Appropriating City Spaces: Exploring Practice, Process and Policy in Aboriginal Street Art

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Information
Faculty of Information
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Abstract
In this thesis I analyze the city of Toronto’s graffiti management policies, constructing street art as a new commons to offer a means of understanding cultural production, appropriation, and resistance within the regulated environment. Using the case of 7th Generation Image Makers, an Aboriginal street art organization based in Toronto, this thesis deconstructs street art as cultural commons, arranged through neighbourhood and knowledge commons. Through interviews conducted with artists, group discussions, and document analysis, this thesis offers an opportunity to develop a new context for understanding street art as a space for both cultural production and resistance. Created within these policy structures, 7th Generation murals present street art as a space for decolonization, education, and community building. Moreover, the production of specific Aboriginal teachings, environments, and histories in such a mode challenges the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in urban centres and Canadian society, requiring a reflection on explicit cultural resistance that makes use of hegemonic structures.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1  Introduction

Across from High Park in Toronto’s west end, several professional and aspiring artists paint a mural on both sides of a TTC underpass. The piece is sketched out in myriad colours, taking traditional graffiti forms and aesthetic: steps, tags, and flowing lines of spray paint. As the artists continue to work, rivers and forests, and multitudes of animals begin to appear. Savannah grasslands meet with wetlands and boreal forest. Crooked trees appear, marking traditional meeting places. The mural presents the original landscape of Toronto, a meeting place of numerous watersheds including the Don, Rouge, Humber, and many others. Looking more closely at the mural are several poles attached to an underwater basket – the origin of Toronto’s name, poles in the water (see Figure 1, 2, 3).

Figure 1: 7GIM Mural at High Park. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto
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Figure 2: High Park Mural, East Side. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.

Figure 3: High Park Mural, West Side. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.
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This work is the creation of 7th Generation Image Makers (7GIM), a Toronto-based Aboriginal arts organization. I first met the artists of 7GIM during the painting of this mural, from July 20th to 26th, 2013. Every summer 7GIM staff, volunteers, and professional artists engage in street art projects, painting murals centering on Aboriginal teachings and stories and connected to the local communities and environment. Originally founded in 1995 to provide outreach and draw attention to issues, risks, and challenges that face Aboriginal youth in Toronto through painting murals, 7GIM has gradually developed into a semi-autonomous arts education organization dedicated to urban Aboriginal youth.

This thesis studies the process and practice of 7GIM in the creation of legal street art within the policy environment of Toronto. Graffiti scholar and curator Cedar Lewisohn (2008), attempting to present nuanced definitions of street art and graffiti, argued that “the best street art and graffiti are illegal. This is because the illegal works have political and ethical connotations that are lost in sanctioned works” (p.127). Similarly, environmental scholar Isis Brook (2007) claims “the illegal nature of the work is what gives it an edge and it is this edge that makes some work effective in reflecting and commenting on the urban context in which it is found” (p. 308). This sentiment too often seems to be reflexively echoed by many street art and graffiti artists, as well as other scholars studying the subject, where the authenticity of authorized street art practice is called into question, particularly given the recent romanticization of graffiti (Lewisohn 2008).

Lewisohn is undoubtedly correct in stating that there are important elements of street art and graffiti that exist outside of authorized interventions, where the allure of street art and graffiti is its subversive, illicit nature, pushing and challenging notions of authorization. This aspect of street art and graffiti is well documented (Philips 1999; Austin 2001; McDonald 2001; Lewisohn 2008, 2011), presenting important challenges to notions of authorship, appropriation, and public space. However, there must also be moments where those same challenges, the same resistance to authority in the form of both state and capital, are present within authorized environments. The question that arises, therefore, is when is an authorized piece authentic in the same way as an unauthorized piece? In which contexts might this occur? Is there some degree to which the subversion of authority actually occurs within a context where it is simultaneously granted?
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Through the case of 7GIM, this thesis will contend that street art represents a complex arrangement of urban cultural commons – represented through both knowledge and neighbourhood commons – where expressions of cultural production create space for resistance to increased privatization of public space. This argument is based on Foucault’s *biopolitics*, understanding resistance as both alternative to and independent of the exercise of hegemonic power, and the resistance of biopolitical labour as a “rupture” rather than a “collapse” of capital, creating alternative spaces (Hardt & Negri 2009). Commons, then, must be understood as both space and activity, rather than a resource, what Peter Linebaugh (2008) refers to as *commoning*.

Commons will be explored both through understanding Toronto as a politico-cultural space and as a policy environment, and through the voices and practices of 7th Generation Image Makers. Interviews with 7GIM artists and explorations of the art they create helps to conceptualize resistance, or as Native Studies scholar Nathalie Kermoil says, to speak “through the image to highlight the displaced and dormant voice” (2010 p. 170). Hardt and Negri (2004) conceptualize this biopolitical resistance as a largely non-exclusionary working class they call *multitude*, a fairly vague categorization that necessitates a generalized and homogenous understanding of *identity*. However, this generalization does not demand an absence of identity, but rather states that diverse identities do not endanger a broader conceptualization of biopolitical labour, instead finding that “[t]he diversity of subjectivities implied by the multitude who are engaged in class struggle requires us to investigate each instance of struggle” (Caraway 2011, p. 49). Biopolitical resistance finds one such instance of struggle in the cultural production of Aboriginal street art: “[b]y telling their stories, Aboriginal artists show the Canadian public that active resistance is everywhere” (Kermoal 2010, p. 172).

In my interview with 7GIM artist Daniel Geoffrey, I asked him, from where does he draw the teachings represented in the murals? He responded, “I only speak for myself and for my teachings, and not even for the Anishinaabek, all pan-Anishinaabek community. For my community: Chippewas of Nawash First Nations, the teachings that I’ve received from my mentors and Elders” (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014). This statement reflects the approach of this thesis: constructing a complex and dynamic understanding of resistance, with the understanding that it can only reflect this context at this time. Writing as a non-Aboriginal author, I am framing this thesis within a particular and biased worldview, but I also strive to let
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the artists speak on their own terms. There are many street art organizations in Toronto, and some, such as Sketch\(^1\), contract to Aboriginal artists. There are likewise many Aboriginal organizations, some of which engage in arts programming, and paint murals. However, \(^7\)th Generation Image Makers represents a somewhat unique organization in Toronto, as a dedicated Aboriginal arts organization.

1.1 Terminology

There are several complex issues of terminology when engaging in a project looking at both street art and Aboriginal cultural production, and several terms that I will use throughout are frequently problematic. With respect to legal definitions, practical usage, and incredibly variable traditions within literature, does one refer to a mural as graffiti, street art, or as a piece? Considering murals and graffiti to be different items reinforces a particular dichotomy, but can be necessarily pragmatic within the context of this thesis. Similarly, there are often political, national, communal, and literary connotations to using terms such as Aboriginal, Native, Indigenous, and other labels (Norris, Clatworthy, & Peters 2013). An exploration and breakdown of the terminology used, and the justification for their use is therefore necessary in order to smooth some of these complexities and to draw attention to some issues of terminology that are often over-simplified.

Aboriginal, Native, Indigenous and First Nations are used interchangeably throughout this thesis, most often referring to Canadian native cultures, and in a limited capacity to native cultures in the Americas more broadly. All of these terms were used by interview participants, both within the interviews as well as in the mural planning sessions, and thus will be reflected in quotations used and ideas generated by this fieldwork. Within my own writing I use Aboriginal, reflecting the term used in the \(^7\)th Generation Image Makers program description, and was the most frequent term used in my interviews and fieldwork. However, as stated previously, these collective terms often mask a significant cultural, historic and legal complexity. Names of specific communities, bands, tribes, nations, and language groups are also used throughout,

\(^1\) Sketch is an organization that offers creative arts teaching to street involved, homeless, and at-risk youth. See http://sketch.ca/.
where research participants spoke mostly to Anishinaabek and Haudenosaunee stories, teachings, and communities; where necessary, demarcation occurs to differentiate terms such as Six Nations (reserve) from Six Nations (nation). Within Statistics Canada census data the term Aboriginal identity is used, which incorporates both self-identification as Aboriginal, Status Indian identity (Statistics Canada 2006). The term Status Indian reflects a registered Aboriginal identity with the Canadian Federal government, but does not hold any significance for this study, as I am more concerned with cultural identity than political status. Problematization occurs with the use of terms such as *Indigenous knowledge* and *traditional knowledge* to denote cultural knowledge (i.e. medicines, teachings, history, etc.) that is distinctly non-Western in origin. In the same way as the terminology considered above, these are largely ambiguous terminology, and do not reflect a range of cultural complexity and seems to imply a historical stasis and isolation (Ellen 2009). While both terms were used to some extent in this study, it was generally with respect to cultural specificity, denoting the knowledge of specific communities and elders. The term *Chicana/o* is used in keeping with newer conventions based on the feminist Chicana critiques in the latter stages of the Chicano movement in the 1970s (Latorre 2008).

Street art and graffiti come with a set of complex terminologies, with these two terms representing a wide range of objects, practices, and policy implications, and tend to encompass a great deal of cross-over, given that many different practices can be employed within one piece. It is important to note that while graffiti pieces range in complexity, typically basic forms such as tagging will often occur within more complex masterpieces and murals, as can be seen in the murals of 7GIM. In this way, graffiti terminology is often categorized in terms of increasing complexity. *Writing* can encompass a range of practices and styles, but typically is built around the core practice of tagging (Lewisohn 2011). *Tagging* is writing a personalized signature with materials ranging from markers to spray paint, usually monochromatic. A *throw-up, or throwie*, most often represents an extension of tagging, with the signature filled out or shaded in two colours, and characterized by large bubbly letters, in a simple but flowing style. A *masterpiece* continues this practice, characterized by more clear definition and stylization than a tag or a throw-up, incorporating more elements and more colour. *Piece* is typically a specific shorthand for masterpiece, but will be used here to also refer to a specific street art work more generally, without necessary regard to style. While a signature can be a piece, a picture is always a piece. Other terminology, such as *wildstyle* and *stencil* graffiti, are more reflective of practices in
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graffiti creation. These terms are noteworthy for their use in my interviews with 7GIM artists, but more complex breakdown of style is outside of the scope of this thesis\(^2\).

As will be expanded upon in Chapter 3, the City of Toronto makes use of three large categories: graffiti art, graffiti vandalism, and art murals, where the difference between art and vandalism largely reflects authorization and aesthetics. These terms are defined through the Toronto Municipal Code, and interpreted by the Municipal Licensing and Standards Committee\(^3\). In general, graffiti art is any approved marking that aesthetically enhances a property, as determined by the City of Toronto. An art mural is a commissioned piece, also subject to approval by the City of Toronto. Graffiti vandalism is a somewhat more complex definition, but largely is any writing that does not have the approval of both property owner and City. Writing, in the form of tags and throw-ups, is almost always considered to be vandalism, while there exist some exceptions for pieces.

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\(^3\) Municipal Licensing & Standards is responsible for bylaw administration and enforcement throughout the City of Toronto. See http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnnextoid=27c4a83b82870410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD.
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As this research directly explores street art and its policies in the City of Toronto, I will operate using the above definitions of graffiti art and graffiti vandalism. However, the results of this research will be used to question and explore the validity and meaning of these definitions, and possibly to suggest alternatives. Because my research focuses most of its attention on legal street art, the term mural will most often be used. As will be addressed, there are certainly any number of elements of cross over between legal street art and graffiti, and this complicated relationship will be a major focal point for discussion. The tension in terminology comes from the issues with definition coming from the City of Toronto, as well as the perspectives of artists themselves, where graffiti is a term most-often reserved for unauthorized practices.

*Public art* is another term that can be used to consider this topic, where it provides a broader range of spaces in which the art can be considered, rather than necessarily in an outdoor environment. Public art might be most easily defined as “art that is displayed in public spaces existing outside of a designated art context (in this sense, the museum and gallery are not public spaces); or for public performative events” (Paul, 2006). Many 7GIM murals, including their most recent mural painted for the Pan Am games are painted in public environments that are not on the street. However, I find street art a useful representation regardless, tying in easily with municipal definitions and limiting the number of terms used.

While street art can represent a wide range of artistic practices, from physical objects, such as yarn bombing (knitting onto trees, benches, etc.), to performance art such as flash mobs, within the context of this research it will refer specifically to painted walls, representing the type of murals commissioned by STreetARToronto, as well as the artistic practice of 7th Generation Image Makers. This is not intended to invite a stricter definition of street art, but merely to enable a focused discussion within a diverse practice. Environmental and urban design scholar Isis Brook (2007) champions more clinical terminology in authorized and unauthorized environmental interventions. However, this terminology is most useful for covering the broad extent of possible street art interventions, incorporating objects and practices that do not fit easily within the broad understanding of street art. Given the narrow focus of this thesis on street art murals, they are used only intermittently within discussions on legal and illegal graffiti.
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Finally, within discussions of cultural politics, hegemony will be wielded fairly generally, referring to both state and political authority as well as a generic interpretation of mainstream population, politics, and media. Capital here denotes Karl Marx’s (1933) process of primitive accumulation, and can be understood as a mechanism of power in the exploitation and expropriation of labour.

1.2 Methodology

This research with was conducted with a mixed or hybrid method of study. Primary research for this thesis includes two main objects of study with 7GIM: observation of practice, in the form of interviews and organizational observation, and analysis of content, in a visual analysis of 7GIM artistic products. This primary research will be couched within a critical policy analysis of the City of Toronto’s graffiti management strategy, as described in the chapter breakdown below.

This case study was conducted using a grounded theory approach to research. This approach was intended to be primarily observational rather than participatory, with room for flexibility in the direction of the research. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), there are two principle precepts involved in grounded theory: change, and a clear stance on determinism that indicates the capacity for actors to make choices in response to conditions. “[G]rounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions” (Corbin & Strauss 1990 p.5).

One of the advantages to grounded theory for this type of research is that data collection and analysis are interrelated processes. Grounded theory guards against bias by requiring that a concept be relevant to the theoretical and analytical evolution of the research: “[n]o matter how enamored the investigator may be of a particular concept, if its relevance to the phenomenon under question is not proven through continued scrutiny, it must be discarded” (Corbin and Strauss 1990, p.7). This is particularly important, as I entered this organization not only as a non-Aboriginal cultural outsider, but also given a number of ideas and biases I held in regards to the desired outcome of my study of street art. Research was conducted in an exploratory manner, building my case from what I observed and recorded, analyzing from the practices I found on site.
and learned through interviews, rather than from preconceived frameworks. Only after I began analysis on these investigations was a framework of street art as cultural commons applied.

This approach is limited in a number of ways. Grounded theory attempts to provide a bias free assessment by encouraging the researcher to ensure conceptual relevance. However, grounded theory requires making decisions about what is considered relevant, possibly excluding important data sets. Biased relevance is built into the research from its investigatory beginnings, as the starting point to data collection requires certain subjective choices. This is mitigated by an acknowledgement and awareness of the subjective nature of relevance, and a willingness to discard concepts that are not supported by the data. Additionally, the small sample size within this case is inadequate for large-scale generalizations. As such the goal of this research is not to simplify, or generalize as a whole, but rather to enable more complex discussions of cultural production and resistance.

1.2.1. Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7th Generations Image Makers artists Kate Mosteller, Daniel Geoffrey, Nick Binjen, and Thom Charron – who have worked on at least one mural with the organization⁴. Mosteller has been coordinator of 7GIM since 2010. At the time of the interviews, Binjen and Geoffrey were considered to be lead artists for the then-forthcoming Pan Am Games mural, and had both worked on three 7GIM murals dating to 2011, including the Allen Gardens and High Park murals. Charron was the least experienced of the three, having worked only on the High Park mural, but has worked for several years as a facilitator at 7GIM, primarily teaching hip hop and lyric writing to youth.

Recruitment for the interviews took place through the recommendations of 7th Generation coordinator Lindsey Lickers, based on artists engaged with recent and current murals. Interviews occurred at the 7th Generation Image Makers offices at 655 Bloor St. W. Participation was voluntary, with each interview participant signing a consent form prior to the interviews. Interview questions were modified to fit the direction of the interview, as each artist brought

⁴ Identities have been anonymized per the artist agreement on the consent forms, approved by the Ethics Review Board at the University of Toronto.
unique perspectives and experiences to the process. In this way, the interview with Mosteller focused more on process and policy, while Geoffrey spoke more to identity and community. However, while the questions and direction of the interviews were often modified, the material covered remained consistent, allowing for the creation of larger themes and interpretation.

These interviews investigated the practice and process of mural creation, the participants’ views on engaging with street art as a cultural practice, and their understanding of Toronto municipal policy regarding graffiti as art and as vandalism. Specifically, these interviews examined the practices and processes of 7th Generation Image Makers as an organization, the roles of staff, lead artists and participants, and the artists’ own art practices. Included in this were discussions of the major street art projects interviewees had been involved with, themes and representations present in the murals, and how these themes are developed. I was interested in developing both a technical understanding of 7GIM processes as an organization – how murals are planned, who is involved, the application process, the recording and preservation of murals – as well as engaging with perspectives and opinions of the artists’ creative practices. In terms of street art commissions, I was interested in understanding what requirements, restrictions, and allowances are placed on a given mural. The interviewees were also asked to consider their perspective on graffiti vandalism, investigating the relationship between policy and practice in cultural production.

The small sample size of these interviews was intended to provide context and depth into a specific case, and dictated by the size of 7GIM and its organizational structure. Questions such as those about graffiti vandalism are not designed to create a generalization about major perspectives on graffiti in Toronto. The interviews, then, provide both a literal and interpretive element. Primarily, these interviews provide insight into 7th Generation Image Makers as an organization, and of the specific practices of these particular artists. Specificity is an integral part of this research, stressed by all interview participants. Their perspectives do not generalize to all street artists, street art organizations, or Aboriginal peoples. The emphasis was on specific stories in specific places. The interpretive element acts only as a means of thematically organizing these perspectives. Organization of objects is innately interpretive, as there is subjectivity in collecting responses outside of the context of the question. However, these themes were developed using
the participants’ own words, attempting to minimize an interpretive bias, allowing the participants more control over the organization of their ideas.

In conjunction with interviews, I engaged in non-participant observation (Handley 2008). In this capacity I took part by observing sketching sessions and meetings. Direct observation of the practices of 7th Generation Image Makers came through sitting in on three preparatory sketching sessions (March 12, May 9, May 14, 2014) for their 2014 mural project. These sketching sessions involved planning themes, concepts, teachings, discussing potential elements of the murals and their meanings, visualization, as well as actually beginning sketches. These observations were intended to support the individual interviews I was concurrently conducting, expanding understanding of organizational practices, and filling in informational gaps that were not uncovered or were overlooked in the interviews. Furthermore, this observation allowed me to gain a sense of group dynamic, directly following and questioning their artistic practices.

While observing the practices of mural construction, I also engaged with past murals, examining these sites through both personal observation and through my interviews, using an iconographic method\(^5\) (Müller 2011). Iconography traditionally involves collecting, combining, and categorizing the art works, as well as attributing meaning through direct visual analysis, and indirect verbal sources. This thesis is not intended to critique, analyse, and categorize these murals on my own terms, but rather through the intentions of 7th Generation Image Makers as authors and artists, and as such primary analysis occurred through questions asked during meetings, sketching sessions and interviews.

These works were accessed with the permission of staff and artists of the organization, and were observed at the 7th Generation Image Makers offices, in online or digital contexts, and at the locations of murals around the city, primarily Clendenen Ave., Allen Gardens, and the Toronto Pan Am Sports Centre. This analysis explored style and process over time, looking at past murals, and explored the process of coordinating and conducting a new mural project from

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\(^5\) There are three steps to iconography as a method: pre-iconographic description, focusing on the primary subject matter; iconographic analysis, focusing on conventional subject matter, or culturally shared visual signs and connotations; and iconographic interpretation, which aims to unpack intrinsic and symbolic values (Müller 2011).
September 2013 to August 2015. Street art provides an interesting medium for the study of remix culture, exploring meanings and relationships in appropriation, sampling, modes of dissemination (both materially and digitally) and the act of production. Street art analysis explored questions of longevity (whether or not a mural is tagged by illicit graffiti, expectations of permanence), distribution (physical space and digital space). Also vital to this analysis is street art as a tradition in politically marginalized groups, such as the Chicano movement in the American South West (Kenny 2006). More significantly in this research, the analysis of Aboriginal street art explores issues of custom and innovation in contemporary Aboriginal cultures, as well as with traditional notions of hegemonic power and mass culture.

### 1.3 Chapter Breakdown

Chapter Two provides a discussion of the conceptual framework, with various relevant literature examined throughout. This chapter begins by framing street art through its historical associations with First Nations rock art, Chicana/o murals, and contemporary graffiti. There is a dual focus in this chapter, setting up narrative approaches to urban Aboriginal identity, and approaching street art as a cultural commons. The latter narrative is unpacked through two categories: knowledge commons – a layered approach to production, access and dissemination of information – and neighbourhood commons – understood as the production of community and identity. These commons classifications are built upon discourses of authorship and public space, often presented in an overlapping discussion of physical and non-physical space. The use of commons classification to discuss street art, and in particular the Aboriginal street art of 7th Generation Image Makers provides a useful avenue into notions of hegemonic power and resistance, with a focus on the means by which politically marginalized groups and cultures are able to resist within authorized environments. This is informed by a discussion of Hardt and Negri’s (2009) concept of *biopolitics*, whereby the exercise of hegemonic power necessitates a preexisting power that is both resistant to and independent of the hegemonic power. This chapter uses an interdisciplinary set of literature, taking from diverse but overlapping fields including communications studies, cultural studies, political economy, indigenous studies, information studies, remix, criminology, and urban studies, among others. Through this interdisciplinary
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approach I hope to expose areas of tension with which to build a complex and dynamic understanding of street art.

Chapter Three is a critical analysis of the City of Toronto’s Graffiti Management Plan, breaking down definitional approaches, rhetoric, and highlighting the implications of policy. Within this chapter I focus first on the underlying policy texts – primarily the Toronto Municipal Code – in order to unpack the means by which the City of Toronto understands and approaches street art. This is intended to sidestep the political rhetoric that accompanies discussions on street art, delving instead into what is actually in place and taking place, and how it is done – objects that are often at odds with the public image of the political administration. This policy analysis provides the basis for understanding the City’s Graffiti Management Plan and its mural funding program, StreetARToronto. This program demonstrates a number of different management strategies that are intended to curb illicit graffiti while promoting a culture of street art that enriches and beautifies the city’s streets. However, this program mandate also creates a variety of new tensions, as well as exacerbating old tensions.

While it is outside of the scope of this thesis to examine the effectiveness of the program, these tensions will be brought forward for consideration. With this under consideration I have chosen to explore two central documents that detail the graffiti management policies in the city, namely Chapter 485 of the Municipal Code, which outlines the current amendments to the definitions and policy on graffiti, and the Graffiti Management Plan website, which navigates the policy tools, details the plan, links to StreetARToronto, as well as many other topics and City departments. These two are the main objects of study for two reasons: first, they supply the bulk of the policy information, and second, they are easily the two most accessible portals available to the general public. However, additional documents, such as budgets, briefs, and application documents are used to provide additional context and detail where they might be (and often are) absent from the more easily accessed hubs. This program is considered and analyzed through the

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6 For example, former Toronto Mayor Rob Ford has become highly publicized for his “war against graffiti” (Moloney 2013); however, the first major bylaw on graffiti was enacted under former Mayor David Miller’s term in 2006, and in 2011, during Ford’s first year in office the administration amended the municipal code in its entirety, resulting a somewhat more nuanced understanding of graffiti, resulting in a new graffiti management plan as well as StreetARToronto.
Chapter 1: Introduction

lens of Chapter Two’s commons framework, conceptualizing commons as a means of resolving, or at least coming to better understand these existing tensions.

Chapter Four presents the case of 7th Generation Image Makers, investigating the organizational history and mandate, and artistic practice. 7GIM, located in Toronto’s Koreatown at 655 Bloor St. W., offers youth participants access to arts resources, a drop-in centre, and workshops. With the help of facilitators and artists, these youth are invited to take part in projects, learn new art skills, or simply make use of art resources available, including access to practicing artists. 7th Generation Image Makers is a small organization, run by a coordinator, Lindsey Lickers, with a variable number of artists and facilitators contracted for murals and workshops.

Chapter Four is first focused on organizational history, with a particular focus on the people and their roles within the organization. This section seeks to explore how 7GIM began, and why it engages with street art, and as with the chapter as a whole, it is driven primarily through interviews with the program coordinator and artists. The second piece within this chapter explores the process for creating a mural, engaging with my own observations and experiences of their artistic practice, as well as the interviews. This section follows the creation of a mural in September, 2014 for the 2015 Pan American Games, but also investigates past mural sites at High Park and Allen Gardens, with a particular focus on 7GIM’s working relationship with StART. Finally, this chapter explores the practice and philosophies of the program coordinator and artists. This section is primarily focused on unpacking themes within the interviews: decolonization, identity, community, and place. These themes are integrated with the commons framework developed in Chapter Two, analyzed through artistic and community practice. Integral to this chapter as a whole are discussions of issues and challenges for Aboriginal peoples in urban centres, looking in particular at Toronto.

Chapter Five concludes this thesis with a broader discussion of the themes uncovered throughout the previous chapters. A strong focus in this chapter is on setting out key concepts found throughout Chapters Three and Four, presenting both potential results and problematization, and considering aspects for further research. This chapter attempts to combine some of the broad theoretical generalizations of Chapter Two with the policy and cultural specificities presented in Chapters Three and Four. Here I also return to the questions asked in Chapter One: when is an
authorized piece authentic in the same way as an unauthorized piece, and is there some degree to which the subversion of authority actually occurs within a context where it is simultaneously granted? This chapter finds that the work of 7GIM presents a context for authentic resistance in authorized works, as well as a model for the proliferation of this resistance. I end this chapter with a discussion of future directions for continued research.

1.4 Research Design

An important consideration within this research is how street art is understood by 7th Generation Image Makers. Street art is a tool and a mechanism for several different objectives, and for the most part is used as a means for capacity building, providing an artistic and cultural learning space for Aboriginal youth, offering both tools and teachers. On one level, the clear goal of creating murals is to develop art skills for Aboriginal youth, teaching a craft and providing experience. Aboriginal youth are able to develop a portfolio, enabling their success in art education and careers. The lead artists on these projects benefit as well, being provided with an outlet for their skill, an opportunity to collaborate, and a means to develop their portfolio and reputation in artist communities.

However, pushing this project into further unexplored areas, I am interested in understanding how Aboriginal cultural production is or is not shaped through a medium currently most associated with an urban hip-hop culture. While arguments can be made that these two concerns might be best reserved for separate projects, I find that the exploration of Aboriginal cultural production in this medium provides a richer discussion for considering the concerns of graffiti management, providing several interesting problematizations and complex relationships. The complexity in graffiti has been established through a plethora of research into street art, murals, and tagging, considered from a variety of perspectives. Several authors (Brook 2007; Dovey, Wollen & Woodcock 2012; Wilson & Kelling 1982; Young 2010, 2012) have explored issues of policy and management with graffiti and street art, conforming to roughly a cultural or broken

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7 Graffiti is poorly understood as simply vandalism, instead representing a wealth of cultural development. See Young, 2010.
windows\textsuperscript{8} perspective of street art. Still others (Philips 1999; Austin 2001; McDonald 2001; Lewisohn 2008, 2011) have done ethnographic studies into graffiti subcultures. Indigenous mural culture, particularly looking at Mexican and Chicana/o muralism has been explored fairly extensively as well (Cockcroft & Barnet-Sánchez 1993; Cockcroft, Weber & Cockcroft 1998; Latorre 2008). 7GIM is thus an excellent case through which to consider policy-making in obscured subjects that cross the boundaries between legality, art, and culture.

\textsuperscript{8} Wilson and Kelling (1982) theorized that unchecked urban decay (i.e. graffiti vandalism) leads to a downward spiral of community degradation.
Chapter 2  Conceptual Framework & Review of Literature

2.1  Introduction

Street art is an often controversial and yet wildly pervasive art form. Typically associated with the spray paint-covered walls of inner-city graffiti, the world of high art often places incredible value on murals painted by some of the more high-profile street artists. For instance, Banksy’s *Slave Labour (Bunting Boy)* sold at auction for approximately $1.1 million (Kozinn 2013). Graffiti cannot simply be categorized as either vandalism or art – its place in urban culture, social commentary, and civil disobedience demands it retain its vandal roots, and graffiti is situated uneasily within high art. Graffiti therefore represents a complex relationship between art and vandalism, between author intentionality and audience interpretation.

This chapter begins by first de-coupling 7th Generation Image Makers street art from a direct relationship with contemporary graffiti, showing the roots of First Nations peoples as wall painters. This allows a more interesting discussion of urban Aboriginal identity, looking at the means by which Aboriginal artists resist hegemonic interpretations through the construction of alternative narratives. Consideration of street art as an indigenous art form is given through a discussion of Chicana/o murals, and the relationship with contemporary graffiti is then re-established. This chapter then begins developing a classification of street art as a commons: first more broadly as Hardt and Negri’s (2009, p.139) dynamic commons, which Harvey (2012) calls cultural commons, then breaking this classification into more specific categories of knowledge commons and neighbourhood commons, drawing from a variety of literary sources. These classifications are then unpacked through Ostrom and Hess’s (2007) Institutional Analysis and Development framework. I lastly develop an understanding of power and resistance from this commons classification and a close examination of urban cultural production and appropriation.
2.2 Aboriginal Art

2.2.1. People of the Rock Carvers

Placing dates and history around graffiti is a fairly subjective practice, and indeed most authors writing on the subject (Lewisohn 2009, 2011; McDonald 2013, Young 2014a) tell a story of wall-art and writing dating back to the earliest human cultures: animals painted in the Cave of El Castillo, Spain, 42,000 years ago, the petroglyphs of the Americas, messages carved into the walls of Pompeii, and the carvings of soldiers and travellers throughout European history (McDonald 2013). This larger historical perspective is central to the context of this study, where each of the interview participants have stated that telling stories on walls is a continuation of their own cultural practices dating back thousands of years. While contemporary graffiti and street art might inform some of the aesthetic practices, the practice itself sits within both an expanded and specific history. As artist Daniel Geoffrey states, “my ancestors were doing this long before this city was here, and we’re going to be doing it, our future generations will be doing it long after. We are the people of the rock carvers, it’s what we do” (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

First Nations rock art in Ontario consists of both petroglyphs (carvings) and pictographs (painting) (Vervoort 2001). Petroglyphs Provincial Park in Peterborough, Ontario, holds the largest collection of petroglyphs in Ontario. Carved by either Algonquian or Iroquoian speaking peoples, these petroglyphs are carved in the likeness of animals, reptiles, shamen, and possibly the Great Spirit (Vastokas & Vastokas 1973). Anthropologists Joan and Romas Vastokas suggest that a general scarcity of softer rock types along the Canadian Shield encouraged rock painting over rock carving amongst Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples, resulting in a preponderance of pictographs rather than petroglyphs (Vastokas & Vastokas 1973). Anishinaabek pictographs can be seen at sacred sites across Ontario, such as Agawa Bay in Lake Superior Provincial Park (Vervoot, 2001). Pictograph sites are most often found next to bodies of water, and would have been painted from a canoe. As such, a pictograph will tend towards a longer horizontal, with vertical expanses reflecting the reach of the author’s arm from his canoe (Vastokas & Vastokas 1973). Various authors (Vastokas & Vastokas 1973; Vervoot 2001) have engaged with analysis

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9 The Canadian Shield is a large geological expanse in eastern and central Canada, encircling Hudson’s Bay and extending to the northeastern United States. The area is composed of exposed bedrock, predominantly granite and gneiss (Vastokas & Vastokas, 1973).
of rock art, exploring the meaning of these arts in myth, folklore, and magic. While these analyses are somewhat outside of the scope of this thesis, the connection between these historical practices and contemporary street art is important, particularly when looking at the context of Aboriginal murals, where they are not simply an aesthetic object, or a story or a history, but also a means of demarginalization and decolonization, an assertion of authority and connection.

Rock art is thus not strictly an ancient or historical practice, with contemporary artists continuing these artistic traditions, drawing on traditional stories, teachings, and images, remixing them into contemporary media (Vervoot 2001). Tlingit artist Nicholas Galanin’s Indian Petroglyph series juxtaposes petroglyphs with contemporary tags and corporate logos, commenting on both contemporary culture and anthropological perceptions of past culture (Burr 2012). Kwakw̱aka’wakw artist Marianne Nicolson’s Cliff Painting (2010), a massive pictograph in Kincome Inlet, British Columbia, is both homage to the many pictographs painted by her ancestors and a reassertion that the practice is ongoing. Ojibwe artist Norval Morrisseau’s woodlands style, based on Great Lakes area pictographs and petroglyphs, found both celebrity and controversy in the use of Aboriginal teachings and artistic style within predominantly western artistic media (Vervoot 2001). Many of the urban extensions of Aboriginal artistic practice are often viewed in light of a growing urban Aboriginal population, and adoption of urban and hip-hop cultures; however, this is only one story and way of interpreting urban Aboriginal identity and Native art practice.

2.2.2. Urban Aboriginal Identity
Increasingly Aboriginal peoples in Canada are living in cities, a relatively recent trend that has continued to accelerate. According to census data, in 1951 only 5.1% of Aboriginal peoples lived in urban environments (Norris et al. 2013), where, by the time of the 2006 census, this had increased to over half, at 54% of the total population of 1,172,785 (Statistics Canada 2006). Toronto has the fourth highest Aboriginal population at 26,575, after Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Vancouver. Norris et al. (2013) suggest varying population growth rates between these cities reflect differing processes in patterns of urbanization, implying the identity of urban Aboriginal is as culturally limiting as the overall as the term Aboriginal itself. While the difference between patterns of urbanization between cities is beyond the scope of this thesis, I hope to add to
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework & Review of Literature

growing literature (Warry 2007; Hokowhitu 2010; Peters 2012; Anderson 2013; Norris et al. 2013; Walker 2013) reflecting complex Aboriginal identities. While Canadian census data tells us that Aboriginal peoples are increasingly moving to urban centres, the 7GIM mural at High Park reframes this narrative, centering Aboriginal peoples at the heart of Toronto.

Aboriginal peoples, youth in particular, face myriad issues in urban centres. A recent report by the Urban Aboriginal Task Force (UATF 2007) found that Aboriginal youth face three main challenges in urban settings: “the difficulties associated with fostering positive Aboriginal identities in the city, the lack of employment opportunities, and having to quit school before graduation” (UATF 2007 p.22-23). These primary social issues, coupled with high levels of racism towards Aboriginal peoples (UATF 2007) are tightly tied to the more visible issues of poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, and homelessness. However, while these challenges necessarily must be addressed, and help define the mission of organizations such as 7th Generation Image Makers, we once again must return to complex notions of community, culture, identity, and production that make up urban Aboriginal identity. The Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (UAPS 2010), a large-scale survey of urban Aboriginal peoples across Canada, found that urban Aboriginal peoples “retain a strong sense of connection to their ancestral communities or places of origin [but] consider their current city of residence home” (UAPS 2010, p.8, emphasis in original) and furthermore “most urban Aboriginal peoples are likely to feel connected to Aboriginal communities in their cities” (UAPS 2010, p.8). Perhaps most importantly, the city represents vast potential as a site for “creative development of Aboriginal culture” (UAPS 2010, p.8), once again challenging mainstream narratives of “assimilation or poverty” (UAPS 2010, p.8).

Aboriginal artists challenge these narratives through resistance to hegemonic definitions of Aboriginal art, where “[a]uthenticity, or more specifically its myth… has therefore been at the centre of the struggle of contemporary Aboriginal artists” (Kermoal 2010, p. 169). Indigenous artists across North America have become increasingly recognized for the adoption of hip-hop, remix, sampling, and appropriation practices as a symbol of resistance, and of subversion of power. For instance, A Tribe Called Red are a First Nations DJ group who remix traditional Aboriginal music, predominantly vocal chanting and drumming, with urban music culture such as hip-hop, dance hall, electronic, and dubstep. The group’s name, a direct reference to the iconic
hip-hop group A Tribe Called Quest, acts in a way to appropriate Black civil rights history, where hip-hop has long been used as an expression of Black resistance to hegemonic control in the United States. The exhibition *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture*[^10] is an expression of this resistance by Aboriginal artists in Canada. Exhibited at the Power Plant Gallery in Toronto in the spring of 2013[^11], Beat Nation is a curated mashup expressing a dynamic and free-flowing nature in First Nations cultures: Jordan Bennett’s *Jilaqami’g no’shoe* (2009) presents snowshoes carved into the form of a skateboard; Duane Linklater’s *Tautology* (n.d) is a neon light Thunderbird, appropriated from Ojibwe artist Norval Morrisseau. These artworks present alternative images to the Western mainstream, hegemonic conceptions of native art, pushing and eroding boundaries of representation. *Beat Nation* curators Kathleen Ritter and Tania Willard argue that the “prevalence of hip hop in Aboriginal communities should not be seen as a break from the past, but a continuum” (Ritter & Willard 2013, p.5).

Native art practice thus presents an opportunity to share alternative viewpoints in increasingly polarized discourse around property rights (both intellectual and physical) in urban centres. Typical research on urban Aboriginal identity focuses on cultural and socio-policial issues (Warry 2007; Hokowhitu 2011; Vandervelde 2011), and urban migration (Norris et al. 2013). Much research has been focused on culture and collective memory, although typically with an understandable focus towards rural communities (Ettawageshick 1999; Krmpotich 2010; Cherubini 2011). Scholarship in native art practices has either focused on traditional and fine art (Vervoot 2001; Spears 2004; Kermoal 2011), or on hip hop and rap music (Vályi 2011; Manzo 2013). Contemporary aesthetic practices in digital art and graffiti find purchase alongside and within traditional motifs and customs. This is hardly exclusive to modern native artistic practice, but it does become more prominent as Canadian Aboriginal cultures resist biased representations. As Ojibwe art scholar Shandra Spears (2004) states: “[w]e must be free, not only from the trap of colonial stereotyping, but from limited definitions about the purpose, style, content and direction of ‘Native art.’ Native art cannot and should not be narrowly defined. A single description of Native art would lock us into yet another colonial, two-dimensional definition of our very three-dimensional artistic selves” (p.126).

[^10]: http://www.beatnation.org/
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework & Review of Literature

While numerous contemporary Aboriginal artists make use of street art and graffiti, there has been little scholarship touching on the practice. Through street art one is able to explore several ways of understanding Aboriginal art, as a means of preserving and teaching about the past, as a way of reconstructing the urban environment, and as a way of pointing to a possible future. “Street culture is redefined by the artists in Beat Nation in order to address the marginalization of inner-city youth culture from Aboriginal perspective, where the streets themselves have stood as metaphors for the colonial process” (Ritter & Willard 2013, p.8). Also vital to this analysis is street art as a tradition in politically marginalized groups, such as the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the American South West (Kenny 2006), and the Chicana emergence that developed in critique and support of the Chicano movement in its latter stages (Latorre 2008). More significantly in this research, the analysis of Aboriginal street art will explore issues of custom and innovation in contemporary Aboriginal cultures, as well as with traditional notions of hegemonic power and mass culture. “It is through this reassertion of Aboriginal narratives upon the city that the ancestral land and the earth beneath the streets are reclaimed” (Ritter & Willard 2013, p.8).

2.2.2.1. Chicana/o Muralism
There can be a number of places and movements from which to explore murals-as-resistance, and there is often a contemporary bias towards the hip-hop culture and aesthetic of urban graffiti. However, some of the most appropriate links might be found within the Chicana/o art movement in the South-western United States. The Chicana/o mural movement began in the 1960s, reaching its political heights in the mid 1970s, and currently continues in several forms across the United States (Jackson 2009). Chicana/o murals were one aspect (but an important one) of a wider Chicana/o socio-political movement – el Movimiento – that challenged American cultural hegemony and the spatial and cultural marginalization of Indigenous peoples. According to Chicana/o scholars Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto (1991) “the Chicano political movement grew out of an alliance in the 1960s of farmworkers struggling to unionize in California and Texas, the disenfranchised and dispossessed land grant owners of New Mexico, the urban working classes of the Southwest and Midwest, and the growing student movement across the country. All these were essential participants in the Chicano movement, but not all embraced the term Chicano”
While this resistance movement drew a broad spectrum of Hispanic artists, “the artistic phalanx of el Movimiento, used a content of pride in Mesoamerican heritage and the value of their native culture presented as descendant from a long line of highly developed Olmec, Aztec, Mayan civilizations and a mythical common origin in Aztlán \(^{12}\) as inducements” (Kenny 2006, p. 24).

This cultural renaissance in Mesoamerican civilization marked a dramatic shift in mestizo cultural identity, where previously indigenous roots were hidden and Spanish heritage celebrated (Goldman & Ybarra-Frausto 1991). According to Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto (1991), “neo-indigenism served a positive function: pre-Columbian motifs instilled pride and a sense of historical identity in the Chicano artists and the communities they addressed; they also were an antidote to modern anti-Indian racism, which labeled all Indians and mestizos inferior and attributed to them a long list of negative and undesirable traits” (p.88). Accordingly, Chicana/o scholar Guisela Latorre (2008) finds that Indigenism as an ideology, and specifically in the Mexican context, “did not provide platforms for self-representation, but rather created a state-sanctioned visual vocabulary that articulated a native identity” (p. 6). The conceptual understanding of Aztlán as both spiritual and spatial helps to construct the importance of both symbol and place in Chicana/o art, themes that come forward in the Aboriginal art of 7th Generation Image Makers.

A Chicana feminist movement emerged in the latter stages of the Chicano movement, critiquing the marginalization of women and the entrenchment of gendered hierarchies prevalent in the national movement. As with the Chicano movement as a whole, this critique occurred along myriad socio-political lines, and mural art constituted one small aspect. However, Chicana muralism presented an alternative mode of resistance and empowerment: “[w]hile Chicana feminist writers and activists were directly calling out Chicanos’ notions of male privilege and sexism within the movement, Chicana artists were challenging masculine aesthetics not by direct militant action but rather through the introduction of new iconography that placed women at the

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\(^{12}\) Aztlán is the mythological homeland of the Aztecs, interpreted geographically by Chicanas/os as the annexed states of southwestern America, “a creative vision that helped forge a spiritual relationship between Mexican Americans and the land where they now resided” (Jackson 2009, p. 17). The idea of Aztlán is often traced to Chicano poet Alurista, a participant at the National Chicano Youth Liberation conference in 1969 (Jackson 2009).
centre of the decolonization process” (Latorre 2008, p.178). Resistant to patriarchal representations of women, these murals not only reinforced the growing Indigenous cultural production and identity, but also presented a means for dynamic interpretations and meanings associated with Indigenous iconography and experience. This mode of resistance is prevalent within the murals of 7GIM.

Particularly in the early years of the Chicano art movement, murals were created for and with communities, rather than as a commercial practice: “the Indian of the Americas emerged within these murals as a timeless ideal, a fluid allegory of cultural affirmation that reconstructed Chicanas/os fragmented past while providing entire communities with a vocabulary that celebrated their contemporary cultural practices” (Latorre 2008, p.1). Murals would use Indigenous motifs and characters such as Quetzalcoatl\(^{13}\) to construct a Chicano nationalism. According to Latorre (2008), “[e]ach of these symbols and motifs was strategically chosen by Chicana/o artists and community members and performed a very specific function in the construction of this new nationalist aesthetic” (p.71).

Chicana/o murals were not only focused on the creation of an Indigenist narrative and aesthetic, but also had a deep concern for physical space and a focus on site specificity: “the Chicana/o experience of marginalization and displacement proved to them that urban space was never neutral or devoid of meaning and, furthermore, that it was a result of a complex history of labor and social production” (Latorre 2008, p. 141). There are two aspects to this reclamation of space, where there is appropriation of physical environment, but also a claim asserted of a site as a metaphorical space of Aztlán, represented through indigenous images. In this way Latorre (2008) argues that Chicana/o artists painted murals “not to search for Aztlán, but instead to re-create it” (p.146, emphasis in original).

2.2.2.2. Graffiti

Contemporary graffiti has both a simple and a complex history. The simple history traces its origins to 1960s Philadelphia, with the emergence of tagging. Within a short time the tag had moved to New York City where it became refined by a variety of artistic practices and was

\(^{13}\) Mythological Aztec ruler and deity.
exemplified by “bombing” subway trains in order to gain more widespread recognition and reputation (McDonald 2013). The complex history necessarily problematizes this origin story, reflecting on a more universal practice that has occurred throughout human history and in every civilization. However, it remains that a particular aesthetic and practice gained widespread prominence in American inner cities in the 1960s and 1970s, a practice that has had a major influence on contemporary urban art culture (McDonald 2013).

While the tag began as a simple name and number spray painted or written in marker, more complex pieces developed to incorporate a wider variety of colour, and typically a decreased legibility of the writing (McDonald 2013). Tagging began as an individual activity, such as the work of Darryl McCrae aka Cornbread in 1967 Philadelphia; as tagging evolved into more complex artistic and territorial forms, artists began to operate in groups, or crews, in order to cover more area and for safety (Young 2014b). Urban scholar Susan Phillips (1999) classifies graffiti into several categories: popular graffiti, community graffiti, gang graffiti, political graffiti, and hip-hop graffiti. Popular graffiti are markings that are easily understood by most of a population, such as is found in bathrooms; conversely, community graffiti is “produced by and for communities of individuals with shared interests” (Phillips 1999, p.49). Gang graffiti is highly specialized community graffiti, coded in ways that is understood by members and cultural insiders, and the aim is typically inwards, towards the gang or gang culture, rather than society at large. Political graffiti is often generated from the same specialized and typically marginalized community, but is aimed outwards, towards state-level politics and society at large. Finally, hip-hop graffiti represents the wide swath of graffiti that developed out of New York and Philadelphia, tagging for name recognition, pieces, throwies, wild style, pasties, and stencils. It is typified as graffiti-art, although not all hip-hop graffiti would be easily recognized as art.

Complex cultural and political tensions with graffiti are often seemingly polarized into debates between art and vandalism; however, cultural responses to graffiti often defy binary interpretations, provoking varying outcomes. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, even in zero-tolerance environments there are many nuances in responses to graffiti, between police, concerned citizens, politicians, artists, and academics. According to communications scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser (2011), “Street art cannot be read as simply a sign of urban decay and rebellious youth, nor is it a pure form of cultural innovation” (p.644). Much of the current body
of literature on graffiti has focused on graffiti-as-vandalism and graffiti-as-art as tensions between a complex variety of actors, not only between vandalism versus authority, but also the tensions between enforcement and eradication of practice set against graffiti’s draw in cultural tourism, as well as the tensions between the consideration of graffiti as high art and vandalism roots (Brook 2007; Dovey et al. 2012; Young 2010, 2012). Differentiation in motivation between graffiti writers and artists can be found across all forms of street art.

Urban scholar Isis Brook (2007) presents an interesting study of the unauthorized intervention on urban spaces, examining the means by which the urban experience is enhanced and authenticated by the unplanned. Brook’s unauthorized interventions find their value in “edginess”, a quality of social and spatial innovation, in the resistance to control over urban function (2007). The limitations of this edginess stems from Brook’s determination that unauthorized interventions are not all of the same quality, and thus “sometimes something just happens and it works, and part of why it works… is because it was obviously not planned to be that way” (Brook 2007, p.318). Young (2014b) expands on Brook (2007) “edginess”, constructing what she terms “urban enchantment”, not necessarily denoting delight or wonder at an object, but simply the fact of being arrested or surprised, “halted in our passage through public space and everyday life, suspended in a momentary relation with an image or a word” (Young 2014b, p.45). Young (2014b) makes clear that this is not limited to pleasure in an encounter; rather enchantment can involve fear, anger, outrage, confusion and disgust. Similarly, Dovey et al. (2014) state that regardless of its qualities as art or as vandalism, the actions of graffiti in urban space “throws its publicness into contention” (p.40), creating awareness of and new purpose for forgotten spaces.

Ronald Kramer (2010) contests the notion that graffiti is necessarily authenticated by illegality, finding a growing subculture of artists who “have not only become adamant about seeking out and acquiring permission in order to produce graffiti, but have also attempted, in various ways and at various levels, to become a part of the society in which they find themselves embedded” (p. 249). Kramer uses this subculture to argue that graffiti, and in particular legal graffiti, cannot be easily classified as resistance as many practitioners are have a deep concern for legal processes. In chapter four I will subvert this argument to show where authorized street art does in fact act as a mode of resistance within legal constructs.
Aboriginal-specific graffiti reflects diverse meanings and motivations, often tending towards Phillip’s (1999) political graffiti. Ritter and Willard consider wall art to be a natural mode of Aboriginal communication and expression: “[t]hese lands we inhabit are marked by Aboriginal peoples, from pictographs and petroglyphs to graffiti and tagging. Cultural stories and Aboriginal knowledge reinforce the idea that the land is part of the people and the people part of the land” (Ritter & Willard 2013, p.9). In December of 2012, a teach-in called “Idle No More” was held in Saskatoon in direct response to the Canadian government’s Bill C-45, and more generally to continuous exploitation of Aboriginal peoples and treaty rights (www.idlenomore.ca). Tags and pieces bearing the name Idle No More began to appear across Canadian cities, demanding that Aboriginal issues take centre stage, writing their struggle into the stones of the urban environment. “Graffiti murals, spray-painted ovoids and modern cliff paintings assert cultural belonging and define traditional territories, whether they be in forests, cityscapes, the ‘Rez’ of the ‘burbs”’ (Ritter & Willard 2013, p.9).

Figure 5: Idle No More tag at Dupont St. and Spadina Rd. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.

Figure 6: Idle No More masterpiece at Spadina Rd. & Bloor St. West. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.
2.2.3. Biopolitics

Michel Foucault’s biopolitics, a notion that was slowly defined over several works, but based on ideas of power explored in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976), finds a great deal of purchase within critical street art, both through authorized and unauthorized works. Biopolitics is often most easily defined alongside and oppositional to Foucault’s biopower, where biopower might be most easily seen as a managerial or administrative power, control over life, populations, and functions (Hardt & Negri 2009, p.57). However, Foucault makes the claim that “power is only exercised over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (cited from Hardt & Negri 2009, p. 59). Hardt and Negri (2009) claim that if biopower is the “power over life” (2009 p.57), biopolitics is the power that comes up through life. Biopolitical power is at once oppositional, intrinsic, and entirely alternative to the exercise of biopower, asserted in a similar manner to Newton’s Third Law, “for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction”. However, resistance is found not as oppositional, a definition that operates to counter biopower, but as a disruption in the workings of biopower. “Biopolitics, in contrast to biopower, has the character of an event first of all in the sense that the “intransigence of freedom” disrupts the normative system” (Hardt & Negri 2009, p.59).

So what then does biopolitics look like? For Hardt and Negri (2009), biopolitical labour power takes its form as exodus, “a refusal of the increasingly restrictive fetters placed on its productive capacities by capital” (p.152). The requirements for this exodus are not simply found in refusal to produce, in the subversion of production, but rather are “only possible on the basis of the common – both access to the common and the ability to make use of it” (Hardt & Negri 2009, p.153). This use of the commons is important going forward, and will be discussed in the next section; however suffice to say an action need not necessarily be politically charged and revolutionary to be an exercise of biopolitical power. Rather, expressions of biopolitical power can be found in struggles for alternate subjectivities, seen in using the urban environment for uncharacteristic and innovative modes.

This disruption is witnessed in Young’s (2014) urban enchantment that deconstructs the everyday urban flow, replacing transition between spaces with encounter. These disruptions
occur with encounters of both authorized and unauthorized street art. This is not to say that the authorization (or lack thereof) of a piece does not matter in an encounter – indeed, the question of whether a piece is authorized is often central to the encounter, helping to develop a larger enchantment. Indigenous muralism, such as in the Chicana/o Movement, often acts as the agent of disruption in the complexity of biopolitics and biopower: “[a]s opposed to an ideology of oppression, Chicana/o Indigenism emerged as a methodology of decolonization that sought to create not false consciousness but alternative models of oppositional thinking serving the needs of Third World communities” (Latorre 2008, p.5). Biopolitics thus presents the conditions of agency and resistance in cultural imperialism. Hegemonic influence in cultural appropriation comes to the forefront, as relationships of power, particularly in Western media, are by no means equal or balanced (Rogers 2006). Cultural appropriation is a complex and dynamic negotiation: a dominant image appropriated by a marginalized culture as a form of resistance might then be turned around by a dominant culture to assert a new identity.

A limitation to Hardt and Negri’s (2009) biopolitics is their need for inclusivity, generating the multitude. Acknowledging the vagueness of this term, Hardt and Negri not only allow for social diversity, but claim that diversity is a necessary condition of the multitude: “multitude should be understood, then, as a not a being but a making – or rather a being that is not fixed or static but constantly transformed, enriched, constituted by a process of making” (2009, p.173). This multitude is formed on the expropriation of biopolitical labour, as capital shifts its organization in response to excess of production. Political geographer David Harvey (2010) finds that increasing capacities in global production have both allowed capital to modify means of production, labour-force, and commodities in order to escape catastrophic crises predicted by Marx (1933) and numerous Marxist scholars. Cornel West’s New Cultural Politics of Difference (1990) demonstrates the complicated relationship between cultural criticism and power, arguing that critics of culture working from within institutions of power will necessarily find their work “simultaneously progressive and coopted” (p.94), and without outside pressure or crisis, transformation is ultimate subsumed or stagnated. Capital thus avoids crisis through both geographical flexibility and reorienting the pressures of both outside and inside disruptions. Casting biopolitical power as similarly dynamic is therefore essential to applications of resistance, but this dynamism must be similarly drawn from both material and immaterial struggle, and a relational conception of the commons.
2.3 Commons

There is an increasingly renewed interest in exploring commons-based resource management, from traditional resources such as food and forestry to what Charlotte Hess (2008) refers to as the new commons that includes objects such as infrastructure, health, culture, and knowledge. Street art presents an interesting case from which to conduct a commons analysis, as it bridges the gap between traditional physical property-based commons and contemporary immaterial cultural and knowledge commons. Hardt and Negri (2009) consider two notions of the commons: the first is “inert” and associated with traditional views of commons as resources, while the second is “dynamic” and associated more with cultural production and labour (p.139). The second notion will be discussed in more detail later; the former, as a more traditional notion will be unpacked first. According to Ostrom and Hess (2007), commons can simply refer to a “resource shared by a group of people” (p.4). For Lewis Hyde (2010), commons is a type of property, where property simply means right of action. Within this right of action is necessarily a right of exclusion, or limitations to the actions, access, or agency of non-owners. This last part, the right to exclusion, is an important notion going forward, differentiating the commons from a simple open-access regime (Ostrom & Hess 2007).

There are certainly cases where commons resources are treated as if in an open access regime, and a variety of commons scholars (Hess 2007; Bollier 2014, Frischmann 2012) make use of this association, particularly with regard to infrastructure. However, developing the notion of exclusion is important, particularly in consideration of cultural resources and production, such as with the traditional knowledge of 7th Generation Image Makers. Hardison (2006) problematizes the monolithic, all-encompassing notion of the commons, a general framework that finds its source in Western notions of property and public domain: “Indigenous knowledge may superficially resemble the public domain. But there are often social restrictions on who, if anyone, may use certain knowledge and under what circumstances” (Hardison 2006, p.3). Hess (2008) provides a working definition of commons-as-resource for this thesis, describing it as “a resource shared by a group where the resource is vulnerable to enclosure, overuse and social dilemmas. Unlike a public good, it requires management and protection in order to sustain it” (p. 37).
This definition provides a useful relationship between three key objects: groups, enclosure, and management. In the first place, there is a clear specification of a group, which by extension indicates exclusion. It is conceivable to use this definition to generate a universalist conception of the commons (i.e. humanity as a group), but it is equally valid to see a common-pool or common-property resource as something shared by a more specific group of individuals (i.e. Anishinaabek). Groups within this research are somewhat defined (i.e. StART or 7GIM), but for the purposes of understanding commons are characterized more by Foucauldian (1990) dynamic relationships than by a static membership. Any community acts most often as a shifting dynamic of actors with a variety of different ideals, goals, and powers. Particularly useful here, dynamic power relations allow us to consider street art as a diverse complexion of relational groups than as an exercise of municipal authoritative power against repressed vigilante actors.

Secondly, this definition places enclosure front-and-centre within a commons discussion. Enclosure, here defined as “the gradual or sudden decrease of accessibility of a particular resource” (Hess 2008, p. 6), is a term that typically references the English enclosure movements of the 15th - 19th centuries that parcelled the commons into smaller privately owned lands (Hess 2008), accordingly correlating with the disappearance of the yeomanry14 as a class (Marx 1933). This term has gained traction alongside the renewed interest in the commons, such as legal scholar James Boyle’s (2003) representation of intellectual property as a second enclosure movement. Numerous scholars (Harvey 2006; Low & Smith 2006; Hess 2008; Hyde 2010) have discussed the increasing privatization of public spaces in cities, with decreasing access to broad uses of traditional public infrastructure such as parks (Rosenzweig & Blackmar 1992), crackdowns on community gardens (Assadourian 2003; Salvidar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004; Eizenburg 2012), and an increase of advertisements on public grounds (Harvey 2012; Young 2014a, 2014b)15. Blackmar (2006) finds enclosure around the very concept of commons, in the appropriation of commons discourse and terminology by commercial enterprises, used to

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14 Independent peasants.
15 Much of this enclosure of both physical public space (parks, streets, sidewalks, etc.) and immaterial realms (television, Internet websites, etc.) is often seen to be the result of public safety and counterterrorism measures stemming from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. However, Low and Smith (2006) contend a key turning point was the shift towards neoliberalism in the 1980s, where “[a] creeping encroachment in previous years has in the last two decades become an epoch-making shift culminating in multiple closures, erasures, inundations, and transfigurations of public space at the behest of state and corporate strategies” (p.1).
“conjure up pleasant feelings of connection” (p. 50). Jeffrey, McFarlane & Vasudevin (2012) argue that enclosure is “not predicated on displacement and land grab alone, nor on class exploitation, but on the appropriation of wealth produced in common, from affective ties and cooperative care that characterise so-called ‘knowledge’ or ‘creative’ industries” (p.1249). Given this, it can be understood that enclosure of public space within cities in many ways prevents open communication of ideas, history, and culture – objects that can be experienced through creative engagement with public space.

Finally, Hess’s (2008) definition of commons requires some kind of management and maintenance. An example of this can be seen in StreetARToronto’s mural funding packages, which mandates a five year maintenance plan, acknowledging that there are various factors at play that will impact a mural over time (see Chapter Three for more detail). This once again indicates the changing and dynamic nature of urban environments: there is natural infrastructure decay, shifting populations, and municipal power structures that change over time. Describing street art as a commons seeks to recognize this complex dynamism in reorganizing our understanding of urban power structures, shifting power away from a focus on authority and capital and into community and cultural production.

The limitation of this definition of the commons is that it lacks dynamic qualities, and a fundamental understanding of change across time. While drawing attention to vulnerable resources and three core management features (groups, enclosure, maintenance), it is unclear how the protection, preservation, or even enhancement of these resources can be generalized, or if the commons fits rather as separate spaces surrounded by privatized management schemes. While I have focused on the ways in which dynamic qualities can be understood within this definition, moving beyond stasis demands changes to the given resource, space, and group. Every encounter effectively introduces changes, whether on a micro or macro level. It is my hope that presenting both macro- and micro-level spaces for analysis will help to engage with some of these issues.
2.3.1. Cultural Commons

I argue that street art is a resource produced within the broad category of cultural commons. There are many approaches to understanding cultural commons, however, much of the research, (Ostrom & Hess 2007; Hyde 2010; Lessig 2004, 2008; Bollier 2014) tends to focus on intellectual property, public domain, and open access regimes. Madison, Frischmann and Strandburg (2010) define cultural commons as “[e]nvironments for developing and distributing cultural and scientific knowledge through institutions that support pooling and sharing that knowledge in a managed way” (p. 659). This definition is somewhat dry and reserved, and seems ill-equipped to encompass the resistance occurring within street art practice, especially in consideration of Aboriginal cultural production.

Ronald Niezen defines culture as “often impermanent, complex, ‘creolized’, hybrid and contested. Culture is a verb, not a noun, a process, not a thing itself” (cited from Warry 2007, p.88). Similarly, for Hardt & Negri (2009), the common “is dynamic, involving both the product of labor and the means of future production. This common is not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the social practices we establish, the modes of sociality that define our relationships, and so forth” (p.139).

These latter definitions might seem at odds with Hess’s definition of commons set out earlier. In fact, Harvey (2012) deconstructs Ostrom’s (1990) analysis of the commons to show that constructing the commons as a set of specific resources to be protected enforces enclosures, typically revealed through exclusionary, draconian measures of state authority, effectively ensuring that “one common may be protected at the expense of another” (2012, p.70). Not only does the static commons demand a hierarchical and preferential protectionism, but also serves to enclose resources within very particular spaces (Harvey 2012). Given this, Harvey (2012) reiterates Hardt and Negri’s dynamic commons, stating, “the common is not to be construed, therefore, as a particular kind of thing, asset or even social process, but as an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet- to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood” (p.73).
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The cultural commons is thus effectively an abstraction, continuously generated through the practice of what Linebaugh (2008) calls commoning. Harvey (2012) describes commoning as a practice that “produces or establishes a social relation with a common whose uses are either exclusive to a social group or partially or fully open to all and sundry” (Harvey 2012, p.73). Harvey generates a great deal of interesting insight into commoning as production, but like many political economists falls short in the realization, effectively reducing outcomes to a vague action. He claims, “how commoning might work at the local neighborhood level is relatively clear. It involves some mix of individual and private initiative to organize and capture externality effects while putting some aspect of the environment outside of the market. The local state is involved through regulations, codes, standards, and public investments, along with informal and formal neighborhood organization” (Harvey 2012, p.79). While Hess’s (2008) commons produce enclosures, Harvey’s (2012) commoning lacks both clarity (despite his claims) and outcome. Linebaugh (2008) claims that viewing the commons as either simply resource or simply verb is a trap, “misleading at best and dangerous at worst” (p. 279), and must be understood as an activity, as labour that is deeply connected to the physical environment. Applying the dynamism of Hardt & Negri’s cultural commons to Hess’s vulnerable resources demands an examination of dynamic relationships, a notion I explore through the relationship between unauthorized graffiti and authorized murals. In order to deconstruct this dynamic cultural commons, I find it useful to consider two interrelated categories of commons: street art as neighbourhood commons and street art as knowledge commons.

2.3.1.1. Neighbourhood Commons

Hess (2008), in line with her traditional commons definition, states that a neighbourhood commons is an environment “where people living in close proximity come together to strengthen, manage, preserve, or protect a local resource” (p.16). Incorporating more dynamic notions into this definition places the emphasis on the “coming together” of a group of people, thereby developing the community as a resource, perhaps more easily understood in terms of identity. Researchers often drift towards community gardens and public parks as the focal point of this research (see Rosenzweig & Blackmar 1992; Assadourian 2003; Salvidar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004; Eizenburg 2012), acting as both an easy demonstration of this commons mentality,
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as well as a controversial struggle for rights to public spaces. At the core of this research is the restructuring of the urban environment, and class struggle against the commodification of the city. This field stems from Henri Lefebvre’s (1990) work on the development and functions of the city, public space, and the concept of the “urban”, where “[t]he city historically constructed… is only an object of cultural consumption for tourists, for aestheticism, avid for spectacles and the picturesque… Yet, the urban remains in a state of dispersed and alienated actuality” (p.148), which leaves the door open to new approaches and understanding. Public space is inherently political, and demands a consistent questioning of the rights held in such places. David Harvey explains, “the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization” (2008, p. 23).

Street art exists as a neighbourhood commons in its capacity as a part of communal identity. For a mural to be funded by StART an organization needs to have direct support of the community it is to be placed in. In this capacity, 7th Generation Image Makers engage in a huge amount of community consultations before even beginning a mural, ensuring that the community is a part of the process. In the same way, the community often takes on some responsibilities in maintenance, protecting the mural as a part of their identity.

Banksy’s Slave Labour (Bunting Boy), provides a good example of aspects involved in street art as a neighbourhood commons, as well as an interesting complication into the realm of street art as vandalism and as high art. This piece, depicting a boy sewing Union Jack patches with a sewing machine, was stenciled in a neighbourhood in north London in 2012, vanished and then reappeared in a Miami auction house, and was promptly dropped when the neighbourhood campaigned for its return. It was subsequently sold for approximately $1.1 million in a London auction house, remaining in disputed ownership (Kozinn 2013). Such a case makes the blurred line between graffiti as art and graffiti as vandalism, definitions that will be discussed in the next chapter, even less clear. Banksy did not have a commission or legal permission to spray paint his piece, making it vandalism in the traditional sense. However, it was also accepted by the community, which protested its secret removal, making both the creation of this stencil and its removal vandalism. In the same way that there is definitional complexity with this piece in terms
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of art and vandalism, we can consider the complexity in categorizing it as a type of commons. It is embedded in urban infrastructure and thus becomes a part of the infrastructure, calling attention to places that are typically unnoticed (Star 1999), and its removal often calls attention to this infrastructure even more, showing evidence of its deconstruction (Smallman 2014).

While the production of community and identity prominent in my understanding of neighbourhood commons is not necessarily material in nature, there are large degrees to which a neighbourhood commons is at lest informed by, if not directly influenced by physical environment and the specificity of geographical space. Understanding the prominent role of infrastructure is important in exploring street art as a neighbourhood commons, connecting easily to Frischmann’s (2012) discussions of infrastructure as a commons. While some argument can be made to the opposite, within this thesis I do not consider street art to be infrastructural; rather infrastructure consists of objects such as walls, underpasses, street light boxes, as well as more natural geography. However, there is a crucial relationship between street art and these objects – rooted in history, culture and practice – that has a major impact on the typical occurrences of street art. The physical geography of street art allows for a rich discussion of two notions typical in commons discussions: exclusion and scarcity.

In terms of exclusion, there obviously is a certain access granted by virtue of the infrastructure in place – one must generally be in the physical location in order to take part in its viewership, at least until its eventual diffusion through various communication media. Access is also denied in its physical removal by the auction house. That said, the removal of this piece is not protested because it is an infrastructural object, but rather because of the cultural significance that has been applied to this piece, likely here in large part due to the fame of the particular artist, but pieces are often protected by the community around them.

In terms of scarcity, a wall can certainly be seen as a rivalrous resource: while there are a great many walls in the city, they are technically finite, and as stated above there is a certain tendency towards particular spaces. At the same time, they can also be non-rivalrous: the use of a wall

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16 However, in consideration of environmental contextuality in viewing street art as a neighbourhood commons, we can overlook access through communications media in this thesis.
17 A good example being the 7th Generation Image Makers piece at Allen Gardens, a case that will be discussed in chapter 4.
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does not diminish its capacity to hold street art, and depending on one's perspective part of the value of street art – particularly with graffiti – is its capacity for remix, for other artists’ contributions, and the build up of pieces over time. For the purposes of this thesis, looking at legal street art in the form of murals, and considering the particular knowledge contributions of a mural, street art will be viewed as a rivalrous resource. Should a street artist paint over a 7th Generation Image Makers mural, particular aspects of the story the mural is telling are lost, and thus the resource is changed. This change should not be seen as a value judgement, as street art is ingrained in remix culture, where “[s]treet artists take the logic of appropriation, remix and hybridity in every direction: arguments, ideas, actions, performances, interventions, inversions and subversions are always being extended into new spaces, remixed for contexts and forms never anticipated in earlier postmodern arguments” (Irvine 2012, p.240). Within the discourse of remix, much of the discussion assumes culturally universal terms, as a mainstream cut/paste practice at odds with modern intellectual property laws. Hidden within this discourse are the implications of remix practice for marginalized communities. While some focus has been given to the negative repercussions of remix, little attention has been given to how remix might be used to the benefit of these communities, and how it acts as an alternative expression of cultural production.

However, the labour power of neighbourhood commoning is easily exploited by capital accumulation. Returning to Hardt and Negri (2009), the concept of community and neighbourhood is characteristic of externalities to what should be traditional real-estate values – the explicit value of the land itself. “In efficient free markets… people make rational decisions, but… when externalities come into play and social costs do not equal private costs, market rationality is lost and “market failure” results” (Hardt & Negri 2009, p.155). Commons are external to what should be independent private property under a free market; however, a neighbourhood denies the independence of a property, characterizing property in relationship to the labour, activities, and aesthetics (among many other characteristics) of larger communities. These relationships generate perceptions that are not reliant on a particular property, but rather the external conditions. While this seemingly should result in market failure, contemporary real

18 An interesting case of the complex play between neighbourhood identity, remix, gentrification and advertising can be found in the recent Play Station Portable video game system graffiti-style advertisements. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.
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estate effectively relies on the externality of the commons, generating differing costs depending on the perceptions of various positive and negative externalities: “[t]he most orthodox neoliberal economists thus spend their time inventing schemes to ‘rationalize’ the situation and privatize the common so it can be traded and will obey market rules” (Hardt & Negri 2009, p.155). I will return to aspects of this exploitation in Chapter Three, looking at the means by which street art murals generate both potential for resistance to and exploitation by capital accumulation.

2.3.1.2. Knowledge Commons

With the second category, knowledge commons, I contend that street art acts as a complex mode of communication, providing public access to information in terms of ideology, history, cultural knowledge, among others, some of which is only accessible to varying degrees of cultural insiders. Knowledge commons tend to exist in a more non-physical space than neighbourhood commons, drifting towards the more theoretical aspects of what it is to be a common resource. While there are often physical repositories of knowledge (libraries, museums, galleries, etc.), with the advent of the internet (also a material repository) this has trended towards more immaterial discussions. The entry point into discourse on knowledge commons stems from Barthes’ (1977) declaration of the death of the author and Foucault’s (1977) concurrent question of what is an author, effectively challenging and problematizing romantic notions of authorship and the production of information19. This discourse has often tended towards intellectual property rights, with a more popularized focus on the chilling effect of copyright on creativity

19 Several critical historical examinations of authorship and copyright (Rose, 1994; Vaidhyanathan, 2001; Lowenstein, 2002), point to Barthes and Foucault’s accounts as oversimplifications of the discussion, noting the complexity of the author-owner function starting with the 1710 Statute of Anne, which was intended to allow authors to obtain value from their works, but also considered these works to be the potential basis for new works. Other scholars (Harrison, 2012) find copyright and authorship to be less than mutual, where practices such as appropriation art reconstitute the romantic author while denying intellectual property rights. Eva Wirtén (2011) contends that the critique of intellectual property itself often asserts the primacy of the romantic author. Navas (2012) argues that beginning with the printing press, emergent technology precipitates creative acts of mechanical reproduction, becoming both increasingly necessary in day-to-day activities and increasingly problematic for proprietary rights holders.
(Vaidhyanathan 2001; Lessig 2004, 2008; McLeod 2005), where creativity is often collateral damage in a fear driven war on new information technologies\(^\text{20}\).

Ostrom and Hess (2007) claim that the knowledge commons as a widespread concept came hand-in-hand with the popularization of the internet in the 1990s, bringing together two distinct fields of commons and information, with various scholars seeing this information sharing resource as neither strictly public or private. Knowledge commons scholarship has since exploded, providing critical scholars (Vaidhyanathan 2001; Lessig 2004, 2008; Ostrom and Hess 2007; Hyde 2010; Bollier 2014) with a means of asserting an alternative to intellectual property. Knowledge commons are typically grouped into two camps: reformists and objectors.

Reformers, such as Lessig (2004), view intellectual property and copyright as a bloated mechanism of control, and would prefer to see change that favours open access to information, the capacity to take and remix and change. Ideally this would exist within a looser intellectual property framework, allowing artists some capacity for control through such objects as Creative Commons licensing. Reformists are not interested in a laissez-faire approach to regulation, relying strongly on governmental control over copyright allowances and increasing fair use or fair dealing provisions. Along with increased fair dealing provisions, reformists would see works enter the public domain sooner in order to stimulate cultural and creative growth. More than that, reformers would like to see the creation of a new culture with regard to understanding authorship in society. Lessig (2008) states that the copyright wars are “not about new forms of creativity, not about artists making new art” (p.18), but are rather directed at technological practices such as peer-to-peer file sharing.

Objectors, or resisters, approach this issue with a liberal reading of Barthes (1977). The author is dead, everything is appropriated, and nothing is new. Both reformers and objectors understand appropriation and remix to be one of the key aspects to the growth of cultural commons. The point of departure between these two camps is in scope: objectors reject copyright law overall, seeing a natural creation of the commons through complete open access. Street art offers a

\(^{20}\) Offering a more complex and ambiguous relationship, Patricia Aufderheide (2013) argues that often creative “chilling” is caused by ignorance, where artists will not even start projects that run the risk of infringement while lacking a full understanding of their creative freedoms under Fair Use/Fair Dealing.
potential alternative model of a knowledge commons, representing the communication of cultural knowledge in a capacity that is neither fully private nor public. To demonstrate, consider the previous example of *Slave Labour (Bunting Boy)*. The knowledge commons aspect of this piece is shown through what it potentially represents, with possible layers of access to types of knowledge. Banksy is presenting certain sets of knowledge, some explicit, some implicit, depending on a viewer’s understanding of the piece, of the artist’s mode and intentionality, and this is all technically accessible to the public to decode. However, there may be objects embedded in the piece that are only accessible to cultural insiders, giving the piece some degree of exclusion. This knowledge commons model will be demonstrated more fully in Chapter Four, looking at the way 7GIM murals create layers of information.

2.3.2. **Institutional Analysis and Development Framework**

Ostrom and Hess’s (2007) Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework provides a useful mechanism to break down the complex relationships and interactions between actors in these two categories of analysis. While Ostrom and Hess make use of this framework for their work on knowledge commons, it is easily adapted to consider other commons resources. As shown in Figure 7 below, this framework is “a diagnostic tool that can be used to investigate any broad subject where humans repeatedly interact within rules and norms that guide their choice of strategies and behaviors” (Ostrom & Hess 2007, 41).
Ostrom and Hess (2007) organize knowledge into three distinct characteristics: facilities, artifacts, and ideas. Facilities, such as libraries, are storage areas for artifacts, with physical limitations due to material infrastructure. Within the digital realm this is represented through network infrastructure – optic cables, bandwidth, computers, data centres, etc. (Ostrom & Hess 2007). Artifacts, according to Ostrom and Hess (2007), are “discreet, observable namable representations of ideas, such as articles, research notes, books, databases, maps, computer files, and webpages” (p.47). Lastly, ideas are “the intangible content and the nonphysical flow units contained in artifacts” (Ostrom & Hess 2007, p. 47), such as data/information/knowledge and identities.

The next units of analysis are the attributes of the community, consisting of users, providers, and policy makers. These various actors are naturally dependent on the commons in focus, but within all categories range between artists and art organizations, government workers and institutions, community organizations, citizens at large, property owners, but can certainly include many others. Rules-in-use describe “shared normative understandings about what a participant in a position must, must not, or may do in a particular action situation” (Ostrom & Hess 2007, p. 50), divided here between three levels: operational, collective-choice, and constitutional. Operational
rules describe day-to-day interactions and decision-making, such as an artist planning a mural. Collective-choice rules reflect the policy decisions that govern operational level rules. Similarly constitutional rules define the responsibilities for making collective-choice rules. These can effectively be broken down into control of access, contribution, extraction, removal, management and participation, exclusion, and alienation (Ostrom and Hess 2007).

After the characteristics, attributes, and rules are defined, the analysis moves into the action arena, which essentially engages with the decision-making of our defined actors given the various characteristics and rules, resulting in patterns of outcomes. Ostrom and Hess note the tendency of commons writers towards a surface level analysis, instead “point[ing] to outcomes they like or dislike” (2007, p.60). Considering this note of caution, let us apply examine street art as neighbourhood commons and knowledge commons. The following table defines commons and cultural commons, as well as providing a brief summary of some of the objects of analysis in neighbourhood and knowledge commons.
Table 1: Commons analysis using IAD framework.

The above table demonstrates the complexity involved in attempting to construct a definition of commons along relational lines, offering a wide array of resources, users and stakeholders, interchangeable depending on the commons in question. Starting with the biocharacteristics of a knowledge commons, ideas can be seen simply as knowledge, existing in the forms of information, motifs, and stories. The artifact is the mural itself, and the facility is the object it is painted on, such as a wall. Some of this changes when considering photographs of murals on the internet, but this is outside the scope of this thesis. Within the attributes of the community, users are the mural audience – those who access the mural, whether by accident or design, simply by...
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walking past it. They may be regular users (i.e. community members) or one time users (i.e. tourists). Audience access can transcend physical boundaries through media such as the Internet, where street art providers such as 7GIM publish images of murals through their own personal websites as well as via social media sites like Facebook, providing access to myriad users. The providers here are the artists who paint the mural, creating the text from which knowledge is accessed. Finally, the policy-makers consist of all those who create the rules around how the mural is created, and what content is allowed, such as municipal authorities, property owners, the artists/organization, and various cultural knowledge keepers (i.e. Native Elders).

Looking at the mural from the provider’s perspective, the rules-in-use consist of what goes into the mural. Within an organization such as 7th Generation Image Makers, the lead artists and the coordinator make the operational rules that impact what materials youth participants engage with and submit, and how the users access knowledge. Collective-choice rules are made by the coordinator, who determines who the lead artists are, and some of the parameters for their decision-making. Finally, the constitutional rules are the mandate of the organization, governing how the coordinator makes decisions, what kind of projects with which to engage, and where.

Within a neighbourhood commons analysis, on the other hand, biophysical characteristics start with community identity as the core idea, the physical environment (i.e. surrounding infrastructure, geography) as the artifact, and the city as the facility. Within Toronto there are clearly identifiable neighbourhoods, such as distillery district, Kensington Market, High Park, Leslieville, that all have a distinct identity within the overall city. Community identity does not necessarily rest within the confines of an enclosed physical environment, however, as is often demonstrated in studies of urban Aboriginal populations (UATF 2007, UAPS 2010), where community can incorporate a local urban space, rural reserve communities, and historical associations with an environment. The artists at 7th Generation shared this more complex notion of identity, which I will describe in Chapter Four.

The attributes of the community shift within this paradigm. The users in this case are both audience and the artists. Community audience, like mural audience, consists of one-time users (tourists) and regular users (community members) who access the identity produced in this commons, either through material or immaterial modes. Artists make use of the physical spaces
within the community, but become regular users by identity association. The providers here are property owners, both public and private, who can be seen in the context of street art as mural clients. Policy makers here can be the municipal government, property owners, and community organizations, who (on the surface) attempt to craft particular community identities, and thus commission murals to fit the particular needs of that identity. Arts organization, and I argue 7th Generation Image Makers in particular have objectives in creating their murals that work to subvert, modify, or educate hegemonic notions of community identities. The rules-in-use are not particularly different from those of the previous knowledge commons example. Given a mural client such as StART, the operational rules are defined by the staff, who determine which organizations’ mural submissions will be accepted, the collective-choice rules by both the staff and director, who dictate the policy rules through which submissions are considered, and the constitutional rules by the mandate of the organization, created by municipal authorities with consideration to the Municipal Code. The patterns of interactions and outcomes from the decision making of these scenarios can then be analyzed and evaluated in the action arena.

2.4 Appropriation
With any discussion of commons, appropriation must necessarily be considered. Much like cultural commons, cultural appropriation is likewise a commonly used and under theorized term in both academia and popular culture. Appropriation as a term has far reaching and complex definitions, one of the most concise being Helene Shugart’s: “technically, [rhetorical] appropriation refers to any instance in which means commonly associated with and/or perceived as belonging to another are used to further one’s own ends. Any instance in which a group borrows or imitates the strategies of another—even when the tactic is not intended to deconstruct or distort the other’s meanings and experiences—thus would constitute appropriation” (cited from Rogers, 2006 p.476, emphasis from Rogers). Moving outward from this definition, Rogers takes issue with the typical political economy models of cultural imperialism, stating “the approach risks assuming that importing USAmerican cultural products into other countries is that same as importing USAmerican culture into those countries, ignoring agency, reception, and resistance. The cultural imperialism thesis illustrates the condition of cultural dominance but ignores the appropriative tactics of the receiving cultures” (Rogers 2006, p.482).
Hesmondhalgh’s *Digital Sampling and Cultural Inequality* (2006) offers a similar reading into the cultural ramifications of digital sampling and remix, where sampling’s origins in early hip-hop represents a romanticism that hides aspects of cultural appropriation. Analysing Moby’s album *Play*, Hesmondhalgh shows how fair use provisions still tend to favour the powerful. More relaxed copyright law does not in itself promote cultural equality, and can in fact cause more imbalanced power relations between cultural groups. Hesmondhalgh’s primary concern is how researchers are most often concerned with the chilling effect of copyright and intellectual property, and the ways in which they are not necessarily representative of other cultural practices. His argument problematizes this romanticism, adding complexity and providing a wider avenue for critique and for alternative interpretations, asking: “[w]hat does it mean, for example, to borrow from the cultures of more vulnerable social groups?” (Hesmondhalgh 2006, p.55). Appropriation is thus a tool used for both resistance and repression, potentially simultaneously. It is a transformative act, and it would be a fallacy to assume that the object appropriated and represented is the same as the original. This exploration of the negative aspects of appropriation on cultural representation presents new avenues for research beyond the production/copyright dichotomy.

Rogers’ model of transculturation, however, offers an alternative reading into unbalanced power dynamics in appropriation. A process that involves “ongoing, circular appropriations of elements between multiple cultures, including elements that are themselves transcultural”, transculturation offers an organic hybrid, and alternative to culture. Much like Barthes’ *Death of the Author* (1977), transculturation implies the death of culture, in the sense of a possessive, individualistic culture (Rogers 2006). “Appropriations do not simply occur between cultures, constituting their relationships, but that such appropriative relations and intersections constitute the cultures themselves” (Rogers 2006, p. 492). Nonetheless, this model finds itself with a set of problems, namely questioning what place does it reconstitute politically marginalized cultures in terms of material power dynamics. Loosely defined concepts such as traditional knowledge, a collective, group-focused mixture of community knowledge, innovation, and practice often fall into spaces not protected by intellectual property law (Greene 2007).

As with authorial death so often cited in studies of remix culture (see Harrison 2012; Guertin 2012), it is far simpler to advocate a theoretical death of static culture in favour of a dynamic,
networked model; however, it is much more difficult to come to terms with in a practical, material way. Historian Peter Linebaugh (2014) asks, “is the commons tribal or cosmopolitan? What values are shared by commoning in a high tech environment and a low tech situation? What holds together the microcosm of the urban garden and the macrocosm of the polluted atmosphere? Does it necessarily gum up the money-making machine? Does the red commons require revolutionary war while the green commons requires unpalatable compromises with NGOs? Why must the crèche be its base?” (p.247).

2.5 The Way Forward

This chapter started by demonstrating a complex history between Aboriginal peoples and wall writing, acting as a means of storytelling, cultural production, and an association between people and physical space, also exploring the complexities around urban identity. In this thesis, commons begins from the notion of dynamic cultural production, not tied as much to physical space as much as the actions being undertaken in physical space. In order to build a more specific understanding of these actions in the mural construction of 7th Generation Image Makers, I have deconstructed cultural commons into knowledge commons in order to look at the production and access of information through storytelling, and neighbourhood commons in order to look at cultural production of community and identity enabled through mural creation. Through the following chapters I hope to add to the growing literature that seeks to understand the relationship between commoning and commons, between dynamic cultural growth and stability. In the next chapter I explore graffiti management in Toronto, applying a critical lens to definitions, strategies, and programs in use, both current and previous.
Chapter 3  Graffiti Management

3.1  Introduction

Toronto has a vibrant and, some have said, unique street art and graffiti culture (Remsen 2014), and a conflicted relationship with this culture. Guerilla art murals are celebrated and supported by their local communities at the same time that zero-tolerance enforcement strategies are enacted to popular commendation. One of the early adopters of the mural-model of graffiti prevention, Toronto presents a number of interesting complications at a policy level. The previous Ford administration of the City of Toronto loudly promoted an anti-graffiti platform, with Mayor Rob Ford “obsessed with graffiti and getting it out of the city and keeping it out of the city” (cited from Moloney 2013), engaging with this platform through both populist rhetoric and intensified graffiti eradication. One step further at the policy level, the Municipal Code itself presents a defined binary of graffiti as art and graffiti as vandalism, with municipal policies and programs indicating a multifaceted approach. For instance, by-laws concerning the penalization of graffiti-vandalism also allow property owners to apply for its reclassification as graffiti-art. Guisela Latorre (2008) posits that an artificial dichotomy between muralism and graffiti has led city governments to believe that murals comprise a solution to the problem of graffiti.

This chapter begins with a general discussion of graffiti management approaches, looking at the oft-cited broken-windows theory of Wilson & Kelling (1982), Young’s (2010) recommendation of self-regulation street art zones in Melbourne, and finally the zero-tolerance hybrid approach used by the City of Toronto. The primary object of this chapter is a critical engagement with the City of Toronto’s graffiti management plan. This first involves a breakdown of the main definitions of graffiti vandalism and graffiti art, found within the Toronto Municipal Code. The graffiti management plan is then broken down into its enforcement mechanisms, and in particular with the StreetARToronto program, a program that funds murals to counteract graffiti vandalism. Using a critical approach, the graffiti management plan is analyzed through both its definitions and programming, exploring facets of this analysis as it relates to broad notions of cultural commons discussed in Chapter Two.
3.2 Graffiti Management

Graffiti invokes a visceral and typically polarized reaction amongst people, and to a large degree on a contextual and inconsistent basis. What may be seen as vandalism in one context is protest in another, and simply artistic in other spaces. At times it is all three at once, generating a complex and conflicting array of emotions (Young 2014b). The ubiquitous tag seems to provoke the greatest ire amongst urban populations, particularly from business owners who are often victimized by the action and again by the cost of clean up. Cities engage in a wide variety of enforcement and management strategies, typically involving a combination of zero-tolerance enforcement, and engagement with youth (Young 2014b). Public perceptions of graffiti are typically driven by media sensationalism and political rhetoric. Former Toronto Mayor Rob Ford’s widely publicized “war on graffiti” invoked an aura of an absolute and draconian anti-graffiti approach, with Ford demonstrating his stance by personally erasing graffiti with a power washer (Peat 2015).

Zero-tolerance strategies stem from the broken windows theory popularized by James Wilson and George Kelling in their 1982 article of the same name. This theory postulates that “serious street crime flourishes in areas in which disorderly behavior goes unchecked” (Wilson & Kelling 1982). Essentially graffiti represents visible urban decay, resulting in a downward spiral of community degradation that leads to far more serious criminal activity. Implicit in this notion is that increasingly visible urban decay generates a social anxiety around particular neighbourhoods that have a propensity for graffiti activity. This theory circulated widely in many academic fields, in popular media, becoming a mainstay in municipal public policy and police services (Young 2014b). Zero-tolerance strategies flourished in the 1990s, notably in American cities and in particular in New York. Accompanying the adoption of these management strategies was a decreasing crime rate across the United States, a result that was viewed as a policy victory by politicians and police (Young 2014b). However, scholars have since problematized this correlation, pointing to a variety of socioeconomic factors such as rates of poverty, unemployment, and urban demographic changes to explain decreases in American crime rates (Phillips 1999).
Chapter 3: Graffiti Management

Cultural approaches to graffiti management focus on creating constructive environments either to discourage illicit graffiti or to create zones where unauthorized graffiti is accepted as a normalized practice. An increasingly popular model for graffiti management is based around the notion of graffiti deterrence through mural creation, a model popularized by Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program (see www.muralarts.org). Founded in 1984 as part of the City of Philadelphia’s Anti-Graffiti Network, the program engages with community groups to provide legal artistic outlets for inner-city youth. Derivations of this program have gained traction in a variety of cities, including Halifax (Community Art Project, see http://www.halifax.ca/graffiti/CommunityArtProject.php), Ottawa (Paint It Up!, see http://ottawa.ca/en/residents/water-and-environment/green-living/ottawas-mural-program), and Toronto (StreetARToronto, see www.toronto.ca/streetart).

A 2006 study in New Zealand found that while murals do not completely eliminate graffiti, there is a significant reduction in unauthorized interventions when compared to blank walls (Craw, Leland, Bussell, Munday, & Walsh 2006). Guisela Latorre (2008) posits that an artificial dichotomy between muralism and graffiti has led city governments to believe that murals comprise a solution to the problem of graffiti. Mural-based approaches to graffiti management typically maintain a zero-tolerance or limited-tolerance position on unauthorized pieces, but, in acknowledgement of the complexities surrounding art definitions, will generally have mechanisms in place to regularize pieces originally deemed graffiti. These hybrid models incorporate a wide variation in approaches to graffiti enforcement and eradication, depending on both the city in question and the current political regime.

Young (2010) offers a fairly radical approach to graffiti management, part of a strategy that was recommended to and ultimately rejected by the City of Melbourne, Australia. Driven by the idea that graffiti is poorly understood by policy makers, community members, and media, Young (2010) proposed a partnership model that engaged with graffiti writers and artists as well as a broader community to create a more informed understanding both of these practices and the needs and wants of the community. Within this community engagement model, Young proposed three types of zones within the city: zero-tolerance zones, limited-tolerance zones, and self-regulation zones where graffiti could not be removed by outside authorities. Berlin offers an even
more hand-off approach to graffiti management, and while graffiti is considered illegal the focus is on preventing gang-related activity, leaving much of the city to self-regulation (Arms 2011).

In Toronto graffiti is legal in zones such as Graffiti Alley\textsuperscript{21}, offering a degree of self-regulation inspired by its capacity as a draw for tourism (Pelley 2015). However, such zones tend to be created within policy well after their cultural acceptance and promotion, and their status is often left unclear and ambiguous. In spite of this semi-regularization graffiti remains controversial amongst the general public, even in areas that are well known for graffiti. In Kensington Market, an area often celebrated for its arts culture, a business owner attacked a graffiti writer in the process of tagging his restaurant (Jeffords & Yuen 2015). Young (2014) found that it is often the “concerned citizen” attempting a citizen’s arrest that are the most aggressive towards graffiti writers. Alternatively, even in zero-tolerance policy environments, police engage in a variety of responses to graffiti writers, including simple warnings or small fines, rather than always pursuing criminal charges, with discretion for forms and aesthetics.

3.3 Graffiti Management in Toronto

3.3.1. Toronto Police Service Graffiti Management Program

The Toronto Police Service (TPS) is very clear in their use of broken windows theory as evidenced by its statement in its Graffiti Management Program (TPS-GMP), where “graffiti vandalism can contribute to decline in property value and, more importantly, generates the perception of increased crime and fear of gang activity” (Toronto Police Service 2011a, p.2), as well as directly citing Wilson and Kelling in their Graffiti Prevention & Control Fact Sheet (2011b). The TPS fact sheet on graffiti begins by painting an “us against them” mentality, where “people who write graffiti see the world as a very different place from those who don’t” (TPS 2011b, p.1). On the surface, the TPS-GMP appears to take a somewhat non-traditional approach, moving away from the popular 4E model\textsuperscript{22} of graffiti management into a community

\textsuperscript{21} A back alley in Queen St. West between Spadina Ave. and Portland St., celebrated for its graffiti-covered walls (see http://www.seetorontonow.com/my-toronto/torontos-street-art/).

\textsuperscript{22} Education, Empowerment, Eradication, Enforcement. See Ottawa Police Service Graffiti Management Program (http://www.ottawapolice.ca/en/safety-and-crime-prevention/Graffiti-Management-Program.asp#Es). Other examples are a 3E approach (education, eradication,
mobilization plan. This involves five elements: enforcement, intelligence gathering/management, community partnerships/engagement, education, and restorative justice-diversion. Community partnerships are formed with business associations, the City of Toronto, and City-run organizations that have an interest in graffiti eradication, while education refers to providing these community partnerships with strategies to combat graffiti (TPS 2011a, p.3-4). While there is some new language employed in the TPS-GMP, the TPS structures their role around enforcement of graffiti laws and eradication of graffiti practices. Graffiti in Canada falls under both Federal and Municipal jurisdiction. Under the Criminal Code of Canada (1985) graffiti is considered to be an act of mischief, either over or under $5000 depending on the investment value of the object being marked. In Toronto, graffiti is managed through a series of by-laws, the Municipal Code (2011), and the City of Toronto Act (2006).

3.3.2. Municipal Definitions of Graffiti
In 2011, Municipal Code Chapter 485 (MC Chapter 485), Graffiti, was repealed and emended in its entirety through City of Toronto By-law No. 1218-2011. The code presents a defined binary of graffiti as art and graffiti as vandalism, where graffiti art is defined as “markings made or affixed to properties that are approved by the property owner or occupant, where the markings aesthetically enhance the surface they cover and the general surroundings, having regard to the community character and standards” (Municipal Code 2011). Conversely, graffiti vandalism is defined as “any deliberate markings made or affixed on property that is not currently exempted or regularized by the Graffiti Panel, Executive Director [of Licensing and Standards] or Council and (a) was made or affixed without permission of the owner, (b) is considered to be a tag (c) for which there are reasonable grounds to believe it may incite hatred or violence against any person or identifiable group, or (d) contains profane vulgar or offensive language” (Municipal Code 2011).

On the surface, then, there are two sets of conditions required for classification as graffiti art: approval and aesthetics. Approval is a condition set by a number of different actors, specifically property owners, occupants, and the City of Toronto. Given that these classifications are set

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enforcement, see Young 2010), and the City of Edmonton’s 3R model (record, report, remove, see http://ww.edmonton.ca/programs_services/graffiti_litter/graffiti-management.aspx)
through municipal policy, approval from a property owner or occupant might not result in approval from the City of Toronto, making it a necessary condition for classification as graffiti art, but not a sufficient condition. Aesthetics likewise is not a sufficient condition on its own, but rather through conjunction with the owner-approval condition. In fact, it would be easy to argue that aesthetics is the weaker condition, being subjective and vaguely defined, and being much closer to constituting a notion of being inoffensive or even simply undesirable rather than necessarily aesthetically pleasing.

Objects, or “markings”, considered in these definitions encompass a wide spectrum of complexity, moving between tags and writing to more complex and more overtly artistic pieces, including stencils and murals. However, given the two conditions as set above, it is unlikely that objects other than murals would be considered to be graffiti art. In fact, this is made explicit within the Municipal Code, where an art mural is a “mural commissioned or approved prior to its creation by a property owner or occupant, where the primary purpose is to aesthetically enhance the surface it covers and the general surroundings” (Municipal Code 2011). A general understanding of these definitions would indicate that property owners might commission or paint murals without the need for City oversight, and the key term here is prior, where regardless of aesthetics or property owner approval after its construction, any markings are deemed vandalism without prior municipal say-so. Lacking any of these three conditions, a piece is deemed vandalism and notice would be sent to the owner or occupant for clean up.

An example of these conditions can be seen in a 2011 case: a bicycle that had been abandoned outside OCAD University for several years was painted orange, and its basket planted with flowers; shortly thereafter the city tagged it with a removal notice. The bicycle clearly met the aesthetic condition of graffiti-as-art, and there were no complaints from the local community, thereby seemingly qualifying for approval. However, the third condition of prior approval had not been met, and thus it was deemed vandalism. This story does end happily for the artist, as widespread support from both the broader Toronto arts community and city counsel quickly found the piece regularized as graffiti art (Alcoba 2011). This occurred during the Ford administration’s inaugural anti-graffiti campaign, and scrutinous media attention on the subject circled around the newly perceived hard-line on graffiti. The regularization of this piece marked
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a shift that saw a (albeit brief) rhetorical deintensification on the war on graffiti, shifting the focus to more progressive aspects of the graffiti management plan (Jackson 2011).

This example shows that rather than being absolute, these definitions clearly present the complexity and subjectivity in judging graffiti as art or as vandalism. In each definition, the first stipulation is its judgment by some reviewer, either property owner or city official. It is perhaps interesting to note that it is the city that is associated with judgment on vandalism, whereas property owners are associated with judging objects to be art. This seems to indicate that the aesthetic merits of a piece are up to the property owners, but that city officials determine if it should stay. In other words, all items that do not have prior approval of the City are vandalism, unless the property owner can make a claim for aesthetics. This relationship is further demonstrated throughout MC Chapter 485, through items such as notice to comply and regularization of graffiti art. Notice to comply enables the city to enforce compliance with graffiti removal within 72 hours, whereas regularization of graffiti art is more a response mechanism that property owners can use to prevent a piece from being removed. However, the balance of power still lies with the city, as they are allowed to force compliance and reject regularization attempts. In fact, the Executive Director is capable of removing a piece without prior notice given “reasonable grounds to believe that the graffiti vandalism may incite hatred or violence against any person or identifiable group, and that the continuance of such graffiti vandalism will increase the harm to the person or identifiable group to whom it is directed” (Municipal Code 2011). A property owner can apply to have a mural regularized either proactively or after receiving a take-down notice, after which either the Executive Director or the Graffiti Panel will determine whether or not it is aesthetically qualified to be considered art.

A 2011 report proposing the new graffiti management plan problematized art mural exemption for ambiguities such as “if murals in the graffiti style are considered acceptable, what quality of graffiti art was deemed appropriate for City streets and laneways, and whether, in fact, Community Council should be involved in this determination”, resulting in a tendency to classify art as vandalism “unless proven otherwise” (City of Toronto Municipal Licensing & Standards (ML&S) 2011 p.9). While changes have since been made to the review process, it remains that art mural exemption is an ambiguous and complex process. Examples of these ambiguities and subjectivities abound, including the above 2011 bicycle art (Peat 2011), the original permittance
and eventual removal of an unauthorized measuring tape that was painted alongside a giant public art thimble in Yorkville in 2006 (Micallef 2014), the case of the Don Valley Parkway Rainbow – a twenty year removal and restoration battle over a rainbow painted in North York until its official designation as public art forty years after it was initially painted in 1972 (Hasham 2012), and the erasure of a City-commissioned mural during Ford’s 2011 graffiti eradication campaign (Rider 2011).

3.3.3. Graffiti Management Plan

Working in conjunction with the TPS-GMP, the City of Toronto takes a modified approach to broken windows theory through its own Graffiti Management Plan (GMP). Stated clearly, and at most available opportunities, the City has indicated that graffiti “fosters a sense of disrespect for private property that may result in increasing crime, community degradation, and urban blight” (City of Toronto Graffiti Plan, n.d.), as well as creating risks to the health, safety and welfare of a community, a disregard for law, and represents a public nuisance that the business value and personal enjoyment of a community. However, there is also an attempt to find alternatives to the traditional eradication approach, finding artistic value and merit in some graffiti and street art. According to its website, the GMP “seeks to support graffiti art and other street art that adds vibrancy and artistry to our streets while balancing the need to eliminate graffiti vandalism which can have a detrimental impact on property owners and neighbourhoods” (www.toronto.ca/graffiti). The current graffiti management plan has not changed dramatically from its previous iteration, consisting mainly of two parts – graffiti eradication and mural creation. While there are some new components within this plan, it mainly emphasizes a shift in priorities, with an intensification of mural funding as an attempt to create environments where graffiti vandalism does not occur, rather than a focus on graffiti eradication through conventional removal.

Graffiti removal is still a major aspect of the GMP, with over $1,800,000 budgeted per year for graffiti removal by the Transportation Services department alone (City of Toronto Budget 2013a), a figure that becomes blurry in consideration of the fact that graffiti removal is embedded across multiple other City departments, including Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Facilities Management, Toronto Water and Economic Development, Culture, Toronto Transit
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Commission, Toronto Housing Corporation, and Toronto Parking Authority (ML&S 2011). Furthermore, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) may offer graffiti removal services to their members independent of the City, at an average cost between $20,000 and $40,000 per BIA (ML&S 2011). Rob Ford’s term as mayor saw an initial intensification in graffiti eradication in 2011 (Peat 2015), with such campaigns renewed each year during the City’s annual spring clean-up event (www.toronto.ca/cleantorontotogether). The Municipal Licensing & Standards division is tasked with by-law enforcement, where, as of 2013, twenty municipal standards officers are dedicated to graffiti by-law enforcement (City of Toronto Budget 2013b) – up from ten in 2011 (ML&S 2011), and a significant portion of the division’s workforce. New changes in the GMP focused on proactive enforcement, preemptively tagging graffiti for removal rather than only in response to complaints (ML&S 2011). Other facets of the City’s enforcement strategy include the graffiti mural exemption panel described previously, and both online and telephone-based graffiti reporting mechanisms.

The second main object of the GMP is its mural creation program, StreetARToronto (StART). This is not strictly a new program, having started in 1996 as the Graffiti Transformation Program (GTP). Prior to the 2011 changes to the graffiti management plan, the City of Toronto budgeted over $300,000 per year for the GTP, funding approximately 20 programs and organizations to employ “at-risk youth” to clean up graffiti and paint new murals (ML&S 2011). Between its inception and the creation of StART in 2011, approximately 430 murals were created on over 300 sites across Toronto. While similar in its programming to StART, the GTP was much more limited in its mandate, and was generally viewed as an accompaniment to the main goal of graffiti eradication (ML&S 2011). A gradual acknowledgement of the limitations of the eradication program, as well as a growing interest amongst artists and community groups to expand mural funding led to its transformation into StART.

Where the GTP was entirely publically funded, StART is a public-private partnership program under the coordination of the GMP. StART engages with property owners and street artists to regulate the commission of wall space, street light boxes, and street furniture (i.e. benches, bicycle lock rings, bus/street car shelters, etc.) with the intention of preventing graffiti tagging and writing. While StART acknowledges the diversity of projects that street art can encompass, street art projects are restricted to traditional graffiti artwork, murals, and stencil graffiti.
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(www.toronto.ca/streetart). There are several different facets of the program, which have specific targets and funding.

StART’s main initiative is its partnership program, which is a private-public partnership. These projects must meet four main objectives: “enhance and promote Toronto’s vibrant street and graffiti art, revitalize communities, counteract graffiti, and engage emerging and established local artists” (www.toronto.ca/streetart). Outside of these main objectives, there are a number of eligibility requirements for application. Application is restricted to “non-profit or charitable organizations operating in the City of Toronto” (www.toronto.ca/streetart), with individual artists or art collectives requiring sponsorship through such an organization. Guidelines stipulate that funded organizations, artist residency, and mural locations be based in Toronto. Community involvement is a major component of StART murals, where applications need letters from community members and organizations, and require approval from the local BIA. Applications typically need to demonstrate that the mural is designed for community engagement and not for commercial purposes. Finally, murals are typically expected to offer some form of mentorship and art training to youth (www.toronto.ca/streetart).

Mural location is a key component of a funding application. Aside from the basic stipulation that murals be located in Toronto, they are also expected to be located in areas that will have a “maximum neighbourhood impact” (www.toronto.ca/streetart). For some organizations that means walls that are the most frequent targets of graffiti interventions, while other organizations scout locations based on harmony between the needs of the organization and artists, and the needs of the community. Murals are expected to have a high visibility.

StART offers up to $40,000 for mural projects, but due to the public-private nature of this program stipulates that StART contributions cannot exceed 70% of the total project budget. Additionally, 15% of the remainder must be raised in cash. StART funding covers objects such as artist fees, project materials, publicity, documentation, events, project management, project administration, and maintenance. Any project must have a five-year maintenance plan that includes removal of graffiti vandalism within a short period of time. This maintenance requirement indicates an interesting area of inquiry into the use of murals as graffiti prevention:
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namely, what occurs at the street level that makes a mural either effective or ineffecti
ve as a deterrent (www.toronto.ca/streetart).

StART continues to expand beyond their initial partnership project, offering three additional programs as well as an artist directory to profile graffiti and street artists for private commissions. Each of these programs has a different funding strategy. The first program is RE StART, which engages at-risk youth and youth who have been arrested for tagging or illegal graffiti practices. This program intends to engage youth with community development, graffiti removal, and opportunities to develop artistic skills in a more socially acceptable manner. In 2013 StART launched a pilot program called Outside the Box, offering artists $500 for completing a graffiti stencil or mural on street light utility boxes. StART’s Underpass Program (StART UP), focuses on improving the City’s underpasses, offering up to $350,000 for a maximum of five murals (www.toronto.ca/streetart).

3.3.4. Analysis

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to critically investigate the effectiveness of the GMP, and in particular the use of murals as graffiti deterrence. There are no quantitative data sets available reporting instances of mural effectiveness and ineffectiveness, and Toronto City Councillor Mike Layton (Peat 2015) and interview participant Kate Mosteller (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014) both estimated an approximate fifty percent effectiveness in preventing graffiti, although this also lacks consideration for deterrence over time. A more complex ethnographic profile of graffiti writers and artists might provide insight into this, building a more complex sociopolitical understanding of graffiti, but undertaking such a study is understandably difficult. However, critical analysis of even the StART descriptors reveals a number of issues.

A crucial issue with StART, just as with GMP enforcement strategies, stems from problems set into their definitions of graffiti art and graffiti vandalism, specifically attempting to set a binary between murals on the one hand and tagging and writing on the other. Beyond simply whether or not these practices and aesthetics can be separated, positioning them as oppositional seems in some ways counterintuitive to the goal of fostering a creative cultural environment in the city. One of the stipulations for funding through StART is the inclusion of a maintenance plan for the
mural, which not only would cover touch-ups due to age and the elements, but also to ensure that any tags are promptly covered (www.toronto.ca/streetart). The maintenance plan shows an understanding that murals are not a panacea to tagging and writing, and in fact there is a discrepancy in understanding what makes a mural more or less susceptible to tagging.

Early discussions with artists at the 7th Generation Image Makers indicate that there are politics within the graffiti community that come into play, providing a degree of self-regulation. Of particular importance is the reputation of the artist painting the mural. There is some evidence to point towards the standing of an artist in the local graffiti culture that helps deter vandalism of a mural. Murals by artists and organizations that do not address or understand the place of graffiti in the local community may be more prone to vandalism. One particularly interesting case of this issue of authenticity is a Sony advertising campaign for the Playstation Portable (PSP). In 2005 Sony licensed walls in seven major US cities – New York, Chicago, Miami, San Francisco, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles – and stenciled images of individuals using a PSP. This campaign was seen by many as an attempt to introduce street-level credibility and created significant backlash, with images in all cities being vandalized by graffiti artists (Singel, 2005).

On the other hand, examples abound in the way graffiti is often used not in opposition to a piece, but as an unauthorized collaboration, an addendum, or side contribution. On such case is the tape measure in Yorkville mentioned previously (Micallef 2014). The original public art installation, constructed in 1997 by Stephen Cruise, consisted of a large thimble perched atop coloured buttons, with discreet etchings in the sidewalk to represent a ruler. A one-sided collaboration in 2006 by street artist Victor Fraser turned the discreet ruler into an overt tape measure, a feature that was maintained without protest until 2014, when Cruise asserted his moral rights to return original features of the piece (Micallef 2014).

These examples offer potential openings into analysis of myriad subjects, including extreme juxtaposition of advertising encroaching on counter-cultural practices and spaces, issues of authorship, remix and moral rights; I include them here to simply show the vast problems that can arise from oppositional positioning between murals and graffiti. It is highly likely that at least part of the reason some murals are not tagged is because they fit within the same culture that spawns unauthorized graffiti, meeting many of the same needs. Likewise, murals are tagged
because they are oppositional to a particular writer’s sensibilities. This same culture and sensibility drives graffiti artists to cover or add to another artist’s piece, while leaving other artists alone. Additionally, unauthorized graffiti is not necessarily intended as either a destructive practice or an exercise in ego, but is frequently used as a means of complex collaboration. On the other hand, this oppositional positioning between murals and graffiti is not strictly a political construction, and researchers (Latorre 2008; Lewisohn 2009) have made clear that disparities exist between those who identify as muralists, and those who identify as graffiti artists, among other artistic labels. Furthermore, Latorre (2008) suggests that murals and graffiti represent “symbiotic and interdependent parts of public urban aesthetics, thus refusing to privilege one over the other” (p.104).

Another issue arises from the concept of urban beautification. Scholars (Hardt & Negri 2009; Dovey et al. 2012; Harvey 2012; McLean & Rahder 2013) have criticized urban aesthetic movements as leading towards gentrification and cultural homogenization of communities, suggesting “it has long been well known that artistic subcultures are the harbingers of gentrification” (Dovey et al. 2012, p.36), and “artists have become – perhaps unwittingly – complicit in a process that in many cases ultimately alienates and displaces low-income communities, including artist communities, through gentrification” (McLean & Rahder 2013, p.94). The basic narrative reads that poor artists move into a neighbourhood because they can afford it, and gentrification follows (Hardt & Negri 2009). This may be the case at times, but this narrative lacks agency on the part of artists, with capital seemingly a leech on the back of the passive artist. In fact artists are often active participants in the gentrification process. McLean & Rahder (2013) noted that while artists and activists often perceive their interventions to transform public space into creative interventions and community building, “these same events, wittingly or unwittingly, reproduce and often exacerbate powerful class divisions within communities” (p.106).

The Chicano art movement in the 1970s, while a powerful counter-hegemonic movement in several ways, also served to actively reinforce gender roles and stereotypes, a counter-criticism found in later Chicana artwork (Latorre 2008). StART is clearly invested in community building, as “projects must demonstrate a strong community engagement component and include the collaboration of artists and community members” (www.toronto.ca/streetart). However, as
McLean & Rahder (2013) state, urban neighbourhoods are messy communities, “heterogeneous mixes of people and networks” (p.106), and the needs of many community members can often be overlooked in artistic community interventions.

A community group that struggles to maintain ethnic diversity in its neighborhood and protect against gentrification may suddenly find its property prices (and taxes) rising as real estate agents market the “character” of their neighborhood to the wealthy as multicultural, street-lively, and diverse. By the time the market has done its destructive work, not only have the original residents been dispossessed of that common which they had created (often being forced out by rising rents and property taxes), but the common itself becomes so debased as to be unrecognizable. (Harvey 2014, p.77-78)

Murals themselves can also be subsumed by commercial interests, helping to drive neighbourhood gentrification through increasing property values and drawing particular community attributes to the fore, while pushing away lower class values (Harvey, 2014). In fact, an amendment aimed at restricting corporate branding of murals or arts programs involving youth failed to pass council during the creation of the new street art program (City Council 2011). This is likely more a function of the increasingly close-yet-tenuous relationship between street art and high art. Interestingly, Young (2012) finds graffiti interventions to be on the rise in gentrified or gentrifying areas, which creates interesting tensions, and a counterpoint to the issue of gentrification through street art. These same topics have not been clearly studied with respect to legal murals, and one of the outcomes I wish to present through my interviews with 7GIM artists is a better understanding of the place of legal murals within this spectrum and dynamic relationships of power. For now it is enough to say that the desire to create murals to foster creative community engagement needs to take into account, but quite often takes for granted, the messy, heterogeneous urban neighbourhood.

With regard to the GMP more generally, Young (2010) questions graffiti management strategies that assume a separation between tagging and more complex street art creations in murals, arguing that there can be no definition of street art that does not acknowledge the heterogeneity of its practice. One striking aspect of the current graffiti management strategy is not only its victimization of graffiti writers, but also property owners and occupants. Critics, including City councillors and Mayor John Tory have argued that property owners are often hit twice by graffiti, once by the initial act, and a second time by municipal bureaucracy that demands they pay for cleanup, or else face steep fines (Peat 2015). While exemptions can be granted to
property owners who either commissioned a piece without receiving prior consent, or who want to regularize an unauthorized piece, ultimate authority rests with the graffiti panel. Given that this pins limitations on an owner’s authority over private property, the notion that the same authority is undermined by graffiti starts to become highly problematic. With this problematization arises space for understanding the urban environment, and walls in particular, as a commons, representing a space between public and private.

The neighbourhood commons analysis explored in Chapter Three offers a good problematization of public and private space in the city, here referred to as “walls”. There might be two main classifications – private and public – for walls within cities, classifications that can be broken down upon further analysis. Private walls would consist of objects that have clear private ownership, the simplest example being privately owned buildings. The building owner would have clear control over what is considered acceptable on the outside of the building. But things are never as simple as this, and there is a dilution of control that occurs. A tenant will have a degree of control, depending on the terms of the lease agreement signed with the owner. In fact, depending on the building and its occupants, there can be several varying levels of power within the occupancy of the structure. Even if this structure is broken down to its finest elements, there is outside control to a varying degree. The City of Toronto is capable of dictating some terms of allowance on the appearance of a building, presenting some public control over the wall. Changes made to the wall are allowed via permit, and there are varying punishments for unacceptable changes. Community groups, such as Business Improvements Area (BIA) groups, exercise a degree of control over the appearance of private walls as well, petitioning the municipal government should changes occur that are less than ideal. Thus even private walls reflect a fairly murky control structure. A look at public walls offers a clear indication of the strict limitations of the term public and what is publicly allowable – the increasing prevalence of advertising space on subway walls while attempting to prevent and eradicate unauthorized writing being but one example.
3.4 Graffiti Management in Common

This chapter began with a general discussion of graffiti management strategies, and moved into the specific strategies employed both currently and previously by the City of Toronto. Toronto’s graffiti management strategy is a hybrid approach, integrating a zero-tolerance to graffiti mentality with a desire for the cultural production and aesthetic value of murals, and while enforcement and eradication mechanisms are in place, both of these principle values are expressed through their mural funding program, StART. The simple policy analysis of this program shows many of the tensions at play between mural artists, graffiti artists, property owners, municipal officials, and many others, demonstrating a complex relationship of power. It would be imprudent to simplify these complex relations by stating that murals created through this program necessarily constitute commoning, as various motivations are not accounted for. However, while simple critical analysis does show that while the potential is there for a commoning movement to be exploited through capital accumulation, mural creation does present space for the growth of cultural commons.

These spaces, and their exploitation, can be found in breaking down neighbourhood and knowledge commons. As defined in Chapter Two, neighbourhood commons is the production of identity and community. However, identity and community should not be defined narrowly or statically, but rather in a relational understanding of the urban centre as a shifting, complex, dynamic whole. Murals can help define the look of a physical space, drawing attention to infrastructure, and creating a particular feel to a community, for example generating the idea that Kensington Market in Toronto is an artist community. This identity does not stop at the borders of a geographically defined community, however, as murals reflect a general Toronto arts “scene”, and are often intended to inspire others to contribute to the continual cultural production of communities, as indicated by Binjen and Geoffrey (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014; Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014). Likewise, murals create opportunities for the production of knowledge commons in the ways in which they are accessed, as a tool for the dissemination of information, such as messages of decolonization and access to cultural teachings. Once again, murals do not necessarily constitute a knowledge commons, and control over production can lead to forms of cultural exploitation, and thus is it crucial to stress that what murals present is opportunity for the production of commons, rather than a definitive commons.
Chapter 3: Graffiti Management

StART’s mission, which seeks to beautify the city while eradicating graffiti, is necessarily subjective, and is designed to appeal to the largest portion of the city’s citizens, artists, and property owners as well as to attract tourism; however the program also lacks attention to the various driving forces behind graffiti and the politics of a subculture. More in-depth study is needed to bridge the creation of street art murals with cultural commoning, with emphasis placed on discerning the modes and motivations of the artists and organizations painting these murals and how they (or how they do not) integrate with graffiti subcultures in the city. In the next chapter I will present a study of one such organization, 7th Generation Image Makers, seeking to demonstrate murals as a space for wider cultural commons, as well as breaking them down into specific spaces of both knowledge and neighbourhood commons.
Chapter 4 7th Generation Image Makers

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the case study of 7th Generation Image Makers, a Toronto-based Aboriginal arts organization. This chapter is broken into three main sections: background, process, and practice. The background section details the organizational history, programming, and people involved in the organization. The second section investigates the process of creating a street art mural, discussing past murals as well as my observations during their mural planning over the past year. The final section explores the motivation behind why 7GIM, and the artists in particular, engage with street art as a practice. During my observations and interviews I identified four themes, which are woven throughout this chapter: community, identity, place, and decolonization. These themes are used to identify a number of ideas, looking at how and why each artist is involved in 7GIM, as well as some of their personal philosophies around street art and graffiti.

The bulk of this text is based on interviews conducted with four artists: Kate Mosteller, Daniel Geoffrey, Thom Charron, and Nick Binjen. While 7GIM has painted numerous murals over the past twenty years, this study restricts itself to the three most recent murals, referred to as the Allen Gardens mural, the High Park mural, and the Pan Am Games mural. The Allen Gardens mural, located at the intersection of Gerrard St. E and Sherbourne St., was painted in 2012 at Allen Gardens as one of four temporary murals painted on a development site. The High Park mural, located at Bloor St. and Clendanen Ave., was painted in 2013 through StART’s public/private partnership program. Finally, the Pan Am Games mural was painted in 2014 at the Pan Am Aquatics Centre and Field House in Scarborough, Ontario. While the major analytical focus sits with these three murals, additional murals are referenced in order to provide greater depth into the work of 7th Generation Image Makers. Of particular note are a twenty-four hour pop-up mural and the mural depicting the 8th Fire Prophecy inside the 7th Generation Image Makers drop-in centre.

23 Pseudonyms are used in agreement with interview consent forms.
4.2 Background

7th Generation Image Makers was founded in 1995 by Anishinaabe artist Maria Hupfield, who wanted to provide a creative space, learning centre and outlet for at-risk Aboriginal youth (http://7thgenimagemakers.weebly.com/). The original programming focused on street art, but has since branched into a number of different directions, providing a drop-in centre and offering workshops on subjects such as visual art, digital production, lyrics writing. Street art continues to be a major part of the summer programming, with between one and five murals painted each year. Formed under the auspices of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST), 7th Generation Image Makers now operates as a semi-autonomous organization, determining the direction of their mandate and programming. When asked about internal policies relating to mural creation, Mosteller replied:

> 7th Gen operates as a very specific part of Native Child and Family Services. So the way it operates is actually more like a separate not-for-profit. Basically Native Child is in trust of all of our money, so they kind of have to funnel all of the funds. But for the most part our initiative, our mandate and vision, is actually somewhat different from Native Child. We carry the same values, but we have a different mandate (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014)

7GIM started during a resurgence in Aboriginal rights movements across Canada. High profile conflicts between police, military, and Aboriginal peoples had occurred in 1990 in Oka, Quebec, as well as the 1995 Ipperwash Crisis in Ontario (Warry 2007). Significant concerns surrounding the welfare of Aboriginal youth in urban centres were also coming to the fore (Warry 2007). In 1995 Toronto City Council established the Graffiti Transformation Project; seeing an opportunity, Hupfield created 7GIM as an outlet for Aboriginal perspective, as well as a means to provide guidance to Aboriginal youth. As Mosteller tells it:

> [T]he reason why that happened in the first place when we first accessed and applied for the Graffiti Transformation Project through the city of Toronto, obviously it was their initiative to counteract graffiti in the city. But one of [our] reasons was because at the time there was some significant political things going on with Aboriginal people, especially urban Aboriginal people, and our youth at the time saw that as an opportunity to have a voice, have an avenue where they could publically speak about it and educate about some of those issues. (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014)

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24 NCFST is a children’s aid organization focused on issues such as poverty, violence, drug and alcohol addiction, and homelessness that challenge Aboriginal families in Toronto (http://www.nativechild.org/)
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7GIM is a small organization largely run by one coordinator, with one extra staff, if funding allows. Workshops, previously run by one or more staff, are now contracted out to facilitators, allowing for greater flexibility with programming and funding. The role of the coordinator has thus expanded to include facilitation and program management. 7GIM’s current coordinator is Lindsey Lickers\textsuperscript{25}, an artist by training, holding a degree from OCAD University, and having helped to develop their Native Art program. Lickers has been working as the coordinator at 7GIM for four years. I first met Ms. Lickers during the summer of 2013, while she, several graffiti artists, and 7GIM participants were painting the mural at High Park. Subsequent meetings allowed me access to some of the group’s history and organization.

![Figure 8: Painting the High Park Mural, July 2013. Photo: Courtesy of 7th Generation Image Makers.](image)

The people who are involved with and access 7GIM can be classified into three essential groups, although there is certainly a large degree of mobility between these groups, and they do not have strictly defined boundaries. The first group might be referred to as casual members, those who access 7GIM as a social service. According to Mosteller:

\textsuperscript{25} See [http://7thgenerationimagemakers.weebly.com/contact.html](http://7thgenerationimagemakers.weebly.com/contact.html).

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They’re not necessarily people… that are interested in pursuing a career, they just have an interest in arts and something to pass the time” (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

For these members, 7GIM offers drop-in hours that allow youth to access arts supplies and equipment, including access to digital technologies. The next category represents youth who are interested in school and/or careers in art. Here 7GIM provides more formal art training, advice on portfolio development and writing artist statements, mentorship, and resources for applying to post-secondary studies. The third group are artists brought in to act as mentors, workshop facilitators, and lead artists for mural projects.

Artists and facilitators are hired through a combination of prior experience with 7GIM, word of mouth, and recommendations from existing artists. Mosteller describes her lead artists as:

A collective of artists who kind of hang around 7th Gen, have accessed 7th Gen in the past, providing access to a wide array of Aboriginal artists (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

In one of the initial planning stages for their upcoming PanAm Games mural, Lickers formed an initial team with artists Binjen and Geoffrey, with plans to include two other artists, resulting in the eventual inclusion of two artists, including one newcomer. With the exception of the newest lead artist, each of these artists have been involved in many of the more recent 7GIM murals, including the Clendenanen Avenue/High Park mural completed in the summer of 2013. Association with past and present lead artists is certainly one of the ways in which artists are hired, where an artist is recommended by one of the lead artists from their own network, and thus become part of the 7GIM network of artists. These recommendations tend to be based around specific areas of need and specialization, as according to Mosteller,

7th Generation Image Makers’ job as the agency and as the program is to take a look at all of the different things that people bring to the table (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

During their Pan Am Games mural planning a number of potential artist names were considered for the lead artist team, including several past 7GIM artists. Ultimately the decision came down to the need for a local female artist. This specificity in hiring needs serves multiple purposes, including generating specific cultural knowledge, combining past experience with new ideas, and balancing masculine and feminine perspectives.
However, the hiring practices of 7GIM go beyond the organizational needs, as identifying the needs and wants of participants and artists is key, as well as identifying the needs that are important to the community.

If there’s kind of a connection there, if there’s a harmony, if there’s an issue that people want to talk about, that’s the coordinator’s job is to try to identify that and… basically try to help make things possible for the youth and the artists who don’t necessarily have the skill set to be able to approach foundations. 7th Gen is basically a liaison, making things happen for artists and aspiring artists, to get them funding to do what they do (Interview with Mosteller 9-5-2014).

In this way 7GIM often functions as a mutually beneficial arrangement between artists and the organization, providing them with a place to pursue practices they are already engaging in. For artists such as Binjen and Geoffrey, advocacy work and passing on their cultural teachings and practices is a large part of what they do outside of 7GIM:

We do a lot of travel around Ontario doing different types of workshops, some art, talking about health and wellness within the First Nations community. I also do a lot of my own programming as well with other different organizations – Aboriginal organizations, non-Aboriginal organizations – as a program facilitator. Different types of programming: agriculture, traditional foods, art, storytelling, cultural, urban agriculture, and different things like that (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

The workshop programming at 7GIM ranges from media to art, to traditional crafts and culture, with typically one workshop running each month. Workshops range from basic introductions to intensive skill training. For example, Thom Charron, the first artist I interviewed, was at that time running a workshop on hip-hop lyric writing. This workshop featured a range of skill sets, but for the most part focused on introductory skills. While some workshops and training are designed to help learn new skills or gain expertise, an important part of 7GIM’s programming is public presentation. In addition to the public street art projects, 7GIM runs exhibitions, with art projects created by novice participants as well as lead artists. Charron described the role of 7GIM as being more for the future rather than the present, operating to pass on things that they have learned to the next generation:

We are trying to preserve something that they could one day take care of. For me as an Aboriginal artist, those are some of the things that help me keep it going, that I’m taking knowledge from Elders, and I’m transmitting that knowledge into art, and that art is reflecting onto the youth who see it or witness it. You know, it’s kind of that intergenerational gap (Interview with Charron, 22-4-2014).
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Education, the teaching of skills, and passing on cultural information and knowledge are at the core of 7GIM, its artists and facilitators.

I’m a helper. I always say my role is, any time I’m out in the community is that of an Oshkaabewis, so, maybe not an Oshkaabewis but a Shkaabewis so I’m just a helper, community helper. I like to consider myself a, if you have to label it, community worker, artist, cousin, friend, and helper (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

4.3 The Murals

Three murals were accessed as primary analytical sites: two past murals at Allen Gardens (2012) and High Park (2013), and their 2014 mural project for the Pan Am Games. While many other murals have been painted, these three murals provide close links in terms of stories, teachings, and artists who worked on them. The Allen Gardens mural was one of the first painted during Lickers’ tenure as coordinator, and also marked the first 7GIM mural collaborations for Binjen and Geoffrey, who helped with the teachings and design. These three murals are linked through a shared association with original ecosystems, and even more notable, for telling the origin story of Toronto through an image of fishing baskets.

Figure 9: Allen Gardens Mural. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto

The Allen gardens mural was painted in 2012 as part of a five sided, 700 foot long mural at Allen Gardens, a park at Sherbourne St and Gerrard St. E., with five Aboriginal groups taking each side. The mural as a whole is known as All My Relations, and is dedicated to the hundreds of murdered and missing indigenous women. Each side takes different teachings – Thirteen Moons teachings, history, South American Indigeneity, Earth teachings, and Water teachings. 7GIM were assigned the Water teachings, which are Anishinaabek teachings reflecting the importance

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26 According to Geoffrey this term means many things, including both helper and apprentice.
27 Anishinaabek teachings about the thirteen cycles of the moon.
of women in representing, maintaining, and regenerating water. It was during the painting of the Allen Gardens mural that 7GIM learned the original meaning of Toronto as “poles in the water”, and marked the first time this story would be painted by the organization. This mural is framed with the Thirteen Moon teachings, emphasising the links between these teachings, the purification of water and the primacy of women in these teachings.

The High Park mural was painted in 2013, on both walls of a TTC underpass on Clendanen Ave. across from High Park, on Bloor St. W. Where the Allen Gardens mural was primarily concerned with water teachings and representations of the feminine, the High Park mural was focused on ecosystems. 7GIM’s research on the area showed High Park to be unique meeting ground between a number of ecosystems – wetlands, Black Oak savannahs, and forest zones, transitional between southern Carolinian forests and northern Boreal forests. The abundance of flaura and fauna was supported by a meeting of five major watersheds into Lake Ontario, also supporting the original communities of Mississauga and Haudenosaunee peoples, serving as meeting points for portage, trade, celebration, and large villages. Further impetus for the placement of this mural near High Park was in part due to a 2011 Mohawk protest, where a group of Mohawk protesters occupied part of the park in response to the creation of mountain bike trails overtop of sacred
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burial site. Finding a lot of confusion and hurt between the local community and Mohawk protesters, Lickers wanted to create a mural that would help to educate and create a broader understanding of the importance of the High Park area (and Toronto in general) for Anishinaabek and Haudenosaunee peoples, recognizing the history and also giving something back to the community.

The Pan Am Games mural, titled *Water: Our Lifeline, Our Spirit*, was painted in 2014 as part of the Aboriginal Participation Program at the 2015 Pan American Games. Much of the motivation and process behind this mural will be described below; however, in brief this mural the shared ecological heritage of both the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek peoples in the Toronto area, creating a space to present different cultural teachings, framed by the Anishinaabek northern white cedar and the Haudenosaunee eastern white pine. This mural once again emphasises water, looking at its importance in traditional ecosystems as well as the traditions of different Aboriginal communities surrounding water, and tracing the relationships between the underworld, land/water, and sky worlds through the sacred trees framing the piece.

Figure 11: Pan Am Games Mural. Photo: Lindsey Lickers. Accessed courtesy of 7th Generation Image Makers.
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4.4 Process

The process for creating a mural is variable, dependent on a number of significant factors. The first of these is obviously the application body (i.e. public or private). During the course of my research 7GIM were preparing to submit a bid to paint a mural for the upcoming 2015 Pan American (Pan Am) Games28, a process that is only somewhat different than submitting a proposal through StART. In either case, the process begins with the coordinator, who identifies opportunities available. Scouting typically begins around September or October – almost immediately after the summer mural project is finished. For StART applications, this means physical location scouting, with one of the evaluation criteria being locations hit hardest with graffiti. For 7GIM, however, graffiti management is not the principal criteria for evaluation.

I think that we function differently because we look at the geographical location, look at the history of it, and how that applies to Aboriginal people, as opposed to, you know, some people just go because there is a graffiti problem, and that’s it, there’s really nothing else about it. But for us, because of our mandate, and because of traditionally the political stance that 7th Gen has taken, and also just trying to spread awareness, I think we need to be really careful about what areas we pick and why, and we need to be able to justify it (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

Other opportunities might also be identified, as there can be condo developers and other private commissions where an owner is having difficulty with graffiti management, or possibly simply would like mural work done. A great deal of care is given to selecting an application body, and 7GIM concerns itself with the quality of the working relationship they will have with the funding organization going forward.

In a commercial, capitalistic society we always have to be careful. There are a lot of artists [who] just want to get their work out there, just want to get paid. But speaking about ourselves, we have a very specific, very political agenda of getting these teachings and these visuals out there, and stating our presence of our minority and original inhabitants of these territories as well. So, with these kinds of organizations we’re already stroking against the grain, but that will only be mentioned or be felt, not per se by us, but behind our backs. There are still some invisible ceilings for us within these realms (Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014).

While 7GIM has painted murals for a large number of different organizations and developers over its twenty-year history, it is the City of Toronto with whom they have worked the longest.

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28 The Pan Am Games is a major sporting event held every four years in the year before the Summer Olympic Games, comprised of nations in the Americas. (Thring, 2014).
7GIM’s working relationship with the City of Toronto has spanned two different iterations of graffiti management. 7GIM has applied fifteen times to the Graffiti Transformation Program since 1996, and twice to StART since it was created in 2010. Lickers maintains a close working relationship with StART project manager Lilie Zendel (www.toronto.ca/streetart), the quality of this relationship reflected in the number of successful funding applications. Approximately 75% of their applications are accepted, and for the applications that are not, Lickers uses the opportunity to ensure their future success by directly asking StART what they need to do next time:

If we don’t know why, if it seems kind of out of the norm of why they would say no, usually we go and we ask them. Because we want to know how to strengthen our applications in the future, but also because traditionally with the Graffiti Transformation, and now StreetARToronto… a lot of things have changed regulation-wise, and for evaluation criteria, things like that… even over the last four years I’ve been here. I know it changed a lot before that too, so it’s really good to just get feedback, and they might tell you things that they’re not telling everybody. If you go out of the way it also looks good, reflects good on you, because you actually want to see them, then they get to know your face, they can put a face to the application, and that’s always a good thing (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

After potential sites and opportunities have been identified Mosteller will begin forming her lead artist team, starting with one or two members to create some of the initial concepts and sketches, and begin research. An examination of the Pan Am Games project describes this process well. Lickers’ was informed of the opportunity to submit an application for a mural in the Aquatics Centre through a pre-established relationship between Lickers and members of the Aboriginal Participation Program of the Pan Am Games. A proposal package highlighting the basic requirements for their bid provided a starting point from which the team could render a sketch, outlining themes, colour palettes, size, and as many specifics as required. Given its aquatic centre location, the mural was expected to showcase water and sports, with particular consideration given to incorporation of locality in the design.

The planning sessions engaged with both group planning and semi-individual work. The first sketching session occurred on May 9th, 2014, with the initial team consisting of Geoffrey, Binjen, and Mosteller. The team first discussed expectations and considered a large number of potential ideas for over an hour, and then split into individual activities, based on a combination of
personal expertise as well as ideas they wanted to explore. This was the fourth mural these three had worked on together, and at this point were well familiar with each other’s roles. Binjen began by researching local geography, looking in particular at images of the original watershed ecosystems of Toronto. This is a typical first step in most 7GIM murals:

First we sit down to create a concept which is based on flora and fauna that would be found in the direct environment of the location. So we try and reflect the natural world within that frame and then trying to reach back to traditional stories and teachings about the land or about certain places and times so we can use that to educate the public. (Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014).

Similarly, searched for images of traditional lacrosse games in order to represent local Aboriginal sport, exploring the roots of the game as a substitute for war. Geoffrey began sketching objects to represent local teachings that would form the backbone of the story and the specific cultures these teachings were drawn from; in this case white pine to represent the Haudenosaunee Six Nations and the northern white cedar to represent the Anishinaabek.

![Figure 12: Sketch of Eastern White Pine, Pan Am Games Mural. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.](image)

Throughout this process Geoffrey expounded the importance of specificity in this work:

I don’t speak for First Nations across North and South America. I’m an Anishinaabe man, but still I don’t speak for all the Anishinaabek Nations, I speak for my community, from my teachers and my mentors, the way I was taught. So those are the stories and the teachings that I carry. So it’s very clear that, even Anishinaabek, our stories and teachings might change from community to community, which is a really beautiful thing (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).
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The initial mural designs are based on the personal knowledge of the artists, but the artists also consult with Elders who can pass down teachings specific to their own communities. These consultations are more than simply fact checking or to ensure accuracy. An important aspect of passing down a teaching is making sure the source that it comes from is represented and honoured.

That’s our methodology of learning and teaching and storytelling. It was passed from generation to generation… Elder to their Oshkaabewis, and it’s very important, especially when talking about those teachings, or presenting teachings… we call it ishitawen – psychology or understanding of life that we always, always have to open where we received those teachings from. It’s just honouring that methodology of learning. You know, you just come in with a teaching and you don’t say where that comes from, you’re dishonouring that methodology. You’re not staying true to that spirit of that teaching that’s being passed down. (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

In order to stay true to the “methodology of learning… that spirit of the teaching” (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014), it is necessary to show its source. 7GIM is not only committed to this methodology for receiving knowledge, but also in passing this knowledge on to the centre’s participants, acting as a conduit to present the teachings of Elders to a new generation of young people within a new medium and while teaching new skill sets.

During the second sketching session, on May 14, 2014, a new lead artist was added to the team, on recommendation by Binjen. Much of this session consisted of catching her up to speed on the plans that were already set down in the previous session, consolidating those ideas, and broadening them out further. Subsequent sessions saw the final lead artist included. The number of sketching sessions held for each mural is variable, naturally dependent on the needs of the mural and the familiarity of the team with one another. The Allen Gardens mural took five sketching sessions before the design was finalized, which was considered a very large number for the 7GIM artists. However, the Allen Gardens mural was a particular case, with 7GIM being one of four organizations working on one wall of a four sided mural, and was coordinated by another organization.

Typically 7GIM will take two or three sketching sessions to incorporate all members and finalize a design. The Pan Am Games mural required six sketching sessions from beginning to end, originally beginning with just Mosteller and Binjen, and gradually incorporating all members of
the lead artist team, and deciding on two female trainees. The trainees were given a weeklong training session prior to the painting of the mural. Once the sketch is rendered, it will be reviewed by the funding organization or client, as well as given a community review to ensure that all parties are satisfied with the design. The familiarity shared between Mosteller, Binjen and Geoffrey creates very little friction, allowing for a very smooth transition through all stages of the process.

Most of the time after that it’s really pleasant to have a team like us around so that there is clear communication and not too many expectations, because most of the things are going really fluidly. (Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014).

Independent collaboration permeates the entire development of the mural, from its initial planning and sketch renderings to the final instalment. Throughout the process the vision of the mural is discussed, but each artist is given the creative freedom to work on their own projects within the mural, and these projects are slowly mixed together into a cohesive whole. Charron describes the process:

Everyone brings his or her specialized piece to the project. Everybody adds on, and it’s one of those things where you just go with the flow of it, and if you mess up, it’s fine, there’s paint for that. Everybody else just trusts everybody else’s
creative process, so I’m not looking at what you’re doing because I’m already focused on my piece. (Interview with Charron, 22-4-2014).

During the installation of a mural, certain responsibilities are divided between the lead artist team and the coordinator, where the lead artist team is typically responsible for the technical requirements of the mural and mentorship of the project trainees, while Lickers oversees such things as overall collaboration of the artists, health and safety, budget, community consultations, and time management.

Time management is a key aspect of a mural installation, both in terms of shift management, and ensuring that the mural is completed on schedule. The time needed to complete a mural is dependent on a variety of factors, including artist availability, location, size, and most importantly, a contractual timeline negotiated between 7GIM and the contractor (i.e.StART). The initial stages of the mural process (scouting, planning sessions, and community consultations) are typically spaced out over a period of several months. The final mural instalment, on the other hand, is a much tighter timeline, based on the needs of the artists, who have work and obligations outside of 7GIM, and on the time limit on the permit given by the City of Toronto. The High Park mural was painted over the course of six days, and was considered by Lickers to be a tight timeline. The Pan Am Games mural was completed in one week, plus a training session for the participant artists prior to the event.

Project documentation is ongoing throughout the mural process, including the collection of all written documents (applications, permits, letters of support) as well as extensive photography and videography.

Everything from sketch rendering, all the way to putting the first mark on the wall, to documenting it after, and even over time, because I think the images change over time, and that’s always good to know too because then you can figure out which paints are the best outside and which are not (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

This documentation is used for a number of purposes, including maintaining organizational records, portfolio construction for future projects, and to share the project on a variety of media, including platforms such as Facebook.
Once a mural is finished there is a degree of upkeep and maintenance required, depending on whether it is privately or publically funded. While privately funded murals would be negotiated on a contractual basis, StART-funded murals require a five year maintenance plan within the initial application, requiring seasonal touch ups to compensate for weather-related shifts in
concrete, as well as ensuring that the mural remains graffiti-free. Mosteller was unsure what might make a mural more susceptible to being tagged:

I don’t know. I think that you’ll find that depending from what kind of subject matter it is, things that tend to get gone over and affected by graffiti more than other things. It would be interesting to figure out what that is, what the difference is, why this one gets tagged and why this one doesn’t. But I do think it’s definitely fifty-fifty. (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

What is clear is that murals on their own do not necessarily prevent graffiti-vandalism. A special finish is applied to the mural that enables graffiti removal without harming the mural itself, but it is 7GIMs commitment during the whole mural process to community in terms of outreach and support that helps ensure the longevity of the mural.

Community relations are one of the most important aspects through the life of a mural, from planning to maintenance. StART funding is particularly focused on how a mural engages with the local community. Says Geoffrey:

You do community consultations. It’s always community consultations. You look at historically what that land was being used for, also the narrative that we want to tell. Then you proceed with concepts, then you go into community meetings and consultations and present sketches and things like that. Find local support, whether it’s with politicians or with whatever. It’s a long process. (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

In the initial stages, finding community support starts with seeking out community leaders, particularly the ward councillor of the target site.

You go to the councillor. That’s the best bet, because they have a lot of connections to the community; they have mailing lists, they have the types of things that will help you with community consultations down the road. But really it just looks great to have a support letter from a councillor. (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

Community support is important not only for getting the mural off the ground, but also for its lifetime sustainability, often preventing tagging in the first place. Mosteller states:

If a community is 100% behind a piece, they will do everything in their power to pull together to make sure that it sustains. And they also protect it. (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).
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The Allen Gardens mural presents a good example of this in practice, where the local residents as well as the homeless community who sleep in the park protect the mural from vandalism, even though it is only a temporary fixture.

It’s a culturally significant piece, but I think it speaks to people on a personal level that promotes within them the protection part of it, to really make sure they think of it as their own. So if you can make something that really is inclusive, I think that probably is a better bet, a safer bet, to make sure that your work stays a long time. (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

Three years after its initial painting, the Allen Gardens mural remains in excellent condition, holding only a small pencil tag to show compared with the more obviously tagged walls around it. It is a testament to the work 7GIM put into the piece.

It’s our duty and responsibility when we’re painting out in these communities to do a really great, amazing job that anyone who comes around won’t even want to go up on it. It’s a lot of the spirit that we’re putting up onto these walls, a lot of history, and it resonates with people when they look at it. This is a living piece of art that shares a living piece of history. (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

Figure 16: Waterlily, Allen Gardens Mural. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.
4.5 Practice

In the background section of this chapter I discussed the entry point to 7GIM’s engagement with street art – to provide a voice for Aboriginal issues in the city; however, there is a much deeper, richer, and complex engagement that was explored in my interviews with 7GIM artists. There is a close association with urban hip-hop and graffiti culture that is often at the core of research into street art, which will be discussed below. Importantly, all of the artists expressed the notion that what they were engaging with was an extension of their own cultures as members of First Nations – skills, ideas and teachings that had been passed down through generations. Considered at the most basic level, 7GIM engages with street art as a good means of communication.

Our world is so visual, and we always have used signifiers to educate people spiritually or directionally. You know, as in petroglyphs where people have carved situations out in rocks thousands of years ago to use it as teachings, knowing that will last for a long time carved in rock. And dealing with the struggles that we have been dealing with, and will be, I think it’s important for us to reach back to those oral and visual traditions and story telling, and do what we are good at, and it’s utilizing our environment (Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014).

Similarly, Charron found a close comparison with the carving of petroglyphs, stating:
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Those were put there by storytellers, by medicine men; it’s basically telling a story of what was going on in that particular time period (Interview with Charron, 22-4-2014).

While the artists at 7GIM might draw on graffiti and street art styles in their work, these murals tell culturally significant stories using culturally significant means. As Geoffrey states:

We were painting on these rocks and on surfaces long before this city was here and we’ll be painting on these surfaces and on these rocks long after we’ve left this city… my Elder told me, ‘you’re from Mideewin29 country. You’re People of Rock. You probably were a couple of lives ago painting on these rocks, so do it. Tell these stories.’ (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

Given the clear cultural extension between petroglyphs/pictographs and street art, there are certainly several interesting comparisons to be made between graffiti/street art and the work of 7GIM, particularly in terms of motivation. The oppression, discrimination, degradation and cultural destruction experienced by youth in the inner city ghettos of 1970s America resonated strongly with the artists at 7GIM.

It was all these young kids in these ghetto neighbourhoods, you know, just sick and tired of the situation, of the oppression that took place around them… they were just fed up and they decided they liked painting their stories and how they felt about their situations, and you know, there’s parallels where that came out of the hip-hop culture. And what was the hip-hop culture? Same thing. That’s what we’re doing: we’re painting our struggles, our stories, our successes, our hurts. (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

This type of painting can be seen in the large mural of the 8th Fire Prophecy in the 7GIM youth drop in centre, a piece that paints the teaching of the 7th Generation and exemplifies the urban and cultural struggle of Aboriginal youth, and holds a vision of the future:

It’s a visual of the struggles that the youth are facing living in an urban city, because a lot of them come from reservations, and a lot of them have never been to a big place like Toronto. So when they come to Toronto they’re dealing with a lot of different kind of stigmas, like homelessness, having a, finding a place to eat, looking for programs to get involved in, looking for training, looking for jobs, if the stuff like with youth justice, and when they come through these doors, we help them in those services and they get to see that big graffiti piece downstairs (Interview with Charron, 22-4-2014).

29 Refers to the Grand Medicine society in the Anishinaabe Nation, keepers and teachers of stories, knowledge, medicine, etc. According to Daniel Geoffrey the term is often misunderstood as a secret society.
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Figure 18: 8th Fire Prophecy at 7GIM. Photo: Lindsey Lickers. Accessed courtesy of 7th Generation Image Makers.

Figure 19: 8th Fire Prophecy at 7GIM. Photo: Lindsey Lickers. Accessed courtesy of 7th Generation Image Makers.
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Street art thus is a useful medium for 7GIM not only because it provides a public forum, but also because there is both subtextual and overt association with civil disobedience and protest.

There’s a connection there from street art evolving from graffiti culture, where there is an opportunity to give voice to people that necessarily wouldn’t have one, or have the opportunity to say something about it. So I see that as kind of a connection because especially for Aboriginal people, you know, the oppression, there’s a lot of yearning to get things out there in whatever avenue you can, and especially through raising awareness. I think that graffiti culture and street art has that opportunity, has a really long history of doing that. (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

![Figure 20: High Park Mural featuring graffiti elements. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.](image)

An interesting visual note within 7GIM murals is the presence of graffiti objects, such as tags, which on their own would be the type of object to be covered by such a mural, but in this case is used within the aesthetic of the mural. This is seen most prominently in the High Park mural, where tags are used as a means of crediting both artists and sponsors, ironically including StART. Painting an object as complex as a mural takes a large amount of talent and imagination, but also technical knowledge, which needs to be developed from somewhere.

Everything takes practice and everybody starts with a crappy tag or, you know, there’s people out there very deliberately putting out their name as much as possible throughout the city and they do not all have a very large skillset, or a
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wide perspective on art, and the ability to be aware of their own persona within this bigger context of street art/graffiti or expressionism. With that, it will inhibit them to always come up with a beautiful wall. (Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014).

 Beautifying the city is one of the primary motivations behind the work of Binjen and others, and on this he shares the mandate of StART. However, for Binjen the beautification of a city is not simply the act of adding a pretty picture, but building a cultural vibrancy, creating space for change and for protest.

Straight buildings, straight lines are awful to me; they’re unnatural, so that’s why, like the grid pattern of the streets, that just fucks with my soul. But just to destroy the whole city as well, it’s like, for the time being I have to be here and it doesn’t get any prettier… if I cannot climb up on the roof, I cannot get there; but if I can get there then I’m sure I can make some nice art there too. And that’s the whole thing, for me it’s like beautifying the place, or speaking out. (Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014).

This work finds purchase alongside notions of commoning, in particular as a means of not only resisting oppression but acting in an alternative space to hegemonic power.

I think that as policy makers they want to be like, ‘well this is our grand city and we want to show everybody that we’re in control.’ But they’re not in control, because there’s no such thing as that, because control, that’s just like oppression, trying to make everybody do what you want them to do. (Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014).

An emphasis on the instability of cities is core to the notions and practices of the artists themselves. In terms of differentiating street art and graffiti, the key idea would be the intentionality behind the piece, rather than the means through which it was accomplished.

If you look at a crazy mural, there’s so much going on in that mural, and the deeper you look into it, it could be a reflection of society, and only the people that are awake to those kinds of things will understand it. And the people who aren’t really trying to see that or they just don’t really have that kind of connection to the art or the culture they’re going to disregard it and look at it as garbage or vandalism. (Interview with Charron, 22-4-2014).

Geoffrey claims differentiation between unauthorized graffiti and authorized street art mostly comes down to how it is conducted:

If it’s illegal and you’re going up in the night-time then you’re going to have little bit more trouble blending your colours and taking your time to make your lines really crisp. But depending on the artist and their spirit, their heart, and what they
want to do, then not really. The only difference is probably the technical applications (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

As asked about whether there are possible connections between 7GIM’s own practices and graffiti aesthetics, Geoffrey replied:

People say that we do, but like, I don’t know. You look at strong foundation lines and secondary lines and the colour pallets that we do use. Yeah, it is inspired in terms of the mediums that we use, like aerosol cans and different things like that. But it’s a fusion (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

Even when sanctioned by the city, street art nevertheless disrupts the notion of cities as stable spaces, exemplifying the mutability of colours, shapes, emphasis, and stories. Each time they paint a new mural, 7GIM reconstructs, or possibly simply repositions, a portion of the city as public common, a space for people to observe, educate, and become a part of the community.

7GIM murals engage with urban enchantment as both an eye-catching disruption and a means of education, attempting to create a space that is noticed, where people are expected to stop and think about their environment.

It’s really important for us as Aboriginal people to tell our stories, and also to put those images out there for people to get an understanding of where we’re coming from, and also for them to understand this is something we’re fighting for. (Interview with Charron, 22-4-2014).

Figure 21: Original landscapes: wetland, savannah, boreal forest, High Park Mural. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.
This is a fundamental aspect of what 7GIM is endeavouring to do, centring Aboriginal people, stories, struggles, and history within urban landscapes. The High Park mural is set at a site of struggle and resistance in part to take that struggle in new directions, bringing the local community into Aboriginal connections to urban spaces. The significance of this piece does not rest in its association with past protest, but it does associate with resistance and protest, and this must be included in understanding it as an act of commoning, in its occupation as both neighbourhood and knowledge commons.

We are a resourceful people. We’re supposed to be out there on the land and this urban landscape is part of these lands. So to reinstate ourselves within the urban environment, I think it’s important to let people know that we are still here (Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014).

Using media such as murals, a new generation of Aboriginal artists are working to change the narrative around urban Aboriginal peoples, placing issues of oppression, homelessness, and alcoholism and drug abuse front and centre, while simultaneously giving voice to a vision of what the city should be.

The Native artists that I’ve been working with, for us it’s reclaiming back that culture and that spirit. But also passing down traditions, youth are going to see that, they’re going to be mesmerized by that. It’s going to open up their eyes; they’re going to get a sense of identity and belonging, like they belong here. And for that that’s very empowering and very inspiring because that goes to show that they can so much be a part of this if they want (Interview with Charron, 22-4-2014).

Returning to the idea that street art is part of the production of a new cultural commons within the urban environment, 7GIM murals are remarkably significant presentations of knowledge and community. Reflecting on the widespread cultural appropriation, destruction and degradation experienced by Aboriginal peoples over the past hundreds of years, the public display of cultural teachings could certainly be found as a controversial practice in Aboriginal communities. Prior to the 1960s most First Nations cultural practices were outlawed in one form or another, including, dancing, singing, wearing regalia, and smudging ceremonies\(^3\) (Warry 2007). Contemporary mainstream culture has not slowed down the pace of cultural appropriation, with current controversies surrounding the naming of sports teams such as the Washington Redskins, the

\(^3\) A smudging ceremony is a spiritual purification ceremony performed within several Aboriginal Nations in North America. See [http://www.anishinaabemdaa.com/ceremonies.htm](http://www.anishinaabemdaa.com/ceremonies.htm)
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wearing of regalia (Friesen 2013), and the hyper-sexualisation of Aboriginal women (Wohlberg 2015) to name just a fraction.

However, Lickers and the artists at 7GIM find their work to be an important means of cultural production, re-appropriation, and preservation.

This collective of people are really about the opinion that you can translate traditional knowledge and histories but still protect it. Some of the imagery that we know of, as far as maybe stories and knowledge about an area, some things are outlined by an Elder to be sacred knowledge. In those terms we usually wouldn’t use it, or we would hint at it, but nobody that doesn’t know that knowledge won’t see it anyway. It’ll be kind of like a hidden message (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014).

Each 7GIM mural produces and reinforces particular cultural knowledge, managed as a commons. 7GIM manages this system through the capacity to control how certain information is accessed, and who is capable of accessing it. Public display enhances rather than endangers dynamic cultural production. As a broader cultural education, 7GIM murals typically involve specific Aboriginal conceptions of the feminine.

Figure 23: Image of pregnant woman, Pan Am Games Mural. Photo: Lindsey Lickers. Accessed courtesy of 7th Generation Image Makers.

Figure 22: Image of woman, Allen Gardens Mural. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.
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In both the Allen Gardens and the Pan Am Games mural 7GIM drew on Anishinaabek and Haudenausaunee teachings connecting femininity with water, life and birth. However, these murals are not simply groupings of icons and motifs, they are stories and relationships, teachings connecting Aboriginal peoples with place, community, and culture. To explore this notion, it is useful to look closely at the murals painted by 7GIM. Familiar motifs wend their way through several of the murals, and a number of different images are recurrent as well. Should a pedestrian pass by one of these murals, the most obvious and immediate association is with nature. This is clearly a connection that 7GIM intends for people to make, an idea that nature is close at hand, and that we should reconnect with a more natural environment. There is also more specific knowledge that can be accessed through these murals, however, that requires some kind of prior information. In each of the past three murals is an image of the poles in the water, and while this image is fairly prominent in these murals it does not necessarily demand attention in the same way as other images. And yet, the image of poles in the water tells the origin of Toronto, both as a translation of the name and in the way it became a major fishing hub due to the convergence of five watersheds. This story, just one of many told within these murals, represents a large schema of complex cultural knowledge with varying levels of accessibility.

Figure 24: Poles in the water, Pan Am Games Mural. Photo: Lindsey Lickers. Accessed courtesy of 7th Generation Image Makers.
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Figure 25: Poles in the Water, Allen Gardens Mural. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.

Figure 26: Poles in the Water, High Park Mural. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.
Each mural, while connected by teachings and imagery, tells very different stories and histories. As stated previously, the High Park mural makes a historical claim to land, and educates about what this historical claim means. The Allen Gardens mural shares some of that claim, but focuses on Anishinaabek water teachings, drawing attention to the importance of women.

Figure 27: Woman in Allen Gardens Mural. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.

Figure 28: Woman in Allen Gardens Mural. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.
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Figure 29: Woman in Allen Gardens mural. Photo: Patrick MacInnis, University of Toronto.

Figure 30: Depictions of women in ecosystem of Pan Am Games mural. Photo: Lindsey Lickers. Accessed courtesy of 7th Generation Image Makers.

The Pan Am Games mural, notable in its title – *Water: Our Lifeline, Our Spirit* – reinforces the teachings of both High Park and Allen Gardens murals, but helps to generate contextual awareness of cultural specificity and relationships between nations, presenting both Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek teachings.
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Ultimately 7GIM murals are intended to tell stories, to teach the living history of a people. These murals do not simply piece together traditional motifs, but rather take historical and contemporary cultural associations and teachings, crafting a relational mode of accessing cultural identity and knowledge.

I always believe that we’re not just doing a bunch of symbology, and broken up imagery that’s jumbled together, like a bunch of handprints and people holding hands and rainbows like that. No, it’s a story that ultimately has to be told… and the way we go about storytelling is, these stories are a living spirit and they have to be honoured in a respectful way, and the same with these pictures, the same with these stories. It’s a continuation of that, whether it be through song, painting, storytelling, it’s the spirit that comes through (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014)

7GIM was started in order to give voice to issues facing Aboriginal peoples, in particular urban youth. After nearly twenty years they have continued to serve this role, as well as to help develop the capacity for young artists to grow their craft and learn new skills, reconstructing the city as a space of new opportunities. Through their particular methodologies, their focus on a community-based approach within the mural process, 7GIM positions itself as a space to drive new, alternative cultural narratives.

We have a tradition that has been proven to be successful, sustainable, and very civilized with respect to flora and fauna and we want to promote that, because it is something that we definitely can reach collectively. It’s a matter of perspective and trust, and that’s why we think the visual aspect, to have that out there for people to look at and to consider is an important act of decolonization, defiance of whatever globalized aspect or world view there is right now (Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014).

4.6 Community, Identity, Place, and Decolonization

Four themes were identified through my interviews and observations of 7th Generation Image Makers: community, identity, place, and decolonization. These concepts are interrelated, but explore different facets of the production that occurs through mural creation. Community represents the relational engagement of 7GIM in their mural painting: their relationship with the communities where they paint their murals, and their relationship with the communities from where they draw their teachings. 7th Generation Image Makers are producing community murals, they are engaging in community relations, teaching communities in Toronto about their struggles, their needs, and their cultures. Community engagement in a general sense is vital to
the work of 7th Generation Image Makers – without community support they would not receive funding, and the educational aspect would be for naught. However, community is more complex than this. 7GIM are also engaging with a community of graffiti artists and writers, not in order to prevent graffiti as a practice, but more so to be a respected part of this community. Geoffrey states:

I hope it’s inspiring other artists, I hope it’s not preventing graffiti. Then you lose the spontaneity, that creative spirit. (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).

7GIM work to protect and preserve their murals through this kind of inspiration, through engagement with graffiti subcultures. A vital aspect of community, however, is that it is not merely a localized space. It is a relational term, connecting varieties of spaces through cultural production. For 7th Generation Image Makers, community is representative of the places they are from, and the places from where they draw their inspiration and teachings. And these communities are also then connected to the communities where murals are painted, where teachings link specific geographical spaces into new relationships.

Decolonization is more clearly identified in the rejection of mainstream narratives, painting a historical legacy and association with Toronto, as well as rejecting mainstream narratives about urban Aboriginal identity. Mosteller indicated that the Allen Gardens mural acts in part to challenge the sexualization of Aboriginal women, generating new meanings and demarginalizing the role of Aboriginal women in society. Likewise the High Park mural reconstructs associations between Aboriginal peoples and urban spaces, challenging assimilationist narratives surrounding urban Aboriginal populations. Place showed up in a number of facets, most obviously in the attachment of the artists to the physical environment. This is a more complex notion of place, where specific places and environments (High Park as a meeting place of eco-systems) are tied to outside communities through teachings learned from community Elders. The artists of 7GIM use place to critique mainstream narratives about urban Aboriginal identity, deconstructing modes of colonization. Identity is reflexive of all of these themes, a relationship between self and complex communities. The artists of 7th Generation Image Makers had strong associations in their own personal identities with place, with the land of Toronto, the land of their ancestral communities, and the land of North America in general. In many ways the work of 7th Generation Image Makers is the production of identity, for youth who are struggling with cultural association, who are struggling with place in the urban environment.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Former City of Toronto mayor Rob Ford’s high profile anti-graffiti rhetoric during his administration did little to curb graffiti, in much the same way as zero-tolerance strategies have typically been of limited value. However, often masked by the rhetoric, programs such as StART have been an innovative way of engaging with street art and graffiti with a focus on cultural production. Creating a commons based approach to understanding street art presents an opportunity to effectively bridge some of the gaps between street artists and municipal authorities in crafting policies around city spaces. In my thesis I have positioned street art as a dynamic cultural commons, understood not as simply resources, but as acts of commoning, generating spaces in the urban environment that are resistant and alternative to capital. In order to examine the actors and objects, and alternatives at play in these acts of commoning, I further deconstruct cultural commons into neighbourhood and knowledge commons.

These various classifications are not intended to draw artificial boundaries around aspects of the commons, but rather to gain a better understanding of stakeholders, participants, and modes of production. With my conception of the commons I draw upon both reformist and radical viewpoints. While this might seem to be a shallow compromise, my motivation is not so much to advocate a particular opinion on crisis or reform in capitalist society, but rather to reflect the same occurrences in street art in Toronto. A commons framework in the case of 7GIM allows for the opportunity to position a small and focused context (Aboriginal street art in Toronto) into a larger power relationship. This larger power relationship necessarily cannot be generalized through this thesis, but in conjunction with exploring Toronto as a policy environment, the case of 7GIM presents an opening into modes of resistance within authorized environment. Authorized and unauthorized pieces can be loosely correlated within the same spectrum, and thus represent aspects of a relationship of dynamic power. This is not a discussion of which art form is more authentic, but rather how they interact and shape one another. West’s (1990) discussion of new cultural critique provokes the idea that insider transformation is difficult without the pressure of crisis. The funding of legal murals in the City of Toronto is in part inspired by the role of graffiti in society.
Chapter 5: Discussion

One of the key relationships between authorized murals and unauthorized graffiti is that unauthorized practices keep the authorized commons spaces honest; “the common and unforeseen encounters are mutually necessary” (Hardt & Negri 2009, p.252). For the commons to flourish, there must be dynamic modes of unauthorized cultural production. Likewise, more dynamic cultural spaces provided through the commons allow for a more multi-faceted and nuanced growth of unauthorized interventions. This is not a broad-spectrum argument that all unauthorized pieces are necessarily good, but rather unauthorized graffiti should be viewed as a form of commoning, acting to generate uses of space alternative to capital. Murals can flourish in environments both as a response to graffiti and independent of graffiti. Street art is certainly not a one-dimensional form, and it will not do to constrain it analytically in terms of means, practices, goals, and outcomes. However, within a biopolitical argument, legal murals represent the potential gains in terms of space in the contested use and ownership of city spaces. It is not a static gain, and murals, like graffiti, are acts of commoning helping to construct and urban cultural production not tied explicitly to capital accumulation, and in fact resistant to and opposite of capital accumulation.

The murals of 7th Generation Image Makers present a critical aspect that is often missing form the commoning of Harvey (2012) and the biopolitical labour of Hardt and Negri (2009): the act of restructuring the city and generating genuine alternative histories demonstrates a collapse of the common urban narrative. As Hardt and Negri (2009) state, “what the megalopolis most significantly lacks… is dense differentiation of culture” (p.253). 7th Generation Image Makers murals act as specific places of cultural production that both reproduce, appropriate, and dynamically change Aboriginal cultural history, resisting both hegemonic cultural assimilation and any bland association with Hardt and Negri’s multitude, at once creating a mass and specific cultural identity.

Marx’s (1933) narrative of capital accumulation is not a story of privatization of resources and thus an expropriation of access, but rather an exploitation of labour that results from these privatizations. It is not accumulation of resources, but accumulation and control of labour. Harvey’s (2010) critical geographies finds capital’s ability to infinitely exploit and adapt to crisis a result of an expansion over geography, originally tied to state authority, but subsequently
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exploiting multiple authorities. This capital dynamism must be met by the dynamism of commoning, tied to relationships between the authorized and unauthorized urban intervention.

This notion of commons in limited in a number of different ways. The first and most obvious is that while graffiti might be seen as an act of commoning, legislation allowing for authorized murals is less clear as a response to this. Perhaps this legislation is only as good as its effectiveness, and should it prove ultimately unfruitful in eradicating graffiti, it may be dropped. However, while the continuation of unauthorized pieces could result in a reduction inmurals and a return to more draconian eradication tactics, it seems far more likely that, given the bureaucratic mechanisms currently in place in Toronto, the role of street art in Toronto will continue to expand. In its current form, graffiti legislation in Toronto both enables a commons and attempts to regulate, police, and enclose the cultural commons. There are issues with the dual victimization of property owners based on the current definitions and enforcement of graffiti, further acting to demonize unauthorized tags and pieces.

Dovey et al. (2012) claim “nothing will kill graffiti more effectively than promotion and preservation” (p.40). This speaks to the risk of corruption and monetization through capital accumulation. However, the complex politics at play amongst graffiti writers and artists presents a dynamic quality that is difficult, if not impossible, to effectively kill. The broader cultural commons of street art is necessarily a dynamic process, not focused on static preservation of specific objects. One aspect of the creation of the city as a common environment is unauthorized graffiti, which operates in much the same way as capital accumulation – continual and changing acts of resistance to notions of property and ownership, acting in opposition to both state and capital power. The creation of policy spaces for authorized murals as a response to unauthorized graffiti is the manifestation of the commons, but this is also not the end result. Authorized mural creation does not necessarily result in deterrence of graffiti, nor does it assume the prevention of capital accumulation. Murals can be easily subsumed by capital, resulting in systems where authorized murals consist solely of pieces that either reflect a certain acceptable aesthetic, are created by high profile artists, or are created for commercial purposes.

Preservation and sustainability of these resources is a challenging subject. Street art is not necessarily made to last, and in fact calls attention to the flux of urban infrastructure, objects
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painted on construction walls to be torn down in years to come, thrown up on abandoned structures. Based on my analysis of Toronto’s graffiti management plan, the City is trying to create a stable model of street art, and thus a more stable perception of the city. StART projects’ five year maintenance plans passes a level of resource governance to a group that must contend with the physical environment as much as any traditional commons resource. Cement expands and contracts with different seasons, creating cracks, fading paint. Wood splinters, metal rusts, all of these must be taken into account.

It is one thing to speak of preservation in terms of a broad notion of commoning, generating widespread creative access to spaces alternative to capital; it is quite another thing to consider the cultural production and preservation from the specific context and view of often-marginalized cultures. In the case of 7th Generation Image Makers, the artists and organization have embraced the precarious nature of street art in a variety of ways. The three main sites studied in this thesis offer differing lifespans for murals. The Allen Gardens mural will stay up for only as long as the construction walls exist, likely coming down this year. The High Park mural is given a five year plan, and while it could stay up much longer than that, most planned maintenance work will stop after five years. Finally, the Pan Am Games mural will likely last as long as the life of the building, and possibly longer. This is an effect of being an indoor public mural rather than a street art mural, reinforcing the precariousness of street art. At various points 7GIM have engaged in twenty-four hour pop-up murals, painted pieces for week-long pavilions, all with the intention of its non-permanence. These non-permanent structures, however, allow 7GIM to engage with story-telling and cultural production in a dynamic manner.

What, then, for the specific and culturally significant stories tied to these impermanent sites? How is the knowledge commons preserved when the medium becomes corrupted by time? Street art can be seen as a continuation of oral cultural history – the speaker might die, but the teachings are passed down. The mural projects are as much about teaching Aboriginal youth these stories during the process of painting as well as during the lifetime of the mural as they are about crafting spaces of struggle. Dynamic cultural production occurs in the moments in which it is continued by others, not by the preservation or reproduction of objects. Similarly, then, for the neighbourhood commons, community and identity is an ongoing means of action. A neighbourhood commons is most apparent in the alternative means of production carried out
through biopolitical labour than by the protection of a specific set of resources. Therefore the commons is tied to resources, but not bound by them.

Stepping back from these more broad generalizations about the relationship between murals and graffiti, 7th Generation Image Makers murals mark specific narratives of struggle, but even further, alternative constructions of the city as space. Four interrelated themes were repeatedly brought the fore during my interviews: community, identity, place, and decolonization. 7th Generation Image Maker murals act to counter the struggle of urban Aboriginal youth by offering alternative narratives on the place of Aboriginal peoples in urban centres, deconstructing the classic flow of rural to urban communities, and in particular denying notions of assimilation. Going further, 7GIM murals enable degrees of inclusiveness within the specificity of stories, environments, and communities. The work of 7GIM, through painting their struggles, their past and their future, repositions this living history into the centre of urban society.

We’re always adapting, that’s what we do. We adapt to the environment and the situations that we’re put into, and that’s why we’re still here, that’s why we’re still thriving… Street art, whatever you want to call it, is just a platform. It’s just something to get people asking some questions, or even stop and take a second to say, ‘oh, what is going on here?’ To ask that first question (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014)

These murals cannot simply be defined as acts of resistance, but also very specific modes of cultural production, honouring and regenerating cultural traditions and knowledge, and moreover representing the ongoing way culture is being acted upon with an eye for the future. The artists at 7th Generation Image Makers are not content to stop at restoration and preservation, instead seeking to ask what their own contributions are to the cultures of their communities.

### 5.1 Futures

The specific ways in which street art and graffiti act as modes of resistance necessitates a consideration for encounters with law enforcement. There is a wide range of locations for these encounters, and one must consider the subjectivity of vandalism enforcement in individual interactions. While there exists a large amount of research investigating the subjective encounters of graffiti artists and law enforcement (Austin 2001; Dovey et al. 2012; Latorre 2008; Philips 1999; Young 2010, 2012), it is largely context driven, focusing on cities such as New York, Los
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Angeles, Paris, London, and Melbourne, amongst others. Very little research into graffiti vandalism has been done in the context of Toronto, which means that while social and aesthetic motivations can be generalized to some degree, the interactions with law enforcement cannot. However, while illegal interventions and legal policy do concern this research, the subjective encounters between the two lie outside the scope of this project. This research is instead informed by research on cities with comparable legislation, in particular Melbourne, Australia. The legislation in Melbourne operates in different capacities, most notably in the provision of state and municipal level interventions, while in Canada interventions occur mostly at a municipal level, with a basic enforcement structure given in the Criminal Code of Canada. Within the context of 7th Generation Image Makers, encounters with law enforcement have occurred during mural painting, with the artists finding that special attention is paid to them as Aboriginal artists rather than simply as street artists. This aspect of encounter between law enforcement and artist must be explored in further research.

One of the core evaluative aspects that needs to be explored in more depth is that of participations standards. The City of Toronto provides a means through which specific groups may apply for StART projects, but the evaluation of this criterion was beyond the scope of this project. There is subjectivity existent within the judgement of these projects, where fulfilling the criteria for acceptance does not guarantee StART funding. Further research needs to be done exploring the evaluation, acceptance, and denial of funding. As was stated previously, there has been little work done in actually understanding the reasons why some murals are tagged while others have been ignored. Further research is necessary on this subject if any genuine study on the efficiency of anti-graffiti murals is to be undertaken. Tied in with this, Young (2010) has previously stated that unauthorized interventions are increasing in areas of gentrification, claims that could generate better understandings of contemporary graffiti subcultures if investigated more fully.

Returning to preservation and distribution of street art, this thesis has focused on the physical site, but that is not the only means of distribution for street art in contemporary society. Graffiti is a precarious art form, prone to either eradication from authority or being covered by the work of other artists. It is perhaps ironic that graffiti preservation might be best achieved through a digital medium, given a variety of major (construction/deconstruction of buildings and landscape) and minor (eradication and replacement) interventions in the urban environment. The
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connection between physical and digital space in terms of distribution and preservation is ripe for further study, such as precarious access (changing city spaces versus changing digital media), materiality/immateriality, and broader questions of public space.

Aboriginal street art draws inspiration from myriad sources, being at once a traditional cultural practice and an appropriated cultural practice. The work of 7GIM finds purchase alongside the critical contemporary Aboriginal art that defies hegemonic determination. While my study presented an interesting and unique context to consider themes of decolonization and urban identity, more in-depth work needs to be done to combine context-focused work such as 7GIM with macro-level urban aboriginal studies, such as the Canada Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples report (1996), Urban Aboriginal Task Force (2007), and Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (2010). While this study acknowledged the diversity of urban Aboriginal identity, the specific focus of 7th Generation Image Makers demanded attention to many of the traditional socio-political issues facing urban Aboriginal peoples. Further research needs to be conducted looking at some of the more socially ignored aspects of urban Aboriginal identity, such as the burgeoning urban middle class.

Anthropologists, ethnographers, and government officials working with Native people in the early 20th century were largely operating under notion that Aboriginal populations would eventually vanish, supported by scholarly theories in Manifest Destiny and Social Darwinism, and embodied in declining Aboriginal populations and social and geographical marginalization (Warry 2007). This notion led to destructive cultural policies denying Aboriginal peoples the right to openly practice and produce their own cultures, and attempted to force assimilation with a mainstream, typically Anglo society (Warry 2007). Contemporary mainstream narratives now make claims that Aboriginal peoples are increasingly urbanizing, moving away from rural lands. 7th Generation Image Makers are resisting these forced narratives, telling alternative stories about the relationships between Aboriginal peoples and the environments around them.

We are in this urban setting where there’s concrete everywhere and buildings, and you see all this colonization. For us, when we create those pieces, it’s decolonizing, it’s reclaiming back that spirit of the land, and that’s something that we want to continue seeing… Through this artistic side of graffiti, we’re able to visually paint pictures that help people open up their eyes… and it’s really important for us as Aboriginal people to tell our stories, and also to put those images out there for other people to get an understanding of where we’re coming
from, and also to understand that this is something we’re fighting for (Interview with Charron, 22-4-2014).

7th Generation Image Makers are an organization pushing for the recognition that there are myriad identities, myriad stories hidden within all-encompassing terms such as urban Aboriginal. As such myriad understandings of Aboriginal, including some of the more generalized ones, are important and necessary in order to cast-off colonization and political marginalization.

There’s a large Aboriginal population here in Toronto too, and dealing with the struggles that we have been dealing with, and will be dealing with, I think it’s important for us to reach back to those oral and visual traditions and story telling, and do what we are good at – and that is utilizing our environments (Interview with Binjen, 14-5-2014).

The staff, artists, and youth participants at 7th Generation Image Makers are part of a generation of Aboriginal peoples finding new ways to not only express, but also engage dynamically in cultural production; not only demanding centrality, but actively shaping the environments and communities around them.

For Aboriginal people, facing a history of oppression, there’s a lot of yearning to get things out there in whatever avenue you can, and especially raising awareness. I think that graffiti culture and street art has that opportunity, has a really long history of doing that (Interview with Mosteller, 9-5-2014)

Street art murals present an interesting mode of expression for Aboriginal struggles, representing a continuation of cultural production associated with traditional rock art practices as well as contemporary interpretations of graffiti as resistance and disruption. At the beginning of this thesis I asked if authorized murals could replicate the resistance of unauthorized pieces. 7th Generation Image Makers, painting their stories, struggles, and successes on the walls of Toronto, certainly resist simplistic notions of authorization and resistance.

We’re in a time right now where we do it, we just put it out there. We don’t take no for an answer, and it’s our right to be passing these stories and use this imagery. It’s as much a part of who we are. You know our ancestors were doing this long before this city was here, and we’re going to be doing it, our future generation will be doing it long after. We are the people of the rock carvers, it’s what we do (Interview with Geoffrey, 14-5-2014).
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