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# Ghosts in

CHRISTOPHER STEAD & NEMA

the

# Machine

ALIAS  
PRESS







[03]  
[04]



[05]  
[06]



Steve  
Rolling in the sun on a Sunday  
morning, Sussex, 1998

- Meas & Carl  
Little Met pop up, London, 2001
- 1 Meas  
Gear change in the District line yard,  
London, 2001
- 2 Meas & Vinx  
'From the Fanyard, to the Tube Yard;  
Bumkin's revenge on the Central line,  
London, 2001





- Vins & Moak  
Surrealistic encounter on the Central Line, London, 2003
- ✓ Moak  
Rolling with a buffed window on the Central Line, London, 2003
- ✓ 2 + Moak  
Busk hour on the Northern Line, London, 2003
- Moak  
Northern Line, London, 2003
- ✓ Moak  
Rolling out of the Northern Line tunnel, London, 2003







Berghain Staff  
London, late '00s

GRAFFITI  
IN  
THE  
POST  
DIGITAL  
REALM

As we toasted to the end of the '00s and entered a new nameless decade, there was a feeling of change in the air, defined by the seeming lack of any. The Tories were back at the wheel, rave was in a state of drift, and graffiti entered its post-digital future. With New Labour remitting power to a coalition built on betrayal, we as a generation were beginning to realise that the affordable housing promised to us in the 20th Century would never emerge, and we'd be renting until the grave. Both 'Thatcher's children' and 'Blair's babies' were living in cities too expensive to get a mortgage in, trapped by the demons of neoliberal domination and precarious 0-hour contracts. As London prepared for the 2012 Olympics, a distinct marketing suite feel seeped into the city as the rapidly changing skyline made it look like a hybrid Dubai. East London's dystopian romanticism made way for the gentrified soup of transient financial-tourism. The graffiti, which had occupied the vacant no man's land of the railways for decades, was reduced to blank walls of grey paint to portray a clean, crime-free Britain, whilst street art was ushered in as part of the fiscal facelift.

The 21st Century had arrived, but with little in the way of political or economic change, the spectre of Thatcherism and Tory politics had returned to haunt a city which no longer had the 'future shock' of rave utopianism or graffiti escapism as a new way out of the bleakness for the youth this time round. Just more of the same old, same old. The avenues of countercultural escape gave way to the algorithmic anxieties of social media, and graffiti's leap into the post-digital realm propelled the scene in a new direction. As traditional modes of archiving graffiti, such as magazines, became outdated, writers found a new voice on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, and viewing graffiti's physical creation online became as much a currency as the final product. Traditionally, details such as the location of a yard and how the writers evaded security were closely guarded secrets, as the key to longevity was to move unseen in silence. The advent of the internet brought a new speed of communication, transforming graffiti into a low-budget action movie, with writers documenting their escapades with GoPros and drones for the purpose of online exposure.

This was further accelerated by the rise of the 'super crew', where a group of writers would unite to paint one piece under one name at high speed. This practice provided some short-term anonymity to the writers responsible for the pieces, making it harder to pin charges on individuals whilst collectively

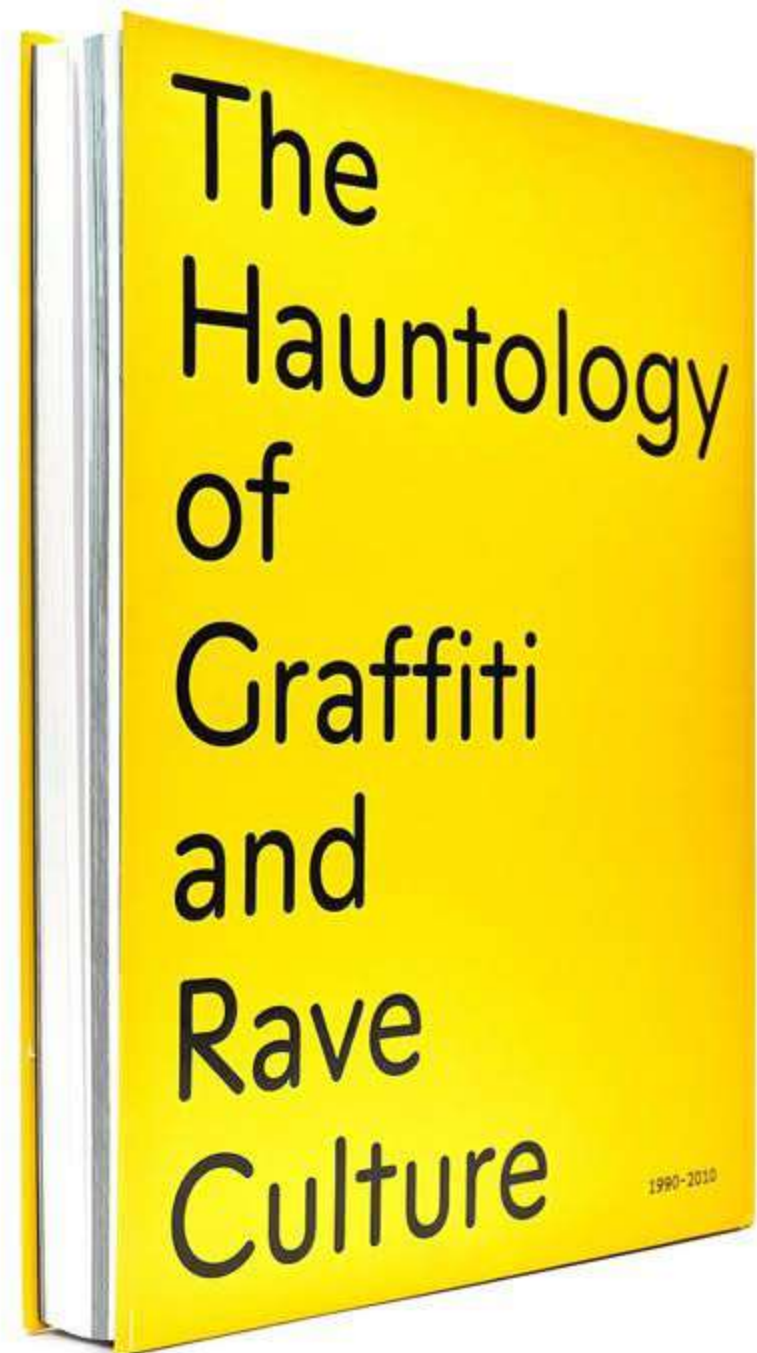
elevating the criminal charge to conspiracy for the entire crew. The increased speed of execution through teamwork inevitably slowed down individual style development, as graffiti was already struggling to move beyond the 20th Century. Older generations often hold onto nostalgia for an idealised past. Still, there was a feeling beginning to emerge that the technological developments of styles in Europe that peaked in the '90s/'00s had since haunted contemporary graffiti. The globalisation of graffiti supplies led to a proliferation of cheap, good-quality spray paint, which started to homogenise the pieces, as they all tended to share the same shiny resin finish. In contrast, much of the graffiti made on trains in the 20th Century was a combination of racked brands made up of different compendiums of chemical finishes, which added a layered dimensionality to the work and gave the pieces a story and soul. The complicated art of racking was as much a part of the style's character as the aesthetic flow and defined a writer's position within a closed hegemonic system based on vice, virtue, and vandalism.

REIMAGINED  
FUTURES

PAST  
LIVES  
TODAY

Initially, the Ghosts in the Machine book was intended to be a love letter celebrating the counter-hegemonic spirit of graffiti and rave culture in the cornerstone of the 20th/21st centuries. The first draft was made in my head chef's office, borrowing his photocopier, Pritt Stick and scissors after he bugged off home every night back in 2012. This handwritten, phonebook-sized 'promo copy' was then sent by post to various European publishers as a time capsule of archival photographs. A precarious verbal 'carrot and stick' deal was offered to me ('show me 1000 words, and you might get an advance'), followed by a hollow promise ('show 5000 more and so on') sort of affair which proved to be all stick, no carrot. Despite 'Carrot-Cake', I gingerly continued to prepare the book with no publisher. Then, midway through production, the pandemic blew in, so I borrowed a 'burner laptop' from my barrister friend and locked myself in my bunker. A more academic influence began to take the book down a Foucault-sized rabbit hole, shifting how I viewed these past lives today.

The subcultural ritual of reclaiming space within neighbourhoods and institutions thrives within the liminal spaces that exist in between and parallel to normative society's notion of utopia and dystopia. Labelled by Foucault as heterotopias, these worlds within worlds can only be entered by a rite of passage, whether it's insider knowledge, a set of master keys, security codes, passwords, or just being



The  
Hauntology  
of  
Graffiti  
and  
Rave  
Culture

1990-2010