

## Urban Figures, Common Ground: JR and the Cultural Practices of Perception

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# Urban Figures, Common Ground: JR and the Cultural Practices of Perception

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The most political decision you make is where you  
direct people's eyes.

In other words, what you show people, day in and  
day out, is political.

Wim Wenders

1

The stern gaze of monstrous eyes and the sudden provocative presence of grimacing faces have added a new and astonishing form of *décor* to the bleak and characterless walls of Downtown Los Angeles. In an uncompromising gesture, the gigantic photographic portraits which spread over entire walls of multiple stories buildings, garage doors, rooftops, fire walls or industrial corridors consume both the city's public wall space and the immediate and absolute attention of the (mostly motorized) passers-by. Beautiful and threatening at the same time, their smart symbiosis with the city's architecture signals a previously unseen form of urban monumentality which, in terms of reception aesthetics theory, would fall into the category of the sublime.<sup>1</sup> "What exactly are they advertising?" one might ask, but the larger-than-life black and white portrait posters lack a commercial purpose. The posters' contents disturb the observer's eye since what is prominently at display is not the stars and starlets of Hollywood's dream factory but the wrinkled faces of Carl, Michael, Tuangpet, Robert and John—elderly Angelenos who would usually fall into the category of the un-famous. So would the architectonic structures upon which the portraits had been pasted: Bleak industrial halls and undecorated sheds reveal their age and un-glamorousness through the sun-bleached and fading colors of their once brightly painted frontages. The portraits seem to have entered a silent and intimate

dialogue with the city, which, upon deeper reflection, brings to mind Robert E. Park's famous assertion that the city is "a product of human nature," a space first and foremost defined by "the people who compose it" (1).

Figure 1



JR, "Michael Downtown" from "The Wrinkles of the City," Los Angeles, 2012 (c) JR

2

Faces on facades are currently experiencing a revival as tools of social critique and commentary. Since 2005 Parisian street artist and urban activist JR,<sup>2</sup> who positions his work at the intersection between graffiti and photography (thus referring to himself as a "photographeur"),<sup>3</sup> has made visible urban conflicts around the globe through the display of the people who are most directly involved: The rioting immigrant youngsters of the Parisian suburbs (*Portrait of a Generation*, 2004-2006), Israelis and Palestinians on both sides of the West Bank Barrier (*Face to Face*, 2007), female victims of war, rape or other side-effects of political extremism in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, the slums of Cambodia, and the shantytowns of Kenya and India (*Women are Heroes*, 2008-2010), the ageing population of the poor areas of Shanghai, La Havana, Cartagena, Berlin and Los Angeles (*The Wrinkles of the City*, 2008-2013), with each individual coming to personify a part of the city's history. JR positions the portraits wisely so that their location in urban space becomes part of the social commentary itself.

3

Especially JR's early projects were realized without permission, a strategy which allowed him to occupy the most relevant architectural spaces in terms of social and aesthetic impact. For his first project—*Portrait of a Generation* (2004-2006)—the portraits of grimacing

teenagers living in the poor suburbs of Paris were placed strategically not only in the very center of Clichy-sous-Bois<sup>4</sup>--to make sure they don't escape the journalist's eyes-- but also across Central Paris' posh *arrondissements* to remind the wealthy public about the class conflict's biased media-coverage. For his *Women are Heroes* project in Kenya's Kibera slum, JR used the photographs of local women to cover 2000 square meters of rooftops, thus providing a water-resistant layer to the fragile shacks. At the same time, to anyone passing the village by plane or helicopter, the large eyes and faces transform the slum into a spatial statement prominently declaring the local women's existence and survival in a world of gender-based violence and discrimination. In addition, the installation also includes the paste-ups of women's eyes on six train cars, which when in movement complete three other oversized portraits pasted on the slope below the railway tracks. In Morro de Providencia, one of the most dangerous favelas in the hills of Rio de Janeiro, the paste ups show large pairs of eyes belonging to the favela's female residents. The visual axis is provokingly directed to Rio de Janeiro's fancy center and glamorous water-front drives: An ironic re-interpretation of Orwell's *1984*, with the female gaze constantly reminding of the ongoing drug war and the city's destructive class hierarchies.

4

Having been awarded the TED prize<sup>5</sup> in 2011 at the age of 27, JR has now become famous on a global scale also exhibiting his works in galleries such as the MOCA Museum Los Angeles, the Centre Pompidou Paris, the Tate Modern London or the Magda Danysz Gallery in Shanghai. His most recent project, financed with the \$100.000 award money provided by TED, is even more participatory in nature: *Inside Out* invites people to upload their own portraits which are then transformed by JR into large-scale posters and sent back to their clients enabling them to paste them at locations relevant to their individual projects. In North Dakota, 60 portraits were placed in the Standing Rock Reservation by the representatives of the 7<sup>th</sup> generation of the Lakota tribe to make visible that they still exist. In Parroquia Guangaje, Ecuador, the Kichwa Indians pasted 23 portraits in order to react to their political invisibility and exclusion in the country. 51 portraits were placed in front of Russian Embassies across Europe to stand up against homophobia. In Caracas, Venezuela the walls of shacks are decorated by the faces of 220 women who all have lost their children because of violence.

5

These examples help to understand why JR's works are classified as "relational art," i.e., art that establishes a firm connection between the artist, the work, its socio-cultural context, and the spectator. According to Nicolas Bourriaud, who coined the term in 1998, works of relational art "take as [their] theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space" (14). JR's projects do both: they emerge from and motivate human relationships. According to the artist, every project starts

with a conversation prior to the photo-session, so that the individual life stories always influence the portrait's message: "Some preferred simply to be, silently, in front of the camera, allowing one to read the past in their eyes. Others accepted, playing supermodels one day and turned, in a matter of seconds, from quiet sadness to uncontrollable laughter" (JR 9). As soon as the portraits are up on the wall, JR usually disappears from the scene to make sure that journalists get in touch with the local population and listen to *their* stories. "Part of the work is the conversation that follows," JR confirms in an interview with *The New York Times* (Wood n.p.). Critics have started to call JR "the Robin Hood of the art world" (Ferdman 13).

6

JR refuses to call his work political, even though his projects are, as he himself points out, intended to raise questions about different manifestations of social misery around the globe. "I would call it art," he insists (Michaud 3). His exhibitions at the world's most distinguished art galleries as well as the availability of his works in the form of lithographs, posters, and photo collections via JR's homepage,<sup>6</sup> confirm his official status as an "artist" and hence his affirmed place within the global art market. At the same time, however, JR's projects clearly fall into the category of street art, a discipline concerned not only with what is written or displayed on a wall, "but also fundamentally *with* reading what is already there" (McCormick 24). In the 1970s graffiti emerged as the unofficial language of Black and Hispanic youngsters in New York's poor neighborhoods and as a response to the unequal distribution of resources and property. In similar terms, JR's portraits, in their strategic figure-ground relationship with the city, localize social, political, and economic inequalities through visual language. Even though distancing himself from a political motivation of his works, JR's balancing on the very edge of photographic art and illegal street activism alone puts his work in the very center of, what David Levi Strauss has called "the documentary debate" (3), a debate which concerns the distinction between aesthetics and propaganda and at the center of which stands the question: Should social misery be aestheticized by photographic art, and if so, who should have the right to do so?

7

JR's relational aesthetic invites a short detour into the history of social documentary photography which, in the early U.S.-American tradition, was considerably shaped by the works of Jacob Riis, Lewis W. Hine and Dorothea Lange. Jacob Riis is considered the pioneer of social documentary (as well as the inventor of magnesium flash photography), who in 1887 first shed light onto "how the other half *of the world* lives,"<sup>7</sup> a phrase synonymous for the disastrous living conditions in the squalid slums of New York's East Side. Similar to JR's work, his black and white photographs of poor immigrant families packed into tenement houses were aimed at effecting social change by making visible the problematic constellation of poverty, migration, and the urban

environment. However, Riis was not interested in capturing the immigrant's stories behind the image and preferred to leave as soon as he had shot his flash cartridges (Bogre 46). Still his documentary work convinced Fiorello LaGuardia to pass a constitutional amendment in 1938 which regulated New York's housing policies in favor of the poor and homeless. Similarly, Lewis W. Hine's investigative images of child labor, putting into focus the harsh conditions in America's factories, mills and mines to which children were exposed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, led to the passing of the Keating-Owens-Act, a law which regulated standards about age and working hours (53). During the 1930s, Dorothea Lange, in documenting the despair of the rural population during the Great Depression for the FSA (Farm Security Administration),<sup>8</sup> used photography to expose the hardships of the rural population throughout America. Especially the visual rhetoric and dramatic composition applied by Riis and Lange proved to be successful: Showing the anonymous poor in dirty rags, crouching positions, downcast facial expressions, frowns or emotionless blank stares, the pictures clearly communicated a rigorous hierarchical relationship not only between the photographer and the photography's subject(s), but also between the photograph's subject(s) and the greater American public looking at them. As Abigail Solomon-Godeau has observed, in Riis' case, the visual as well as textual dramaturgy depicting the poor individuals in a subaltern position also served the function to soothe the public fear of the immigrant other so that photography became a tool for their surveillance and control. In Lange's case, the rural poor were displayed strategically as dignified subjects (most famously "Migrant Mother") suggesting that the suffering was a result of individual misfortune rather than of a larger political and economic crisis originating from the nation state. At the same time, Lange's photographs published in newspapers subliminally promoted the New Deal policies as the most effective solution to the problem. In the U.S., early ethnographic photography thus produced, what Solomon-Godeau has called, "a double act of subjugation: first, in the social world that has produced its victims; and second, in the regime of the image produced within and for the same system that engenders the conditions it then re-presents" (176). Documentary photography, in its early days, was rather a tool for moralism than for revolutionary politics. In the 1960s, Leonard Freed's documentary work on the Civil Rights Movement surveyed protest events such as the 1963 March on Washington in that he captured the many different facets of the life of a cultural community which had been shaped by racism and had suffered the impact of trauma on their lives. Freed's evocative snapshots of different moments in the urban cultural milieu of African-Americans subtly counteracted the destructive one-dimensionality of the black/white or oppressor/victim binary paradigm of race which dominated documentary reports up to the 1960s.

8

In similar, but more radical and abstract terms, Martha Rosler's 1974/75 photo-text installation "The Bowery in two inadequate

descriptive systems” represented a critical reaction to the many forms of social portraiture in which the human subject had been reduced to the personification of poverty serving a larger national political battle of charity propaganda. To undermine the usual “victim photography” approach, Rosler’s representation of the Bowery’s fallen people was communicated through their very absence. Instead of putting in front of her lens the poor drunkards or mentally confused, their status as a “subculture” was communicated through the Bowery’s architecture alone, i.e., the dreary facades, shabby doorways and empty bottles in front of them. “The photos here are radical metonymy,” Rosler explains her project, “with a setting implying the condition itself” (325).

9

This brief historical review of social activist photography in the U.S. shows that the discipline, from its very beginning onwards, involved a complex system of visual codes that was built upon different subject and object positions in space. Since these early days of ethnographic photography, a lot has been written about spectatorship and the organization of the visual, for example, about the power of photographic *mise-en-scenes*, camera positions, perspectives, frames or viewpoints but also about the politics of the gaze, the look, voyeurism, fetishism or surveillance. By now, it is almost a commonplace that the way a photograph is staged, placed, and distributed, also influences the way it is consumed and interpreted. Furthermore, new aesthetic decisions made by photographers often indicate important transformations of social and cultural codes which organize urban life. While Riis’ realist mode, for example, lends expression to the fact that the city at the turn of the century was considerably transformed by new immigrant populations, Rosler, by deconstructing the conventional modes of victim photography, also made a statement about New York’s socio-economic situation during the 1970s, which saw a heavy decrease of low-rent housing and the deinstitutionalization of mentally disabled people from state hospitals.

10

Considering this historical context, JR’s work marks another transition in the history of social documentary photography. What distinguishes him from other photojournalists is that his visual aesthetics subvert the established rules of spectatorial desire in that they aesthetically evoke the empowerment of the dispossessed subject. This empowerment, as I will show in the following, is due to a taxonomy of visual strategies which effect a substitution of the subjects’ connotations from “pathetic” and “powerless” into “self-possessed” and “superior.” The fact that the (photographic) image, in our age of visual (or rather virtual) culture, has become suspicious and unreliable, invites an analytical reading of JR’s work through the lens of perception theory, hence shedding light onto the complex taxonomy involving urban space, social criticism/activism and the empowerment of the subject.

## Surfaces

11

With JR's visual language, the space of the city becomes the picture plane of the portrait. This is nothing unusual if we think of the flood of print and digital advertisements which have become a natural feature of cityscapes around the world. Similar to the image use in print media, JR's posters, upon first sight, can hardly be distinguished from advertising campaigns placed in the urban fabric. As Bertie Ferdman rightly argues, JR's works "walk a fine line between images (for art's sake) and advertising, alluding in a way to the very Warholian notion of art as marketing, the very 'marketing' of his project seems implicitly part of the work" (21). JR's aesthetics are based on marketing<sup>9</sup> strategies, communicated by the poster's monumental size and their strategic placement in the urban environment. This act of integrating the portraits into the city thwarts conventional representations of the urban poor which rather than effecting charitable action reinforce the "us" versus "them" divide. As David Levi Strauss explains: "The politics of images, the way they are organized, has changed, and this has acted to erode their effectiveness, and their power to elicit action.... Images of suffering and misery elsewhere in the world are used as reminders of what we are free from. They operate in the greater image environment of consumption to offset images of contentment, to provide the necessary contrast" (81). The visual documentary of poverty or social and political injustice (i.e., all those realities which are largely invisible to the Western world), however, involves the radical exposure of the private sphere of the poor (desolate housing, war zones, etc.) to the public, while at the same time neglecting "the social function of subjectivity" (97). JR, however, subverts this visual strategy of victimization in that he makes the dispossessed subject invade public space. Rather than staging (or aestheticizing) the urban poor within their "typical" environments of poverty or war, JR's portraits are reduced to facial close-ups, which are only added a physical backdrop when pasted onto the city's architecture.

12

With the city acting as a frame (with a boundary only on the inward side), the portraits are placed within a specific context which dictates how the image/subject should be read. Rather than photographs which downscale the human face in a picture frame or in a gallery space, JR's faces and eyes stand in direct relation with its urban surroundings. Hence, the spatial dynamics which result from this interaction between portrait and buildings also have an impact on the visual communication between the pedestrian who performs the look and the person on the portrait who is looked at. The visual rhetoric upon which this communication is based entails an aesthetic effect, which philosophers and perception theorists (most famously Longinus, Burke, Kant, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Adorno, Lyotard) have called the *sublime*—and which is most generally defined as a sensation of both awe and terror.

While early theorists limited the aesthetics of the sublime to objects of phenomena of greatness in nature (i.e., the vastness of the ocean or the monumentality of the Alps), philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century defined it in more abstract and culture-specific terms. For Lyotard, for example, the sublime is the expression of all that which is unrepresentable. In his famous essay "What is Visual Culture," Nicholas Mirzoeff has used Lyotard's definition of the sublime not only to describe the effects generated by the postmodern omnipresence of the visual but also to link sublime effects triggered by the visual to ethics: Quoting Lyotard, Mirzoeff writes: "Because the sublime is generated by an attempt to present ideas that have no correlative in the natural world—for example peace, equality, or freedom—the experience of the sublime feeling demands a sensitivity to Ideas that is not natural but acquired through culture"(9).

13

It is within this theoretical frame of the sublime that JR's work has to be approached. The sublime, as an aesthetic effect which refers to the unrepresentable dimension of cultural practices or phenomena, is at work whenever his vast black and white posters suddenly pop up within a city's environment. JR's positioning of posters in so called "heaven spots" -- urban spaces which are, due to their height or inaccessibility usually hard to reach (rooftops, freeway signs, etc.)-- not only ensure the poster's visibility from many different perspectives in the city, they also contribute to the effect of the sublime in the poster's reception aesthetic process. JR's portraits confuse the conventional organization of photographic images in public urban space in that they come in even bigger dimensions than usual advertisements, forcing the urban public to partake in a visual dialogue with the subjects displayed. The sublime effect resulting from the scale of the posters is also based on the confusion between figure and ground. Usually, in a visual composition, the ground is larger than the figure, which makes it easy to distinguish between the two categories. However, in JR's posters, the figures take on almost the same size as the ground so that the subject and the city, the face and the surface, operate in the same dimensions. It is through this blurring of figure and ground that both the human body (as figure) as well as the city (as ground) can no longer work as a conventional frame of reference and as such provoke a perceptual disequilibrium of the visual urban order. It is this initial disturbance of the visual order wherein the evocative power of JR's portraits lies and through which his challenging of power structures operates. A closer examination of his projects reveals JR's reciprocal ideological perspective: the urban poor should be made visible as individuals. At the same time, these individuals want to see their urban reality in different terms. This act of monumentalization puts the dispossessed individual in an elevated position, so that it can look at the (urban world) from a "heavenly" perspective, a point of view usually reserved for those in power. With the dispossessed subject looking down onto the urban public, JR counteracts the "suppression of the social function of subjectivity" (Berger 100) which, as David Levi Strauss points

out, results from the way photographic images are used today (97) . What constantly resonates in JR's work is the need for urban redevelopment.

14

Also JR's choice to use the photographic genre of the portrait contributes to the empowerment of the individual. As Richard Brilliant remarks, the practice of portraiture—representing the shift from the private to the public persona—is always an expression of individual presence and social identity:

The very fact of the portrait's allusion to an individual human being, actually existing outside the work, defines the function of the art work in the world and constitutes the cause of its coming into being. This vital relationship between the portrait and its object of representation directly reflects the social dimension of human life as a field of action among persons, with its own repertoire of signals and messages. (8)

- 15 Being a medium formally reserved only for the privileged (aristocracy, artists, politicians, important thinkers or scientists, etc.), the portrait has always been the carrier of a person's individuality and character. However, unlike the painterly portraits of earlier centuries, which were collected in galleries,<sup>10</sup> museums, or aristocratic residences, JR's visual biographies do not remove the photographed subjects from their social origin, but place them literally onto the social and cultural space from which they originate. What is established is a firm relation between the face and the facade, a liaison also inherent in the term's etymological history. Deriving from Roman "facies," the term facade directly relates to the words figure and face, hence connecting the parts of a human body (the face) to a building's skin. (Hohmann 15)<sup>11</sup> Similar to a building's facade, our skin represents the borderline between the internal and the external body. This etymological connection is also at the root of JR's work, in which the social space of origin (=the city) therefore becomes the frame through which the subject must be looked at in the first place. To understand the subject, one also has to understand the space in which it is situated. In this way, the photographs contribute to a readability of the city which is determined by the reciprocal relationship in which the subject is shaped by and simultaneously shapes the urban milieu.

16

Many of the individuals captured on JR's camera have been asked to perform funny faces, a compositional strategy which enables those people usually unseen and unheard in political discourse to perform a gesture of empowerment. JR's portraits are characterized by the subject's direct look into the camera, and in so doing, communicate an active (rather than a passive) subject, a subject full of life. Just like a moment of comic relief in drama, the images of grimacing faces suddenly pop up amidst the harsh realities of war zones and in urban areas of extreme poverty. JR's most well-known funny-face portraits are those wallpapered on both sides of the Israeli West Bank Barrier in 2007 displaying three men of Palestinian and Israeli origin face to face. A party of three having a blast. From Bakhtin we know that laughter or comic spectacle can

present “an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts” (92). Even though Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque applies to the context of Medieval and Renaissance social systems, it also helps to understand the significance of the grimace as a tool of political resistance in JR’s works. Medieval ideology<sup>12</sup> considered the comic as a category belonging to the “non-official, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man and of human relations” (6). Since the Middle Ages, the carnivalesque, often expressed via grotesque body imagery (e.g. in the form of masks) was considered a liberation from the restrictive and hierarchal medieval social order. Bakhtin writes:

The serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations, and always contain an element of fear and of intimidation.... Laughter, on the contrary, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. (90)

- 17 It is only during carnival, that the established social order can be turned upside down and the social codes of hierarchal distancing can be declared invalid. Fool and king can freely change their roles. It is due to the wearing of masks (or grimaces) that spectators can no longer be distinguished from the actors. Victims can no longer be distinguished from their offenders. In this sense, JR’s portraits also provide a grotesque alternative to the everyday imagery of war, violence, and death, as they use laughter on both sides (the actor and the spectator) to confront the everyday fears and horrors experienced in war zones. “Even though [the Women are Heroes project](#) [did not change the world](#),” JR explains, “sometimes a single laughter in an unexpected place makes you dream that it could” (1). As a reanimation of desolate urban spaces, the portraits temporarily eliminate hierarchal barriers between people and, at the same time, motivate a questioning of the flood of distorted and one-sided images (of either victims or criminals) produced by the media.
- 18 JR also alludes to the homonymy of the word “eye”/“I” in that he sometimes also reduces the abstracted body to the display of a subject’s pair of eyes. Especially in places notorious for their high crime rate, JR seems to prefer the display of eyes thus hinting at the necessity, as famously articulated by Jane Jacobs, to have “eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street” (35). With JR’s work, however, Jacob’s demand for the presence of onlookers to provide safety on the sidewalks has deeper implications because the authoritative gaze of the dispossessed also symbolizes the authorities’ look away from the corruptive forces operating in urban crime zones.

## Conclusion

19

JR's portraits have transformed cityscapes around the globe into contemporary portrait galleries whose reception works against traditional readings of the city. JR's works are, in many ways, a gesture of an anti-neoliberalist urbanism in the sense that they represent a visual counter-narrative to the global city whose visual rhetoric is dominated by messages of consumer-capitalism. By granting those urban subjects living in poverty prominent spatial positions within the public urban sphere, JR also subverts the strategies of mainstream media usually criminalizing the urban poor. JR's unmasking of the social miseries through the empowered and autonomous subject, is a radical antithesis against the dominant mode of "victim photography" which places the dispossessed subjects in a subaltern position. The sublime effect, the strange coexistence of the feelings of awe and terror, resonating from the eyes and portraits also communicates a kind of monumentality that works against the amnesia of a mainstream culture. Each of JR's portraits, therefore, also represents an urban monument and thus also the repressed aspects of an individual urban reality.

- 20 JR's participatory principle, most effectively performed by the project *Inside Out*, becomes a vital tool through which different manifestations of social misery can be made visible not only in the urban but also in the virtual sphere. As Bertie Ferdman remarks: "By taking the literal (and physical) space of the street into the virtual commons, a space where we can all upload our images and then see the myriad interventions that have taken place, *Inside Out* produces new frameworks by which others can create and reclaim their cities. The art belongs to no one and everyone" (21). While for *Inside Out*, the artist's role is reduced to the printing subject, it is urban individuals who can decide where to place their posters, thus claiming their right to the city. While not every work of (street) art might change the world to the better, JR's posters definitely challenge our perceptual patterns in and of urban space. Even though JR rejects his role as a political urban activist, his works clearly negate the distinction between art and propaganda. In fact, the aesthetic and participatory impact of his larger-than-life posters makes this very distinction seem irrelevantly small.

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## NOTES

1. Etymologically speaking, the Latin term sublime means "set or raised aloft, high up," thus establishing a connection between a sensation of both awe and terror and an object of physical greatness. For the definition of the sublime along the lines of greatness see, for example, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*.
2. The acronym JR refers to the artist's initials.

3. See Gaby Wood, “Supercolossal Street Art” *The New York Times*, Feb. 24, 2011. In the 1980s Sidney Janis has introduced the term “post-graffiti” to denote the emergence of new techniques of visual art in the public urban sphere, for example, by means of stickers, stencils or paste-ups.
4. Clichy-sous-Bois is one of the most isolated suburbs of Paris which due to its high unemployment rate and criminal activity has been labeled one of the “urban problem areas” by the French authorities. In 2005 it became the center of the riots following the death of two young boys of Malian and Tunisian descent who were escaping the police and whose deaths sparked the dissemination of the conflict to other French towns. Clichy-sous-Bois has therefore become synonymous with the fight against social and economic exclusion and racial discrimination in France.
5. TED (an acronym standing for Technology, Entertainment, Design) is a New York based non-profit organization which annually awards \$100,000 to an individual “with a creative and bold vision to spark global change” (See <http://www.ted.com/participate/ted-prize>). According to TED, “JR embodies the many characteristics TED looks for in a winner: creativity, vision, leadership, and persuasion. His work is not just stunning. It is innovative, using collaborative storytelling techniques, which move the art of photography in a new and exciting direction. His work is about unlocking the power of possibility, revealing our true selves to those who live around us and then sharing those stories far and wide”(ibid).
6. See <http://www.jr-art.net/>
7. Jacob Riis’ photographs were initially taken to illustrate his book *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York*, a reformist treatise in which the grim realities of immigrant life in New York’s slums were documented.
8. The FSA was established in 1935 as one of the programs of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, intended to support poor farmers throughout America. The FSA employed photographers to visually document the effects of the Great Depression.
9. For an elaborate discussion of street art and its effect on commercial advertising see Stefania Borghini et al. “Symbiotic Postures of Commercial Advertising and Street Art: Rhetoric for Creativity.”
10. It is in the public daguerreotype galleries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where American celebrity culture began, as Miles Orvell recounts, quoting a contemporary observer: “Suspended on the walls, we find Daguerreotypes of Presidents, Generals, Kings, Queens, Noblemen—and *more nobler men*—men and women of all nations and professions” (28).
11. Hasso Hohmann’s recent publication *Fassaden mit Gesichtern* (2014) offers a thoroughly researched and well documented history of the use of faces on the facades of residential buildings throughout the world.
12. “The very contents of medieval ideology—asceticism, somber providentialism, sin, atonement, suffering, as well as the character of the feudal regime, with its oppression and intimidation—all these elements determined this tone of icy petrified seriousness. It was supposedly the only tonefit to express the true, the good, and all that was essential and meaningful” (Bakhtin 73).

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