

WHY TAG?

PERSONAL REFLECTION OF A USED-TO-BE GRAFFITI HATER

Semarang / Indonesia, Year 2000 (12 years old, Junior High School)

I hated graffiti. Boys from nearby high schools tagged my house with dirty words and ugly paintings. What they did was absolutely wrong. First, the wall was not theirs, it's mine. Second, they didn't ask my permission to tag it. Third, their tagging was really awful; a talented elementary school kid could draw better than them. They ruined my property, and they had to pay for it.

Jakarta / Indonesia, Year 2007 (19 years old, University - Undergraduate)

Cynthya, my best friend, adored Ranger Bastards so much. She said they were one of several tagging groups in Jakarta; and, most certainly, they were the coolest. Well, I agreed with her. I thought that they did great jobs in beautifying dull Jakarta streets. Hence, I started to think that graffiti was an art.

Rotterdam / The Netherlands, Year 2011 (23 years old, University - Graduate)

I have never known that writings on walls convey deep meanings. They communicate the oppressed opinions in society. From them, we can learn the social political situation of a place, even ones' personal thoughts and opinions. At certain points, I imagine myself in their positions. I really am curious of what the writers think. The more I observe the writings, the more I feel that we are all the same. We both have opinions, dissatisfactions, angers, and hatreds. The difference lies only on the way we communicate it. They tag it, I don't. That is why, I feel no reason to hate taggers anymore.

In fact, I am jealous of the taggers. I envy them for being able to express their ideas, even only on walls. As an Indonesian girl, I was taught not to speak up easily, especially if I have different opinions. Because being different can be a social suicide in Indonesia's homogenous communal society, I suppress myself for years and years.

Therefore, I am very fascinated with the anonymity and freedom which tagging gives. I will be able to write whatever I think. If people disagree, I am safe from being a social outcast because they don't know who I am. In this sense, I somehow feel that this may be the reason why people start to tag. In this restricted world, we need to communicate our ideas freely without any social threat or pressure.

If I tag something on walls, it will be about everything. Topic, feeling, name, and object that are closely related to my life at that time. At times, it may be about love, happiness, joy. At others, it may be about hatred, anger, or depression. I don't see the reason why we should limit ourselves to provide a certain image to other people. Although I understand that people like positive feeling or

attitude more than the negative ones, it is also very important to understand that both the positive and negative are ours. They co-exist within us. Hence, you cannot deny one of their presences.

Apart from that, I believe that people should not tag about racism and discrimination. I perceive the wall as a media where different people from different backgrounds can be totally equal. It is the place where we can communicate our ideas freely and safely. If people tag about racism or discrimination, they may attack or offend the other taggers. Then, the concept of wall as a safe place will be violated; and, in the end, there is no point in tagging anymore. Thus, in every thinkable way, a tagger should respect other taggers or readers.

In the end, I think that the importance of tagging lies not only on its product, but also on its action. The courage of being yourself and communicating your opinion is as important as the idea sharing. When there are more and more writings on walls, their existence and importance cannot be ignored anymore. The larger part of society may have to recognize the presence of alternative opinions, instead of only the mainstream ones. And, perhaps, in my wildest dream, a world of greater tolerance may be realized. An utopia where people don't need to be afraid anymore of speaking up their minds, no matter how different they are.

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