emphasises the work of experts, such as historians, archaeologists, and state heritage institutions, who are the only ones who could decide what is heritage and how they will handle it (Smith 2006). Heritage, therefore, illustrates Foucault's power/knowledge nexus. This fatally results in dismissing types of heritage that do not fit the experts' perspectives. We also can find this at the international level, as UNESCO has been criticised as a European-centred institution, relying on Western preconceptions of what heritage is and how it should be handled (Boer 2023; Smith 2006). This creates inequalities such as the fact that a lot of UNESCO world heritage sites are found in the Western world – giving the impression that the Global South don't have heritage or an own history. To counter this biased and outdated conceptualisation, experts should share authority in the spirit of a public approach to history and heritage, which acknowledges that everyone has a word to say, that "*everyone [is] a historian*" (Rosenzweig 1998, 177; also see Cauvin 2022; Thelen 1998). This can be done through collaboration and participation practices that give a voice to marginalised communities – and therefore a place for them in history. Through collaboration, the experts acknowledge that their knowledge is situated and not holistic, and that people not traditionally considered as experts may have expertise on specific topics. The role of the experts is still valuable, as they bring contextualisation and share knowledge and skills (Rizzo 2021). However, in the spirit of sharing authority, the experts must also acknowledge that their set of skills should be adapted, specifically when dealing with non-traditional (meaning: outside of the AHD) forms of heritage, such as graffiti. Furthermore, experts and communities together can reflect on what heritage is: not only monuments and sites, but also intangible rituals – like dances or festivals, for example. The focus on intangible heritage since the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage accounts for a wider definition of heritage and, therefore, a fairer and more complete discourse on heritage, including dissonant perspectives.

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Consequently, co-creation appears as an effective tool to implement participative and collaborative practices, including in the field of heritage. Understood as a collaboration between different stakeholders entailing participatory processes and practices (Eckhardt et al. 2021), I view co-creation as a powerful practice to move from a top-down approach to a bottom-up approach in the heritage field, questioning the role of the expert and aiming at creating a 'just city' (Fainstein 2010). Co-creating heritage by collaborating with non-expert historians enables a more diverse and richer understanding of the past while questioning and challenging mainstream and dominant narratives (Ward and Pente 2017). Creating a historical narrative (and therefore heritage) of the city defines its identity, which should reflect as many perspectives as possible. Consequently, co-creating urban heritage is a way to build the identity of a city in a collaborative way. In the following, I argue that graffiti is cultural heritage, notably drawing on Merrill's analysis of graffiti as intangible heritage (2015).

Graffiti as intangible heritage
Studying the possibility to integrate graffiti into tangible and/or intangible heritage, Merrill considered several elements as constitutive of graffiti culture: illegality, illegibility, anti-commercialism, and transience. These intangible elements contribute to establishing the cultural significance of graffiti, but also to recognising it as intangible heritage. Illegality, he says, is the 'backbone' of graffiti culture (Merrill 2015). It implies that the practitioners are social outsiders because the practice of their art is outside the frame of the law. Some writers indeed consider that if "*it's not illegal – it's not graffiti*" (Ferrell 2016, xxxiv).2 Graffiti writers are also seen as outsiders because of the illegibility of their work, constituted by cultural codes only they can understand (Merrill 2015). This can be, for example, the stylised writings or the specific vocabulary to describe graffiti. All of this contributes to creating a "*superior, secret, and silent society*" of graffiti writers (Merrill 2015, 371).

These two factors (illegality and illegibility), Merrill says, are linked to the anti-commercial stance of graffiti, which has been an important feature of the culture since its origins (2015). Graffiti is a resistance to the artistic, aesthetic, and cultural institutions, although the question of its commercialisation is an ongoing debate. The commercialisation of graffiti also threatens another important dimension, its transience. This aspect is linked to the ephemerality of graffiti, itself related to the structure of the urban environment. Environmental factors and city policies shape the practice of graffiti, but they also trigger expression, dialogue, and competition between writers (Merrill 2015). This ongoing and constant dialogue

entails that graffiti works remain ephemeral, meaning they can fade away or be covered. This dynamic is at the core of this cultural movement, as it creates a competition between writers or crews, painting over each other's work (for example, this is very common in hooligan culture; in the graffiti scene, see Banksy *vs* King Robbo in Merrill 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that trying to conserve graffiti through heritage policies would directly clash with its ephemerality (transience) and would freeze the dialogue both between writers and with the urban fabric. Indeed, the relation between writers and the city also stands central in graffiti culture, as it is a practice of space appropriation.

Space appropriation and living the city
Drawing on Lefebvre's concept of space appropriation as an answer to feelings of domination, scholars argue that graffiti is a spatial practice that resists the dominant spatial order, battling for space occupation and territorial control (Evans 2014; Maudlin and Vellinga 2014). Evans defines graffiti as "*a socio-spatial political act*" and studies the emergence of this culture in the context of modernist architecture that started in New York City (NYC) as early as the 1920s (2014, 185). He argues that this modernist renewal split neighbourhoods and displaced people, leading to a loss of identity. Consequently, the production of urban identity is a core element of graffiti writing. For example, a lot of pioneers' pseudonyms are made up from a name followed by the number of the street they lived in (such as Taki 183 or Barbara 62 and Eva 62). Lamazares also argues that 'pixação' (a specific form of graffiti from São Paulo, Brazil) developed as an answer to Brazilian modernism, combining aggressive writing styles and dangerous climbing to respond to the city's verticality (2017).

Moreover, Evans claims that graffiti writing is a "*production of social space […] creat[ing] a new space and spatial identity*", putting new values into the urban space (2014, 193). In that sense, graffiti writing contributes to the creation of the city. Lefebvre's insights into urban space are fundamental here: he argues that space is produced by people, making it inherently social. To better grasp this idea, Lefebvre conceptualised the spatial triad: every space is conceived, perceived, and lived, and the intersecting dynamics of these three aspects make it a social space (Brown 2020). 'Conceived space' designates the representations of space created by planners or architects. This is the dominant space, thought to be 'true'. 'Perceived space' designates how we practice the space in our daily routines. Finally, 'lived space' refers to the representational space, the subjective experience of space, shaped by our experiences and emotions. It is the dominated di-

mension of space (Lefebvre 2000). In the case of the metro, it is conceived as a transportation means with technical properties and practiced as such in daily routines. For graffiti writers, it is not only a means of transportation but also a canvas for their art, a network to navigate and paint. They mould the metro space to make it their own, according to how they live it. Doing so, writers subvert the planned use of the space, going against the power relations underlying in spatial planning. In other words, they change the space into a 'counterspace' (Lefebvre 2000). Opposing hegemonic representations of space, counterspaces are a struggle against dominant state-space (Altun 2018). Drawing on this concept, I'll argue that covering the metro network with graffiti is a rebellious act against the planning power of the state or of the metro authority, making evident spatial power relations.

Subway graffiti: a specific way to appropriate the city
Subway graffiti became a major movement within the graffiti culture in the 1970s and 1980s. The iconic 1984 photographic book by Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, *Subway Art,* contributed to the widespread fame of and enthusiasm for metro graffiti. However, the enthusiasm was not shared by the city of New York and the Metropolitan Transport Agency (MTA), who started in 1972 a 'war on graffiti'. The MTA developed strategies to ensure that no painted car would circulate, making the metro a less interesting canvas for writers (Lemoine 2012; Snyder 2006; Weide 2016). Indeed, the main point of tagging metro was the possibility to acquire a 'citywide' fame and recognition from other writers, to get a "*subcultural status*" (Ferrell 1998, 594; Lemoine 2012). So, writers turned to other media (such as freight trains) to keep their art growing, which allowed them to 'go nationwide', spreading their names, styles, techniques, and aesthetics further from their hometown (Ferrell 1998; Weide 2016). In both cases, graffiti is a way for writers, who often come from marginalised neighbourhoods, to travel beyond the borders of their lived space and 'invade' other parts of the city (Evans 2014).

Furthermore, subway or train graffiti does not stop at the cars. The pieces that can be seen in the surroundings of the railways also constitute a part of subway or train graffiti. Indeed, in terms of infrastructure, railways, bridges, and tunnels are part of the rail network (Nieweg 2022). Consequently, graffiti on this kind of infrastructure can also be considered rail art. The painted walls along the railways offer to the passenger a sort of open gallery. In opposition to train graffiti, it is not the canvas that is moving, but the 'visitor'.

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Subway graffiti and graffiti on buildings both illustrate an engagement with the urban fabric. Similarly, successive crises have shaped the evolution of graffiti culture. In this sense, I argue that graffiti constitutes a central element of cities' sociocultural heritage. The case-study of the Zilvermeeuw will illustrate well how graffiti is related to the city's history but will also show the hesitations to give graffiti a place in heritage-making. Through this case-study, I'll argue for more collaboration with the (local) graffiti community, fostering a co-creation of urban heritage narratives.

Sources and Methods

For this contribution, I conducted on-site research, including participant observation at different events. The launching of the Zilvermeeuw website and a tour of the National Transport Museum were insightful in analysing how this piece of heritage was handled by the municipality and the different actors involved in its restoration. A local city tour with the Street Art Museum Amsterdam (SAMA) during the European STAR project in May 2022 proved useful in understanding how the district of Amsterdam-West integrated street art and graffiti, making it an open-air street museum. A tour with the Alternative Groningen Tour as part of 'The Tag Conference Groningen: Framing Graffiti Heritage' in November 2024 provided more insights into how graffiti and its history can be integrated into the history and heritage of the city.

In addition, I organised semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in the restoration of the Zilvermeeuw and the graffiti and heritage scene in Amsterdam to unfold the conflicts surrounding it. To get insights into how the Zilvermeeuw was seen by people from official heritage institutions, how its restoration was planned and how graffiti fits (or not) into these, I talked with Jaap Nieweg. He is the Director of External Relations at the Museum Stoomtram Hoorn-Medemblik, and he is the one who originally proposed to make the Zilvermeeuw a piece of heritage. As such, he participated in the discussions about its renovation and its conservation, including the graffiti issue.

To better explore and understand the links between graffiti and heritage, I had a discussion with Aileen Middel. She is both a graffiti writer and a member of official heritage institutions collaborating with museums. Also known as Mickey or Mick La Rock, Aileen Middel is involved in heritage and museum projects about graffiti in Amsterdam. She is one of the first women who became famous for her graffiti in Europe, writing mainly in Groningen, Amsterdam, and New York during the 1980s-2000s. She co-curated the 2015 exhibition 'Graffiti. New York Meets the Dam' with Annemarie de

Wildt, curator at the Amsterdam Museum. Aileen Middel was also a member of the Stadscuratorium of Amsterdam between 2019 and 2022.

I also looked for insights into how the community handled graffiti conservation through time, and how it could collaborate with official heritage institutions. I could discuss with Richard van Tiggelen, whose expertise on graffiti archiving and history provided precious inputs. He is a former graffiti writer, co-founder of and conservator at the Dutch Graffiti Library (DGL), where he participates in creating and organising a Dutch graffiti archive.

Analysis

The Zilvermeeuw: Competing narratives, competing heritage

Introduction: The Zilvermeeuw metro

The first metro line in Amsterdam was completed in 1977, connecting the Zuidoost district (also called the Bijlmer) to the rest of the city (line 53). Its nickname, 'Zilvermeeuw', comes from its colours, reminiscent of the European herring gull. However, it quickly became one of the main canvases for (local) graffiti writers, who painted the metro trains at their stocking area because it was quiet (Imagine IC et al. 2020). Graffiti on the Amsterdam metro rapidly grew and became an attraction for graffiti artists and writers all over the world (ibid).

Upon the renewal of the metro set in 2015, two wagons were conserved (23A and 23B) to become A-status heritage objects (the highest status). The set is registered within the *Mobiele Collectie Nederland*, which justifies this A-status by putting forward the role of this metro in relation to the rest of the city, its inscription in a troubled social context, and its technical aspects (Stichting Mobiele Collectie Nederland, n.d.). Graffiti is mentioned in the 'History' part of the notice as a symbol of the troubled years of the Bijlmer. Graffiti writers are presented as vandals, next to "*junks, dealers, zakkenrollers en dronkenlappen*" [translation: "*junkies, dealers, pickpockets and drunks*"] (ibid). This notice is a good example of the AHD in action. The metro is remembered as a piece of technology that opened the Bijlmer to the rest of Amsterdam and brought economic growth, while there is little consideration for dissonant narratives (such as the protests against its construction).

The competing narratives on the Zilvermeeuw

The AHD around the Zilvermeeuw is also evident when looking at the conserved set, the metro set 23. Indeed, the narrative built around the metro reflects the national history more than the local one. First, the conserved

set is the one where Princess Beatrix and Prince Claus stepped in in 1977 to inaugurate the opening of the metro line. This refers to the birth of the Amsterdam metro, supported by the Dutch royal family, which later led to the development of Zuidoost and the city in general. At the same time, the social movements opposing the metro plans during the 1970s are harshly described in the 'History' part of the notice, suggesting that these protests were against the progress and growth that the metro provided. In fact, people were against their displacement and the destruction of their homes in the context of a housing crisis. So, if the metro later brought prosperity, it was not without a few sacrifices along the way, nuancing the triumphant story that the online notice suggests.

In addition, the whole restoration process further enhances the AHD and traditional heritage-making frameworks. For its last ride in 2015, the metro was cleaned up, then stored on a Gemeentelijk Vervoerbedrijf Amsterdam (GVBA) yard in Diemen where it was covered in graffiti again and *"ernstig beschadigd"* [translation: *"seriously damaged"*] (Nieweg 2022; Zilvermeeuw Amsterdam 2022). The removal of graffiti for the last ride of the metro before it was exhibited in a museum makes it clear that it is rather associated with vandalism, delinquency and insecurity (Nieweg 2022). The Zilvermeeuw case well exemplifies the influence of the AHD on heritage practices: a material, concrete artefact has been chosen to be passed onto future generations because it is seen as important mainly regarding the national and economic history.

Furthermore, the restoration of the set in its 'former glory' (including the insides of the wagons) illustrates the AHD in that it focuses on its aesthetic aspect, a fantasised clean and pristine state, and less on the authenticity that a used metro set (with used seats, footprints on the ground, and of course, graffiti) could bring forward. The restoration makes the metro an immutable piece of heritage that does not reflect its life and its use. It refers to a traditional conception of heritage, where the monumental is the norm, and overlooks intangible aspects, showing the still important place given to monuments and artefacts in the making of heritage.

As Nieweg explained, the strict anti-graffiti policy that the GVBA implemented over the years also drove the restoration policy (2022). The experts (in metro, in restoration, in conservation, in heritage) decided to tell their part of the story, without taking other parts into account, creating an AHD around the Zilvermeeuw. They did not try to challenge the existing frameworks of heritage-making, in part because of the controversial nature of graffiti. Regarding the GVBA position, the 'war on graffiti' led against writers also played a role in dismissing the cultural (and aesthetic)

value of graffiti. The role of decision-maker that the GVBA had here is also important to highlight. As the owner of the Zilvermeeuw (until it became a piece of heritage), the GVBA had the power to orient the restoration in a way that would suit it. In turn, this influenced the experts in their handling of the Zilvermeeuw and of the graffiti.

Overlooking the importance of graffiti on the Zilvermeeuw reveals a disinterest in local history. Indeed, the Bijlmer is a dynamic and central place for graffiti in the Netherlands and was notably visited and lauded by 'graffiti kings' from NYC in 1983. Planned in the early 1960s to resolve the post-war housing crisis, the Bijlmer district was heavily influenced by modernist ideas, promoting functional ideals and the separation of living and working places (Wassenberg 2006). But when the whole new district came onto the market at the end of the same decade, modernist planning was under harsh criticism. The middle-class population, expected to live in the Bijlmer, was looking for a different type of housing than what the modernist district had to offer. Consequently, the Bijlmer attracted lower-class populations, notably immigrants from Suriname (Wassenberg 2006; Zahirovic and Sterk 2007). This social (and racial) exclusion, coupled with the spatial isolation of the district, made the Bijlmer a poor, Black neighbourhood, sometimes referred to as "*the first and only Dutch ghetto*" (Zahirovic and Sterk 2007).

It is then no surprise that graffiti developed in the Bijlmer during the 1970s, integrating elements of the local identity and adapting to the local architecture. In their collaborative book *Graffiti in de Kempering* (2020), Imagine IC, the Dutch Graffiti Library, and Mick La Rock offer an overview of graffiti in the Bijlmer and a focus on the Kempering parking garage, which has been an important spot for graffiti since the 1980s. Indeed, parking garages were essential parts of the development plan of the 1960s, symbolising the car utopia of these times and later became graffiti hotspots ('counterspaces'). Similarly, graffiti writers took over the transport infrastructure, such as the underground metro and its surroundings. Specifically, the high metro tracks (see Figure 2) constitute both an identity marker of the Bijlmer and among the graffiti scene, as they remind of the world-famous NYC metro, as noted by both Dutch and US graffiti writers (Imagine IC et al. 2020).

Figure 2. Left: *Metro trains during test runs in the Bijlmer, Ganzenhoef station*: Amsterdam 1977. Photograph by: Hans Peters for Anefo, via Wikimedia Commons. Right: *GVB metro train set 174 on line 53 near metro station Kraaiennest*: Amsterdam 2014. Photograph by: Erik Swierstra, via Wikimedia Commons.

The local history of graffiti writing and urban development of the Bijlmer makes graffiti culturally significant within the district's history. That is why the debate on the final location of the Zilvermeeuw is also of importance in making the metro a piece of heritage. The initial decision to exhibit it at the National Transport Museum can be considered as a further embedding of the Zilvermeeuw in national history, driving the narrative away from its local significance. Some people think it should be back in Amsterdam Zuidoost, highlighting the importance of the metro for the Bijlmer (Meershoek 2022). But graffiti still holds a controversial place in this story. Indeed, placing the Zilvermeeuw as a monument in the open space would attract graffiti writers, as Middel explained:

> *"There is this whole movement, culture, that really likes to paint on trains, and it would be an act of heroism: who is the first one to paint the Zilvermeeuw in Amsterdam Zuidoost!"* (Middel 2022).

Indeed, it is easily imaginable that the strong metro graffiti culture, coupled with the cultural significance of the Zilvermeeuw for the Bijlmer, would attract writers. This clashes with the perspective of the restoration team, who do not want to see their cleaning efforts go to waste. The discussion seems rather limited, and the case should serve as a call for more attention to potential (intangible) heritage outside the boundaries of the AHD. I argue that this case also illustrates the need to think of heritage outside of traditional frameworks (defined by the AHD) right from the start. Including relevant actors from the graffiti scene from the beginning of the processus

to make the Zilvermeeuw a piece of heritage would have contributed to put into question the AHD while giving power to the community in taking care of their own heritage.

Co-creating the city: graffiti heritage and the community's role

Looking at the conservation and restoration plan, it is stated that "*Bij de afwegingen van de restauratie-uitgangspunten is besloten de graffiti te verwijderen, maar wel op foto vast te leggen*" [translation: "*When considering the restoration principles, it was decided to remove the graffiti, but to record it on photographs*"] (Stichting Beheer Collectie Amsterdam Vervoer Museum [SBCAVM] 2022, 5). If the decision to remove graffiti was driven by the GVBA, the choice to record graffiti on photographs reveals a certain awareness of the cultural significance of graffiti. Indeed, back in 2022, the SBCAVM and Imagine IC were working on this project, accentuating that "*[…] de verschillende graffiti-uitingen mede bijdroegen tot de wisselende verschijningsvorm van de metrotreinstellen van het "Zilvermeeuw"-type*" [translation: "*[…] the various graffiti expressions contributed to the changing appearance of the "Zilvermeeuw"-type metro trains*"] (SBCAVM 2022, 5). This project testifies that graffiti is an important element to remember in the history of the metro. The restoration plan states:

> "*Gedurende het project zal in samenwerking met Imagine IC worden getracht een meer compleet beeld uit die periode voor het restauratie dossier van het project samen te stellen, waarbij bijdragen vanuit de bevolking de veelzijdigheid zullen vergroten.*" [translation: "*During the project, in cooperation with Imagine IC, an attempt will be made to compile a more complete picture from that period for the restoration file of the project, in which contributions from the population will increase the versatility*"]. (SBCAVM 2022, 6).

This participatory initiative emphasising the community's stories around the Zilvermeeuw would have accentuated the cultural and social importance of the metro. Nevertheless, as Nieweg had indicated in our interview, it was a "*fragile project*" lacking strong involvement from the SBCAVM (2022). As of today, it seems that this project never came into existence and never will (Nieweg 2024), showing a failed attempt at co-creating the heritage of the Zilvermeeuw. The project, fragile and unsure from the beginning, has not been given the consideration needed for its success. It appeared to me that there was no significant discussion, nor any further

questions, about how to engage with graffiti heritage. In addition, graffiti seemed to have been handled as a separate part of the metro, as a side-story, rather than as an element of the whole story.

Yet, there might still be options to make space for graffiti and the community in the story about the Zilvermeeuw. Indeed, during our discussion, Van Tiggelen proposed to "*give [graffiti] a place in that storyline*" by "*[doing] some curation about who is painting that car*", in the case where it should return to the Bijlmer (2022). That way, graffiti would have a place in the heritage narrative of the Zilvermeeuw. But at the same time, it would be contained within the borders of curation, which graffiti usually transcends, and that could lead to new frictions. For example, who has the authority to decide which artist(s) should be commissioned? In light of their expertise and the principle of co-creation, the community should have the greater decision-making power in this matter. But how to reach such a closed community? Maybe an institution such as the Dutch Graffiti Library could represent them, even though they obviously cannot speak for everyone in the community. However, they know graffiti history and its relationship with the metro, and they are part of the scene, which is important given the illegibility of the graffiti society (Merrill 2015). The DGL could also organise the making of a collaborative graffiti piece for the Zilvermeeuw, gathering local writers who have a connection to this metro to emphasise the connection between graffiti and the Zilvermeeuw and bring forward this side of the story.

The nature of the graffiti could also come into question, as some writers make a difference between illegal and legal graffiti (this last one usually falling into the 'street art' category). Consequently, would it be really giving a place to graffiti or only to a certain type of (legal, official, curated) graffiti? Would that adequately represent the story between graffiti and the Zilvermeeuw? Here also lies a reflection on what is actually being narrativized: the graffiti in itself or the graffiti culture? Curated graffiti falls more into the 'street art' category because it is legal. Graffiti and street art are often opposed, though more and more graffiti artists also earn money with curated or commissioned street art (Campos & Leal 2021). Nevertheless, the approach is different, and the intangible elements of graffiti culture are not present when doing street art. Consequently, the cultural underpinnings of curated graffiti differ from those of graffiti. In that sense, I argue that allowing curated graffiti on the restored Zilvermeeuw would distort the historical entanglements of graffiti and the Zilvermeeuw, as metro graffiti was always illegal and ephemeral. It would be giving a place to a different type of graffiti than the one that is historically and culturally linked to the

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Zilvermeeuw metro. It would be more about the graffiti in its materiality and less about the culture. But that's not to suggest that it would necessarily be a bad thing. The general discussion around graffiti and heritage is ongoing, and I am not trying to argue that there is a single 'right answer', but rather to emphasise the multiple historical, cultural, social, and political elements that should be considered in this discussion.

The question of the institutionalisation of graffiti heritage can also be redundant, as the community has been archiving, recording and preserving their own work since the beginning of the movement. Since the late 1980s, pictures became a widespread way among writers to keep a trace of their work (Snyder 2006). Other material and immaterial elements are part of the graffiti archive, such as testimonies or sketch books. With the development of the Internet, writers got the possibility to diffuse their art on a global scale but also share techniques and knowledge. This led to a wide movement of the culture's documentation by the doers themselves.

Both Middel and Van Tiggelen are (former) graffiti writers who want to collect, preserve, and share the graffiti culture – each in their own way. They both stressed that graffiti heritage is community-driven, as shown by the preparation of the exhibition 'New York Meets the Dam' for the Amsterdam Museum:

"[…] all the materials in the Amsterdam part of the exhibition came from that community. So, you can see that the community is building and has a heart for their own heritage and stuff". (Van Tiggelen 2022).

Solidarity among members of the writers' community is also an important part of graffiti heritage, as Middel put it:

"[…] we have this huge network of graffiti writers who are always very helpful towards each other. So, when I was looking for something that I couldn't find myself, Richard stepped in, helped me out with either photo materials, stories, publications, etc.". (Middel 2022).

In this exhibition, the initiative and willingness to present and democratise graffiti culture came from within the community. This community-driven conservation is also a way to claim ownership of the movement and keep control of what is done with it. Here, the experts are the graffiti writers, who make the history and build the heritage of their movement from within.

They have knowledge that heritage professionals may not have and will bring valuable insights into the handling of graffiti as heritage.

Conclusions

Shifting from the 'authorised heritage discourse' which implies that only tangible, old, Western monuments merit to be heritage, more attention to intangible heritage enables a wider meaning of 'heritage' to also include immaterial elements. In that context, it has been argued that graffiti is intangible heritage. The techniques, dynamics, and core elements of this culture make it culturally significant in an urban environment, contributing to creating the identity of the city. The case-study of the Zilvermeeuw shows that these intangible – but also the tangible – elements of graffiti are not always thought of as potential heritage despite the cultural, social, and historical significance of graffiti. The narrative on which official heritage institutions focused emphasises the authorised discourse on heritage – highlighting the material, elitist, national aspects.

And yet, even as a part of the AHD, the Zilvermeeuw seems today somewhat abandoned. The website dedicated to it that was inaugurated at the Stadsloket Zuidoost in 2022 is now unavailable; the future of the metro piece is unsure, as the National Transport Museum, where it was exhibited until then, has been closed since March 2023 and is looking for a new location. This illustrates that traditional heritage frameworks must also be put into question because they are more subjected to market laws, which, *in fine*, have the power to make heritage and culture.

On the other hand, I think that involving the community in the creation of heritage builds a stronger relationship between heritage and the citizens, arguably leading to more engagement with heritage and its management, resulting in heritage-making by and for the community. In that sense, co-creation can also be a way to bypass neo-liberal policies that are at work in the cultural sector, with destructive consequences for culture in general. Making space for communities in cultural discussions would create community spaces where the locals work towards a sustainable and meaningful heritage narrative. Graffiti is specifically relevant in that case, as a culture developing outside institutional frameworks where stories and archives – and, therefore, heritage – are created by and for the writers' community. From a heritage scholarship perspective, this approach contributes to the decentring of expert knowledge and fosters community participation, working towards the democratisation of heritage.

There are, however, some limitations to graffiti heritage.3 In the first place, some of the intangible elements of the culture defined by Merrill

(2015) could be endangered by graffiti's conservation, and notably the transience. Moreover, should graffiti be recognised by heritage institutions, the question of its (il)legality would be more nuanced and potentially lost. Such discussion is ongoing, and there might be no single 'correct answer'. However, I hope that this paper underscores that a good practice would be to work in collaboration with people from the writers' community. Similarly, there are challenges to participatory practices. For example, the community might not want to collaborate with heritage authorities. This would entail discussions and compromises, which leads to another challenge of co-creation: it is time-consuming. This means that without strong engagement and concrete means (e.g., in money, time, location, relations), such co-creative projects cannot go on – and that's what happened in the case of the Zilvermeeuw's graffiti conservation project.

This paper therefore calls for more involvement of institutional actors in alternative forms of heritage and for collaboration with local communities. Recognising that graffiti is a part of urban identity and, as such, deserves to be included in heritage discussions, can only lead to more nuanced, more interesting stories about cities. Sharing authority enables a more democratic process of heritage-making, and numeric tools, for instance, could help favour community involvement for a better co-creation of the city's heritage and history.

"Moreover, should graffiti be recognised by heritage institutions, the question of its (il)legality would be more nuanced and potentially lost."

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Endnotes

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2   Ferrell quotes Haze in Workhorse and PAC 2012.

3   Difficulties in making graffiti heritage or conserving it are well illustrated by the case of Melbourne, Australia in MacDowall (2006) and Merrill (2015).