
Official Graffiti of the Everyday

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This article focuses attention on “official graffiti” or regulatory signs typified by highway signs and the most invasive and emblematic piece of official graffiti, the prohibition circle with its diagonal red slash used in the iconic representation No Smoking. Establishing the range and pervasiveness of official graffiti in everyday life (as prohibitions, warnings, advisories, instructions, etc.), the authors approach these visual manifestations from the standpoint of the sociology of governance and analyze them as important instances of government at a distance. They explore the varieties and forms of such regulation and trace their expansion from public space to quasi-public space and to the private realm. Locating the texts and icons of official graffiti within implied or express discursive frameworks, the authors point to the construction of objects and subjects of regulation and to regulatory agents as “absent experts” and address the key role of the construction of danger and the link to insurance principles in a “risk society.” They also examine resistance through actions of defacement and avoidance that result in the complex order and disorder of surfaces and spaces. Official graffiti manifests a distinctive form of hegemony that is exercised through the small, daily acts of everyday governance.

Signs, signs, everywhere a sign!
 Blocking up the landscape, breaking my mind!
 Do this! Don't do that!
 Can't you read the sign?
 —“Signs” by The Five Man Electrical Band
 (TGS Recording 1995)

I. Official Graffiti¹

Regulation is an inescapable part of everyday life. One significant form is the taken-for-granted regulation, epitomized by

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¹ We apologize to linguistic purists for using the plural form *graffiti* throughout (we treat the term as a collective noun that can be either singular or plural). Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not yet designate the singular *graffito* as archaic, we suggest that it long ago achieved that status which entitles it to rest in unused peace.

the ubiquitous road traffic signs, the signs displayed on buildings of public access, Entry and Exit (or In and Out), and those that have more recently invaded the private sphere with the mushrooming of that most invasive and emblematic piece of official graffiti, the prohibition circle with its diagonal red slash across the circle warning, for example, No Smoking. It is these signs that we designate official graffiti. Official graffiti is an endemic feature of the present.

In coining the concept *official graffiti* we seek to make a number of points. The term *graffiti* has generally been reserved for the transgressive adornment or defacement, depending on your point of view, of public sites (Ferrell 1993; Lachmann 1988). Our conception of an “official” graffiti suggests that such visible forms of regulation act to mark, scar, and deface public spaces. Our use of the term *graffiti* to denote official regulatory signs does not seek to deny the transgressive and subversive qualities of street graffiti. Indeed, we believe that our discussion of how official graffiti works serves to contextualize the subversive qualities of marginal modes of visible resistance. Hence we seek to bring official and unofficial graffiti into the same frame. We also draw attention to the way in which we use the idea of “official.” “Official” is a status that not only marks formal legitimacy but also asserts legitimacy; the same No Smoking sign adorns law courts, restaurants, and stores, has found its way onto the front doors of private homes. It is the appearance of official status that is the key. Thus, we use *official* in a way that goes far beyond the formal governmental regimes of road traffic signs. As we seek to demonstrate in our discussion of the private use of official graffiti, there is a persistent blurring of the public-private divide.

Regulation and its close ally, law, stand in a paradoxical relationship. This paradox is expressed within the everyday world in which we expect “the law” to articulate a powerful brew of rules and values, to stand for both our rights and for what is right. This comforting presence of law is conjured up in the rhetoric of politicians and policymakers whereby law is persistently called on to regulate an ever expanding range of aspects of life that appear troublesome, unpredictable, or somehow dangerous. Yet when laws already exist and do not seem to work, we are reluctant to question the regulatory impulse, but instead seek to make further laws to the detriment of the laws already in place.² There seems to be an automatic assumption, characterized by the disposition toward “legal imperialism,” that the solution to social

² The recent public panic in Ontario over the existence of after-hours clubs is an example of this typical response. After several late-night shootings in Toronto, the Ontario Government suggested that legislation be brought in to regulate “after-hours clubs,” which were already unlawful under the Liquor Licence Act. The government found itself in the somewhat embarrassing position of having to explain why they wanted to regulate something that was already unlawful, but this did not inhibit the urge for further legislative intervention.

problems is through the invocation of more law (Hunt 1993:327). It seems that whenever people feel that the fabric of society has been loosened, the law is perceived as the last defense, the last hope for the enforcement of morality and order. Similarly, even though we experience regulation as intrusive and inconvenient, we are always ready to call for more regulation when its failure inconveniences us; we curse the illegal parker, call for tighter regulation of parking, but will take an illegal space in an emergency. The paradox emerges when, at the same time that we increasingly rely on legal and regulatory intervention, this intervention is experienced as an external intrusion, a resented restraint on autonomy.³

Lest we fall victim to the extravagant claims made for law and regulation resonant in their own discourses, we need to remind ourselves of just how trivial, petty, intrusive, and unsuccessful regulation so often is. Care is needed, however, for in pointing out the triviality of much regulation, we do not imply that regulation and law are unimportant. Indeed, this article explores the contention that regulation can, at one and the same time, be both trivial and important. *Prima facie* evidence for regulatory trivia is provided by the fact that most of us go about resisting and offending against regulatory efforts over our daily lives, from illegal photocopying and participation in undeclared cash transactions, to regularly committing a variety of motor vehicle offenses. We are faced with such a array of injunctions, warnings, directions, and threats that the breaking or avoidance of regulation becomes expected and normal. Regulation even appears in places where we fully expect the opposite, such as the rule-littered space of ostensibly “wild” or “natural” parks and reserves whose contrast with our regulated urban environments forms their very attraction for our recreational activity.⁴ In short, never before has regulation seemed both so important and so trivial, so petty but so entirely normal. It is this world of everyday regulation which we seek to characterize as permeated with “official graffiti,” which consists of a great profusion of regulatory signs, notices, symbols, and instructions that figure in everyday life.

We make no claim to resolve this paradox of law and regulation; we are concerned to take a closer look at official graffiti itself, which, because of its pervasive normalcy, has largely es-

³ This paradox is given a somewhat different conceptualization in Habermas's (1987) discussion of juridification, in which the expansion of legal intervention is identified as both an intrusion into the lifeworld, and yet at the same time exhibits a capacity to protect the lifeworld from further colonization by the economic and political systems (pp. 356-73).

⁴ There are significant and fascinating issues around the link between regulation and the social construction of “wilderness” and “nature” whose attraction lies precisely in the fact that they are in a domain outside the ordered regimen of industrial society and yet, as the same time, precisely for this reason are “dangerous,” a repository of risks, so that parks and nature reserves are some of the most intensively regulated social spaces, abounding with official graffiti: No Fires, Don't Feed the Bears, No Swimming.

caped scrutiny. Our discussion leaves the larger paradox in the background where we can keep an eye on it, and moves to explore the significance of prohibitions, warnings, directions, advice, and watches. Far from being trivial, we believe official graffiti is an expression of a particular type of regulatory configuration, one that can be interrogated as part of a characteristic practice of modern governance.

II. Toward a Sociology of Governance

Our approach is to examine official graffiti through the sociology of governance. The focus on governance concentrates attention on social action that controls, restrains, limits, directs, molds, facilitates, and empowers. It builds on that part of Foucault's work which developed the idea of "governmentality" (Foucault 1991).⁵ The concept of governance provides a tool for interrogating the practices and locations of micro powers; it facilitates the questioning of the multifaceted experiences of being administered. The idea of governance recognizes that political power is exercised "through a multitude of agencies and techniques, some of which are only loosely associated with the executives and bureaucracies of the formal organs of state" (Miller & Rose 1990:1). This recognition emphasizes the processes and "intellectual technologies" involved in constructing and regulating social objects from locations that may include, but are far from limited to, constitutional governments. Our approach recasts the state/civil society distinction as one that is blurred and permeable but still intact; it is a conceptualization that responds to an increasing scholarly chorus that questions the usefulness of this distinction.⁶

The concept of governance is useful for another reason; it provides for the possibility of constructing micro-macro links by connecting the way in which "mentalities" of government and forms of "knowing," acquired in both personal and institutional settings, are related and connected in webs of regulatory configurations. As such, the study of governance requires an examination of social distance, or "government at a distance" which involves a "delicate affiliation of a loose assemblage of agents and agencies" (Miller & Rose 1990:9). The concept of governance also helps to address a crucial question that Latour (1987:223) raises about the nature of power and repression: How is it possi-

⁵ The neo-Foucauldian sociology of governance is represented by the work of Mitchell Dean (1991), Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (Rose 1989, 1993; Miller & Rose 1990), Colin Gordon (1991), George Steinmetz (1993), Alan Hunt and Gary Wickham (1994; Hunt 1996).

⁶ For example, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1985:302) comments that "the dualism state/civil society was never unequivocal . . . it was from the start pregnant with contradictions and bound to be in permanent crisis"; see also Rose (1987:8).

ble “to act at a distance on unfamiliar events, places and people?”⁷ The governance approach examines the way in which power is exercised in daily routines and is manifested in everyday consciousness.

Governance is viewed as projects that involve specific practices and discursive tactics. Taking our cue from Foucault, the advantage of conceptualizing governance as a practice is that it enables us to see the fluid, oscillating process that is constantly revising, repeating, realizing, failing, and initiating its effort of constructing and positioning social objects. Governance is always an ongoing set of practices that persists until its object or target undergoes some significant shifts to a reconstructed object or is abandoned. Governance involves a repetition of attempts; it is rarely, if ever, complete.

Because this conception of governance recognizes the importance of the state as a sphere of power along with other locations, we are able to avail ourselves of Gramsci’s conception of hegemony. Indeed, in examining the presence of official graffiti as an aspect of hegemony, we may be able to tease out distinctively modern nuances of how hegemony is exercised. Gramsci argued that hegemony involved “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (1971:12). Only in moments of “crisis of command” is state coercive power brought to bear on those who do not consent. This consent is often exercised “through the so called private organizations, like the Church, the trade unions, the schools, etc.” (ibid., p. 56). Expressed in terms of governance, hegemony involves leadership that is exercised in the act of governing; the use of state violence signals that the leadership has failed to convince the majority that their actions are reasonable and in the common interest. As Gramsci argues: “If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer ‘leading’, but only ‘dominant’, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc.” (ibid., pp. 275–76). In other words, consensus involves the everyday practices whereby people make sense of their situation and their perceptions that the exercise of authority is congruent with what they experience as “natural” or “normal” (normalization), that

⁷ Peter Dale Scott (1993) adopts the conceptual stance of governance in discussing the political corruption that surrounded the investigation of the Kennedy assassination. He comments on the lack of a coherent account generated by the many investigations of the president’s murder: “I believe this failure has been an unnecessary one, caused by the tunnel vision of most critics and their opponents. They have been too fixated on the least answerable question: Who really killed the President? And they have paid far too little attention to the contextual question, both more important and paradoxically more easy to answer: What were the structural defects in governance and society that allowed this huge crime to be so badly investigated?” (p. 4).

no other obvious alternative is present to which they can turn. This point is nicely expressed by Isaac Barrow who back in 1677 offered his advice on the proper conduct of the Catholic leadership: "The Bishop's governance should be so gentle and easie, that men hardly can be unwilling to comply with it" (Oxford English Dictionary 1989:1181).

III. Locating Regulation

Before examining official graffiti as a distinctive regulatory form, it is necessary to consider the general features of regulation by conceptualizing the way in which regulation acts on social reality, how autonomous configurations of regulation orient themselves both across and within particular historical events. We make use of the idea of configuration because regulation rarely appears in some pure form; rather it works through groupings or clusters of different types of regulation. A configuration is composed of several elements that orient and shift within regulatory occurrences: the object of regulation and the regulatory agent shift and orient themselves as part of a regulatory effort guided by specific strategies. A configuration is a spatial metaphor that implies social distance, involving both space and time, which are themselves socially constructed realities. This metaphor is useful in that it takes account of the presence and absence of social actors and the distances between them and the social constructions of reality which they reflect and act upon in the material world. On the other hand, it is important to note that this is only a metaphor, and that we should be cautious about taking it literally. In this respect, we should view the metaphor of configuration in the context of Althusser's (1971) discussion of a "descriptive theory," one which provides a good starting point for description, but which runs the risk of constraining the analysis within the imagery of the metaphor adopted.⁸

Regulation involves a distinctive configuration of discourses and practices. Without offering an extended treatment, these elements can be introduced. Regulation requires the production of knowledge that is the work of officials and experts. Some of this knowledge production is socially visible, such as that of doctors, police officers, and social workers; but much has low levels of visibility, conducted by administrators who rarely leave their offices. Official knowledge is important because of the role it plays in constructing "objects of regulation," in quantifying and objectifying aspects of social life so that they can be rendered amenable to observation, surveillance, processing, and thus regulation. The knowledge contained in certain forms of technology allows

⁸ "Every descriptive theory thus runs the risk of 'blocking' the development of the theory, and yet that development is essential" (Althusser 1971:130).

social practices to be objectified as observable and measurable forms. For example, photo-radar technology constructs “speed,” while parking meters construct both space and time such that they can be rented and therefore also violated.

“Regulatory strategy” is created when knowledge is transformed into legislative form or, at least, generates some loose set of organized social actions that can be applied systematically (Hunt 1993:319). Legislative strategy can be understood in an extension of Foucault’s power/knowledge relation, as power/knowledge/regulation. Knowledge is transformed into a form capable of impacting social life through different configurations of regulation that rely on information, expertise, and policies that come together as strategies.

Regulatory objects are always socially constructed; their construction depends on a particular type of “mentality” anchored in the social reality of a specific time and place. While regulatory objects can be reconstructed and shifted, as often happens with shifting targets of criminalization, so also can they be deconstructed and abandoned. A crucial part of the dynamic of the regulatory object is a tension that exists between the individual and the aggregate: objects of regulation are usually constructed as aggregates, such as “welfare recipients” or “child molesters,” as parts of identifiable, quantifiable populations. However, once an object is identified within a larger aggregate object, the strategy has to adjust to the fact that officials have extracted an individual from a constructed population and must move to process the contingencies of an individual. It is important to take account of the tension inherent in the construction of the object, a construction that includes both aggregate and individual qualities. This process can be illustrated in the example of parking violations. The object of regulation, constructed as the “motor vehicle driver,” is targeted through a specific strategy that utilizes constructed agents and a specific discourse involving such elements as “no parking zone,” “rented time,” and “vehicle owner.” However, when an individual driver violates the regulatory norms, a regulatory process is initiated; she receives a citation or his vehicle is towed. Thus the regulatory configuration must deal with individual action within the construction of an aggregate object or target. Thus for a regulatory configuration to be effective and legitimate, the construction of the aggregate object must anticipate the consequences of capturing specific actors within the objectified population.

“Regulatory agents” are responsible for selecting and initiating regulatory activities such as surveillance, reporting, inspection, warning, information collection, and invoking legal and bureaucratic process. The agent usually operates within some framework of legitimacy that is visible; a police badge or a grocery clerk uniform. It is important to note that regulatory agents

are usually also themselves objects of regulation; they enforce what Hart (1961) called primary rules, but are themselves regulated by secondary rules. These secondary rules can become so prominent in regulatory configurations that primary rules are often displaced by the secondary rules governing agents. This is often illustrated in labor disputes where regulatory agents, as a form of protest, “work to rule” and zealously do everything by the book, frustrating the public service they are carrying out.⁹

An essential aspect of regulatory configurations is the relationship between regulatory objects and agents. This relationship can be envisioned as a spectrum where, at one extreme, the object and agent overlap to the extent that the object is self-regulating and where, to the other extreme, the object must be sought out by the agent and impacted with specific processes and sanctions. Many regulatory efforts, employing multiple configurations directed toward shifting an object to a reconstructed position, utilize strategies that place the object and agent at a social distance from each other. As we will seek to show, official graffiti provides a prime instance of the construction of self-regulating objects. Woodiwiss’s (1990) discussion of “transpositioning” of objects and agents addresses the importance of this positionality of regulatory objects as legal subjects. Legal discourse “provides a means whereby the objects of legal interest may be shifted from position to position within a particular disciplinary network” (*ibid.*, p. 113; emphasis omitted). Getting married or divorced, reaching the age of majority or seniority, repositions subjects within regulatory configurations and official documentary systems that construct elements of social life.

It is important to stress that regulatory projects often create unexpected consequences due to the constructed nature of both objects and agents. While objects of regulation can be located within specific social actors, they can also be constructed in a way that involves object displacement. The ability of people to imagine themselves in places or circumstances other than the ones that they inhabit provides for a social imaginary which can construct objects of regulation that are “imagined,” but not imaginary. Within regulatory configurations, the objects of regulation are constructed both in the social world and in the social imaginary; the boundaries between the two do not always make for regulatory efforts that are successful or predictable. For example, neighborhood watch programs construct a “stranger” who is acted on both as a real violator who is actually caught committing criminal acts and as a violator who is only imagined, but nevertheless creates real consequences because people act on their imaginings by perhaps locking their doors or staying inside. But

⁹ For example, Canadian police officers, who are unable to strike lawfully, have often cited health and safety legislation and internal policy in their refusal to carry out certain duties as part of a protest.

there is also displacement signified; the danger comes from an outsider, not from within the community. Thus, regulatory efforts are then directed at both violators who are known to be “real” (a thief “caught” by the police) and violators people imagine to be real (“the stranger” who talks to children in the street).

IV. Official Graffiti of the Everyday

Having sketched some of the features of regulatory configurations, we now explore how a particular kind of configuration might assist us in unpacking the highly regulated nature of modern life. Our interest in official graffiti was sparked by questions: How are regulatory efforts articulated in the everyday? How are regulatory efforts expressed in visually explicit ways? We take as the paradigm case the signs posted in visible ways, usually in public spaces, such as No Smoking or No Entry. It is important to note that not all regulatory efforts lend themselves to this form of articulation. For example, we may see a sign in a cafeteria indicating No Smoking, but we do not see a sign that says No Murder. It is not that one is trivial and the other important; rather this difference serves to underline the spatial aspects of regulatory prohibitions; smoking is permitted in some spaces/places, but murder is not permitted anywhere. Signs in crowded public places warn of the danger of pickpockets even though its form is that of a hand intruding into a pocket; we read this sign not as No Pick Pocketing but as Beware of Pickpockets, indicating a site of heightened risk.¹⁰

As a form of regulatory action, such prohibitory signs can be viewed as part of a much larger series of articulations that seek to direct the behavior of people in a wide variety of social situations and spaces. Prohibitory signs are never simply iconic injunctions against specific acts, they generally function not only as commands but also involve a mix of an order along with an entreaty. “No Smoking” invokes not only the command “Don’t Smoke” but also the request, not certain that it will be successful, “Please, Don’t Smoke.” This mixed message is especially evident in the familiar No U-Turn road sign, which implants the idea that this spot is a favorite location for transgressors; at one and the same time it orders compliance, urges us not to commit the infraction (by implying danger and risk), and also incites us to transgress.

Official graffiti cannot simply be counterposed to the random, often subversive unofficial or street graffiti. As a form of

¹⁰ Our solution to the question of why we do not encounter No Murder signs does not address the interesting issue of what, if anything, determines the limits of iconic representation in particular and official graffiti more generally. For present purposes we merely note the limited lexicon of such representations; a sign depicting a prostrate corpse pierced by a knife might run the risk of suggesting that stabbing is prohibited but that strangulation is not.

vandalism, graffiti is exercised by marginal groups who, denied legitimate outlets, express “pent up social and political concerns” (Nwoye 1993). Homeless young people use graffiti to express the nightmarish existence of street life that often includes overt violence and prostitution (Luna 1987). Graffitiists deface institutional surfaces as a random way to express or attack the “system.” However, we stress that both types occupy similar spatial territory; this is seen most clearly when we notice that street graffiti often manifests itself in the defacement of official graffiti. Prohibitory signs are not only defaced but are targets for ironic substitutions; No Bikes on a store window is transformed into Nikes, Please Don’t Smoke into Please Smoke. One consequence has been the growth of institutional anti-graffiti campaigns that have come to constitute an industry in their own right, with their own experts on graffiti removal. Take, for example, the anti-graffiti activist Professor Graham W. Ashworth, Director of Keep Britain Tidy:

[W]hether we suffer enforced exposure to graffiti in our daily lives, whether we have a campaigning role to improve local environments or whether we carry a responsibility for graffiti removal, the anti-graffitists can now fight back! . . . Though graffiti does indicate a human presence I believe that, along with litter and fly posting, it is endured rather than accepted, invariably creating an atmosphere of neglect and unease rather than “life.” (Whitford 1992:xi–xii)

Note that Ashworth admits no possibility that official graffiti might adversely effect the quality of the environment.

The contrast between official and street graffiti lies in the claim to authority and legitimacy of the former. This authority is not simply a legal authority exemplified in road signs but derives also from its standardized and impersonal form, underlined by its aspiration to a fixed and permanent form. Official graffiti invokes authority from a multiplicity of sources, public, quasi-public, and private, and is not restricted to governmental agencies. Indeed it is an important part of our argument that the deployment of official graffiti is a significant component that can be added to the range of activities considered in Macaulay’s account (1986) of “private government.” Official graffiti can be viewed as a visible manifestation of hyperlexis or legal overload, one of whose mechanisms is the reduction of rule pronouncement to a lexicon of familiar and interchangeable icons. The paradigm case is provided by road traffic legislation whose iconic manifestations now provide an international discourse of prohibition, warning, and advice. More generally at the level of the streetscape, the stamping, posting, and flashing of official graffiti appropriates the casual, temporary nature of street graffiti and reinforces a visual order that, while prohibiting unofficial graffiti, competes for the same space. Thus No Bill Posting acts as an

invitation to flyposting and sets in train a war between official and unofficial discourses. Flyposting does not compete in the same discursive register as official graffiti; it is no “Democracy Wall,” but it is a site of competition between youth or popular culture and official projects of order and tidiness.

Much of what we treat as official graffiti involves the assertion of an implied authority in which there is an appropriation of the repertoire of formal icons into the quasi-public and private realm. Public parks used to prominently display the full legal text of the applicable bylaws unconcerned that few, if any, would read them. The process of regulatory reduction has substituted iconic representations of No Litter, No Dogs, etc. Similarly, No Parking signs litter the urban landscape; while some derive their authority from public law and others from property law, many are no more than an attempt to harness an implied authority as when residents purport to regulate on-street parking outside their houses. As we will show, the attempt to mobilize implied authority lies at the heart of the expansionary nature of official graffiti.

At this stage we offer a provisional catalogue of the various forms of official graffiti. Since we contend that official graffiti have no fixed boundaries, we make no claim to provide an exhaustive catalogue.

Table 1. Examples of Official Graffiti from the Canadian Experience

Mode of Articulation	Examples
Prohibitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various NO icons prohibiting object and/or activities on a wide variety of surfaces • “Do Not Litter” sign in park • “Please Don’t Litter” insignia on fast food napkin • “No Shirt, No Shoes, No Service” sign on restaurant door • “Do Not Use in Bathtub” decal on hairdryer
Warnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Keep out of reach of children” on lotion packaging • “Hold Handrail/Attend Children” decal on escalator • “Smoking Causes Cancer” notice on cigarettes packaging • “HOT!” notice on coffee cup with prohibitory icon • “Not Made For Commercial Use” decal on coffee maker
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign in library queue: “Stand Here and Have Books Open” • Instant coffee packaging: “Add Boiling Water and Stir” • “Eight Items or Less” sign at grocery checkout • “Entrance” and “Exit” signs in theatre • Transfer instructions on bus ticket
Advisories and Alerts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childproofing/Crimeproofing pamphlets, videos, posters • Crime wave/Crime occurrence posters • Forest Fire/Weather Hazard Advisory signs
Watches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage announcing electronic surveillance in ATM kiosks • Signage for Neighborhood Watch/Block Parent programs • “On Patrol” notices and decals, i.e., “Cabbies on Patrol” • Signage/Posters for “Report a Prowler” Programs

Our conception of official graffiti is intentionally broad; Table 1 moves from the obvious case of prohibitory regulation to

embrace other forms of quasi-official signs in public spaces for which we use the example of Neighborhood Watch signs. We further extend our conceptualization to embrace a wide range of warnings, directions, and advisories. Here we take packaging labels as our example. Some justification is needed for this extension of the domain of official graffiti.

Our broad use of the concept *official graffiti* is justified by the common form that these mechanisms share. First and foremost is the fact that they are all regulatory projects in that they intervene in the governance of conduct, whether it be in the performance of driving a car, of consuming a pharmaceutical product, or of using a consumer product.

The second shared feature lies in the fact that they invoke a common underlying discursive framework. This shared form involves a construction with three elements: an implied reader, an implied regulatory object, and an implied author who exercises regulatory authority. Thus, for example, road signs emanate from a statutory transport or highways authority and mobilize the authority of the police for enforcement; they are directed at the general class of motorists (or at some group therein as in No Truck signs) and they imply the object of regulating driving conduct. Similarly pharmaceutical directions imply a medico-pharmaceutical authority; the advice to "Take before/after meal" appeals to the privileged knowledge of this authority. Such advice is directed toward the consumer of the product and seeks to govern the consumption of pharmaceutical products. The individuals at whom official graffiti are directed are constructed by multiple gazes which infer the existence of these absent and sometimes distant centers of authority. In the street, parking regulations reveal the authority of municipal government and of police; in semipublic space such as the shopping mall, the corporate authority of property owners is summoned to aid, and in private spaces of consumption, packaging and labeling invokes the distant authority of what we call "absent experts," of doctors, pharmacists, nutritionists, and many more.

The regulatory object itself is often implicit, as in the case of road signs which imply a concern with road safety or product labeling directed at consumer protection. The regulatory objective may, however, change over time. For example, the instructions on condom packets are today no longer directed to their contraceptive function, but have become part of the contemporary discourse about AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

Condoms, when properly used, may help reduce the risk of catching or spreading many Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), however they cannot eliminate the risk. (Ramses Sensitol package)

Note the shift in the regulatory object and also the tone of danger and risk struck by this formulation. Sex remains hazardous even though the nature of the risk seems to have changed.

Third, we identify a distinctively public character inherent in official graffiti. The most obvious expression involves projects directed at governing public space; many forms of official graffiti are associated with public space as in road signs and notices displayed in places of public resort (No Parking, No Smoking). However, they form part of a public discourse that persistently blurs the boundaries between public and private. Regulatory icons have a tendency, as we have already noted, to migrate from public to private space; thus the ubiquitous No Smoking icon originated in the public arena has found its way into common private usage in homes and vehicles. Prohibitory icons have become commonplace on consumer packaging. The expansion of official graffiti from the public to the private exemplified what Habermas (1987) calls the colonizing of the lifeworld.

It should be noted that the representational capacity of regulatory authors is often stretched; No Littering is effectively captured by a slash through an opened tin can, and successful representation has been rewarded with rapid globalization of the icon. No Pollution is more difficult to represent with an icon; no standard form has yet been secured, and in the absence of a suitable icon, written text must suffice. This example points to the fact that official graffiti works within a restricted, but slowly expanding, lexicon.¹¹ It may be noted that the standard iconic representation derived from road signs that distinguish between commands and warnings has been disseminated into wider usage with an ideogram of a bear placed within an unslashed red circle being used as a warning of possible presence of "dangerous" animals. Official graffiti has also expanded into the realm of the political; placards, stickers, and label badges enjoin No Nukes, No Dumping, and a myriad other campaigns by representing the offending project within the standard prohibitory red slashed circle.

A fourth general feature of official graffiti is that it involves a distinctive spatial dimension in being both mobile and fixed, an idea that Bruno Latour (1986:21) captures imaginatively as "immutable mobiles." Official graffiti are attached to many distinctive sites. Road traffic signs have their own specially erected locations; prohibitions are affixed to entrances, doors, walls, and other commonly used spaces of social passage; packaging and labels carry warnings, advice, and instructions in many locations. These signs and notices, whose form conveys an official pronouncement, are invested with both a sense of permanence and

¹¹ This expansion of the iconic repertoire is aided by the now common provision in computer software of ever larger sets of iconic representations ready to be deposited at will into the public arena.

an appearance of legitimacy. Despite this sense of permanence, official graffiti is used in both “stationary” and “mobile” forms. Some graffiti are affixed to surfaces as in the cases of stickers and labels attached to entrance doors, to tables and walls, and to consumer packaging and consumer products themselves. Other graffiti are affixed to stands that can be moved around within a specific space, such as Wait Here or Queue Here signs. The more stationary genre of signs often have the additional property of marking boundaries, such as No Trespassing signs on property boundaries, No Excessive Noise at Any Time notices at the entrance to campgrounds, Neighborhood Watch signs serving to mark the boundaries of residential communities. Such warnings have also become highly mobile, being emblazoned on disposable objects such as parking permits, concert tickets, and a wide variety of consumer packaging.

We do not claim that all these features are present in equal proportion in the items in our typology of official graffiti, but each category combines some or all of these distinctive characteristics. In addition some features are more situationally specific.

Official graffiti is used increasingly in such a way as to responsabilize its reader, that is, to enjoin individuals to accept responsibility for their conduct by reference to some asserted social or ethical value.¹² This feature is readily discernible in such injunctions as No Litter and Don't Feed the Animals, which enjoin the reader to share a concern with the tidiness of social spaces and the well-being of animals.¹³

Another feature sometimes to be found is that official graffiti may be present in both what Goffman (1959:137–40) calls “front” and “back stage” performances. A doughnut shop that uses official graffiti to declare No Loitering in its vicinity at the same time confronts staff behind the counter with a Don't Forget to Smile sticker on the cash register. The dual nature of these performances emphasizes the presence of both primary and secondary rules at play within these configurations, regulating both the objects and agents of regulation. Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor is also useful in evoking the presence of an “audience” or what we have called the implied reader; in both front and back stage performances, an audience that is part of the aggregate nature of the constructed object of regulation.

The omnipresent prohibitory icon, the red circle slashed by a diagonal, is the paradigm example of globalization. No Littering signs have now reached Antarctica. This icon exhibits an almost

¹² Mitchell Dean (1991:218) illustrates the link between governance and responsabilization when he stresses the significant feature of the English 1834 poor law which made male “breadwinners” responsible for the support of their wives and children.

¹³ An extreme extension of responsabilization is found in the cards issued to Canadian soldiers on active service, one of whose injunctions reads, “Do not maim, torture or kill prisoners.”

infinite pluralism in that the objects of regulation can be represented as pictographs; whatever is to be prohibited can be represented within the circle, only then to be slashed into regulatory purdah. The prohibitory icon deploys a semiotic contradiction, the object of regulation must first be constructed only then to be prohibited, a contradiction that should remind us of the historically specific constructed nature of all regulatory projects. It is perhaps the perfect iconic representation of “postmodern modernity” (White 1990); any offending object or activity can be represented and inserted in the ubiquitous slashed red circle.

Official graffiti is heavily dependent on its context, in drawing on one or more public discourses that are connected to some construction of the public good. These contexts characteristically construct some social risk or danger. They constitute an implied audience that is warned of the risk; for example, the risks from smoking, from using drugs or alcohol. The risks of lighting campfires, of not wearing a seatbelt, or of not using a condom properly all serve to emphasize the ever present risks and dangers inherent in everyday life. Even the ubiquitous Exit sign suggests the possibility of an emergency and prepares us in case we need an escape route.

The reader constructed in the regulatory project of official graffiti is not merely identified as “motorist,” “consumer,” etc., but is constructed in socially significant ways. We suggest that a distinctive moralization is often present within the regulatory discourse, which is particularly relevant when such moralization is unintended. For example, many consumer advisories and warnings construct consumers/users in such a way as to imply that they are ignorant, feckless, or helpless. The condom user is told of the necessity to “First open the packet,” the taker of pharmaceutical pills is similarly warned against swallowing the pill before removing the protective wrapping. The consumer is infantilized. On the other hand, this diminution of the reader enhances the distant and absent authority of the expert who presides over our well-being. This social construction of reader/author reveals a significant contradiction. The contemporary deluge of advice and warnings forms part of the expanding discourse of “consumer protection” which has as an important motif the empowerment of the consumer, but we suggest that this motif is persistently undermined by discursive forms that talk down to and infantilize the consumer.¹⁴

Another more evident moralization of advisories and warnings is found in the construction of the dangerous stranger who lurks ready to victimize. Neighborhood watch programs employ the standard prohibitory icon with the “prohibited” object repre-

¹⁴ These discourses of consumer protection also have consequences for the design and operation of products. In the name of child protection, pill bottles and household cleaners are rendered unusable by all but the most dexterous.

sented as a stooping stranger in an ominous long coat.¹⁵ Likewise, pamphlets and videos advising about child or senior safety focus on the danger represented by the stranger. For example, the dangerous stranger is vividly described in the official pamphlet *Ontario Seniors Crime-Proofing—It's a Way of Life* distributed by the Ontario government.

If you notice a suspicious loiterer, play it safe and call the police. . . . If approached by a stranger, stay calm, use common sense, try talking. Loud screams discourage many a would-be thief. . . . Be wary of Strangers who offer assistance if you have car trouble. Stay in your car, politely request the stranger to call a service truck for you, and stay put.

Note that these warnings are typically silent about what we know to be the danger presented by persons close to the “victim.”¹⁶ There is, in other words, a double moralization, not only in the construction of the danger as ominous stranger but also in ignoring the more disconcerting fact that dangers emanate from the everyday, the familiar, and the known. Signs that read Beware of Your Neighbor would undermine the ideological project of reassurance that underlies Neighborhood Watch and Block Parents projects.

It should be noted that the Watch regulatory technique has expanded significantly and now takes a considerable variety of forms. Regulations enjoin us to participate in the surveillance of neighborhoods, roadways, parks, railway tracks, and forests in which people are urged to report prowlers, vandals, drunk drivers, poachers, rowdy campers, and those who light forest fires. Watches are characteristic of most official graffiti in that they are highly mobile and mutable. They appear both as stationary and mobile forms. One icon can act as a logo, used in a variety of locations on a variety of object surfaces—the No Stranger icons illustrated on the incongruous location of sugar pack (see Fig. 1) is also used on Neighborhood Watch signs, plaques, posters, and police cruiser Crimestopper decals.

Warnings, it should be noted, are an ambiguous form of articulation in the sense that they often blur into the other categories. Thus the injunction Do Not Use in Bathtub (see Table 1) is couched in prohibitory form (Do Not), yet it also acts as a warning which is, in turn, closely linked to the provision of instructions for proper use. It is important to note that official graffiti is marked by considerable fluidity in its form; orders, warning, advice, direction, and instruction merge into one another. Yet the

¹⁵ The iconic “stranger” gives an implicit sexualization of danger; the long coat of “the flasher” is an already familiar imagery. The stranger is usually depicted as wearing a hat that invokes the gangsters of the 1930s, another evocative image of danger.

¹⁶ This equation of “danger” and “stranger” is not immutable. There was an important shift in the 1980s in the discourses around violence against women that largely abandoned the imagery of the lurking stranger and addressed issues of domestic abuse.



Fig. 1. Sugar pack series: Prohibitory icons for No Drugs, No Stranger, and Neighborhood Watch sign emblazoned on disposable sugar packets.

implied author of official graffiti always addresses the implied reader. These messages are directed at those who are presumed to be at risk in the act of using and consuming. Those who take medication have their pill containers labeled with “patient compliance” warnings such as For External Use Only; microwave oven users are warned, Do Not Use to Dry Household Pets; smokers are warned that Smoking Kills.

Directions can be seen as an extension of warnings; they guide a consumer through the use or consumption of the product. Figure 2 illustrates a series of icons used to direct the condom wearer. Each icon is linked to a brief written direction. It is important to note the way in which signficatory gaps are left to be filled in by the situational context. No sexual act is represented; yet the final icon features a foaming bar of soap that needs little explanation within the constructed discourse of sexual relations and the possibility of transmitted disease, but is significantly silent about what has preceded the act of cleansing. The soap even hints at the moralizing trope that sex is somehow “dirty.”



Fig. 2. Icons from condom directions

Directions are often used to create and support the marketing and image of products. A throat lozenge direction which reads “Allow lozenge to dissolve slowly in your mouth” constructs the lozenge not as something that is to be sucked indiscriminately but enhances its properties as a sophisticated medication that can be self-administered but must be used in a controlled manner. Many directions for products whose use might be thought to be self-evident, such as shampoo and hand lotions, nevertheless provide detailed and fundamentally redundant instructions.¹⁷ Directions are also used in public spaces for such

¹⁷ For example, a hand lotion urges: “Apply to hands twice daily, massaging on and around nails and cuticles” (Vaseline Lotion); a shampoo label tells us to “wet hair, add shampoo and lather, rinse and repeat if desired” (P.C. Pro Vitamin B5); a shaving cream instructs the user to “wash face with hot water and leave wet . . . release shaving cream into hand . . . spread evenly over beard” (No Name Shave Cream).

items as washroom handdryers, escalators, and many other familiar artifacts. Significantly, other familiar technologies remain unencumbered with direction; for example, elevators are presumed to be so familiar that even though users are enclosed in a confined space, they are not deemed to require instruction.

Official graffiti has become intimately connected with the technologies of insurance that characterize modern “risk society” (Beck 1992; Simon 1987). They have come to incorporate express or implied disclaimers of liability for potential harms or injuries. The instruction “Not to be taken internally” on weedkillers and domestic detergents does two things; it is a warning that constructs the user as inadequate or incompetent while at the same time it implies a disclaimer of legal liability. Official graffiti play a prominent role in avoiding corporate responsibility or legal liability, whether tortious or contractual, by constructing a double movement: by encouraging the use of a product or technology while at the same time relieving the manufacturer of possible liability arising from its use. One of the most vivid examples of this is a Burger King styrofoam coffee cup which is marked with the warning “Attention Hot” in four languages as well as a prohibitory icon slashing a steaming cup of coffee that is being spilled.¹⁸ What is remarkable about this prohibition is that the prohibited object in question—coffee cup—is exactly the same object as that which is depicted on its surface. As an object, the coffee cup seems to prohibit its own existence; yet commercial interest requires a semiotic gap to ensure for the possibility that some coffee might pass down the consumer’s throat. What, of course, it seeks to warn against is spilling the contents rather than prohibiting the container itself.

A fascinating case of implied disclaimer is provided by the phone company Bell Canada which, in promoting cellular phones, issues a safety icon representing a steering wheel grasped by two hands. It is precisely the technology being promoted that requires motorists to remove their hands from the steering wheel in order to use it. Bell and other cellular companies have reacted with hostility to suggestions that use of a cellular phone in a moving vehicle should be prohibited. These “disclaimers at a distance” are a widespread and varied instance of governance at a distance. Another common form are labeling instructions about safe disposal of environmentally dangerous substances. The responsibility for environmental protection is de-

¹⁸ Other notable examples include a champagne bottle with icons warning drinkers not to pop the cork off into their forehead (Tott’s); a range of prohibition icons featuring a martini glass displayed on “responsible drinking” leaflets distributed by a distillers’ association.

flected onto the consumer, and the producer thereby displays environmental “concern.”¹⁹

As an element of insurance practices of risk reduction, official graffiti seeks to manage “chance, hazard, probability, eventuality or randomness on the one hand, and those of loss or damage on the other” (Ewald 1991:199). Official graffiti exists in a world in which “accidents” are likely to happen at any time whether they take the form of product recalls, fire alarms, hail storms, food poisoning, improper condom wearing, or forest fires. Most official graffiti campaigns are connected to the efforts of governmental agencies, whether governments, corporations, or public utilities, to regulate the incidence of risk and protect themselves from legal liability. As a technology of insurance, configurations that utilize official graffiti often overlap with projects of education or public awareness campaigns. Efforts to combat AIDS or drunk driving are currently visible examples that employ regulatory efforts utilizing many types of official graffiti on precisely those products implicated in the risks themselves. It is difficult not to discern an element of hypocrisy in the “Drink responsibly” campaigns of the liquor industry.

Official graffiti employs many types of stylization; we make no claim to have fully catalogued these multiple articulations. They occur in a countless variety of forms, often using a selection of strategic articulations. For example, while prescription labels primarily take the form of both warnings and instructions, they also employ other discursive tropes. Of particular significance are those that invoke moral regulation in the sense that they normalize one form of behavior while discouraging other competing behaviors. This is especially pertinent where official graffiti constructs self-regulating behavior that invokes judgments about personal character and integrity. For example, labeling on prescription drugs and tobacco products deploys the powerful moral symbol of “addiction,” which suggests the moral failure of those who cannot exercise control over their consumption behavior. Thus, while an unofficial pilltaker faces the wrath of “Just say no to drugs” campaigns, the official pilltaker, who has been prescribed self-medicating products, acts under the aegis of medical authority. Even the legitimate pilltaker is still subject to a stigma, one Goffman (1963) described as that of being socially “managed”; and this, of course, is what patient compliance labels do. As an integral part of the pharmaceutical industry, compliance labels legitimize a drug taking that might otherwise be morally condemned, as well as facilitating the actual medicating itself.

As illustrated in Table 2, patient compliance labels are cross-referenced to specific types of medication so that each medicated

¹⁹ The most widespread and subtle example is the ever present recycling icon which both urges the consumer to recycle while demonstrating the environmental consciousness of the producer.

Table 2. Patient Compliance Labels as Official Graffiti

Articulation	Example
Directions to prepare body before medication	"take medication on an empty stomach"
Directions to prepare medication	"shake well and keep in refrigerator"
Warnings of effect of medication	
Body	"may cause discoloration of the urine or feces" "warning—this medication may permanently discolor soft contact lenses"
Behavior	"this drug may impair the ability to drive or operate machinery"
Directions for medication	
How to intake	"chew tablets before swallowing" "use as gargle—not to be swallowed" "do not chew or crush—swallow whole"
Where to intake	"for vaginal use only" "for rectal use only" "not for injection" "for external use only"
What to be taken with	"medication should be taken with plenty of water"
What not to be taken with	"not to be taken with juice"
Directions to maintain body for medication	"limit the effect of caffeine containing beverages—they may change the effects of the medication"
Prohibitions about refill authority	"according to law this prescription cannot be refilled more than five times nor refilled after 6 months"

patient can be provided with the proper official graffiti attached to their pill container (Compliance Label and Drug Reference Chart, August 1993: Pharmasystems Inc.). This sort of graffiti, using a wide range or articulations, attempts to construct "the patient" collecting a prescription into the regulated position of a docile consumer of pharmaceutical products, truly one of Foucault's (1977:138) "docile bodies." The dispensing of official graffiti becomes as important as the dispensing of the medication itself. As Table 2 shows, this involves the construction and interaction of the docile patient and the medication under the direction, at a distance, of pharmacological experts and, face to face, of the dispensing pharmacist.

Official graffiti thus constructs objects of regulation that are, at the same time, not only regulated but significantly self-regulating. The objects of regulation, whether consumer or patient, either become active regulatory agents to the extent that they regulate themselves, or they are policed by a network of absent experts. The everyday reality of official graffiti only works effectively to the extent that its objects routinely engage in self-govern-

ance. Official graffiti sets in motion unreflective acts of regulatory compliance; we spontaneously respond to Entry/Exit and the innumerable other manifestations of official graffiti. Yet it would be wrong to view compliance as automatic. The very fact of regulation generates the possibility of avoidance and resistance; we slip out past No Exit signs, transgress No Smoking notices, and routinely ignore No U-Turn signs. The implication is that we need to amend Foucault's dictum that power generates resistance in such a way as to insist that regulation is constituted by the coexistence of compliance and resistance.

V. Regulating the Everyday

We conclude by making some suggestions about the significance of the neglected sphere of the regulation of the everyday world. Official graffiti serves as a mediator of social reality. We have suggested that it vests meaning in permanent, semipermanent, and mobile forms through the articulation of warnings, prohibitions, directions, and advisories. They are, to borrow from Dorothy Smith (1990:211), "texts [that] speak in the absence of speakers; meaning is detached from local contexts of interpretation; the 'same' meaning can occur simultaneously in a multiplicity of socially and temporally disjointed settings." The ability of such texts to homogenize diverse and separate local settings is the key to their peculiar power, a power that seems especially pernicious in the texts of official graffiti deployed on an endless variety of surfaces, both private and public, stationary and mobile, situational and institutional. As forms of Latour's "immutable mobiles" they are inscriptions that allow "centres of authority" to reach out to regulate at a distance. Immutable mobiles allow an order such that "a few men consider millions as if they were in the palms of their hands" by translating "real" things into something that can be rendered into forms that can be managed and governed. For Latour (1986:28, 21) "there is nothing you can dominate as easily as a flat surface of a few square meters; there is nothing hidden or convoluted."

Official graffiti constructs an order of surfaces on which individuals are positioned as objects to be regulated by officially "defaced" surfaces that constantly surround the body in both public and private acts. Timothy Mitchell, describing the "world as exhibition" that colonized 19th-century Egypt, could just as easily be describing the presence of official graffiti in colonizing and occupying the everyday surfaces of today. "As with the new streets of the city, physical space—even respirable air—has become a surface and volume that can be divided up and marked out into places where individuals are positioned" (Mitchell 1991:78). The ordering of surfaces inflicted by the official graffiti of the everyday has the effect of preserving spatial expressions of power, for

example, by locking people into traffic patterns that organizes what Thomas Markus (1993) has called a “syntax of nextness,” a syntax that regulates access into “deep space” where power is located. This spatial organization is only too apparent in the official graffiti of institutional spaces.

Official graffiti is characteristic of other regulatory configurations in the paradox it generates: its regulatory appetite must always outstrip its regulatory capacity. While it speaks in a language of imperatives and prohibitions, it can only rarely admit a looser social policy style of governance, but such a derogation periodically emerges. As we have noted, it implores at the same time as it orders. The widespread case of police practice of not ticketing speeding motorists within a semi-officially designated band above the prescribed limit is one of the best-known instances. So voluminous and multitudinous are the requirements laid down by official graffiti that a world of full compliance is unimaginable. The very existence of official graffiti rests on an ever present and unstable flux between compliance and resistance. We do not wish to be understood as suggesting that regulation through official graffiti is trivial. Far from it, we suggest that the consequences of everyday avoidance/resistance are far from trivial: a No Parking sign becomes grounds for towing, infractions of speed limits result in ticket and higher insurance premium, flouting a No Loitering notice can result in arrest.

We suggest that official graffiti can fruitfully be thought of as an example of what we can call an ideography of ideology, of ideographs that utilize a wide lexicon of articulations and act discursively to shape subjectivity and to position social actors. Shifting configurations of regulation rely on this ideography to homogenize social relations and spaces so that targets of regulation can be more easily sought out and acted on. This is especially true with respect to the construction of self-regulation, where both responsibility and liability are discursively positioned within a blurred public/private distinction.

The paradox of regulation/resistance contains a telling contradiction in which individuals are united in their collective anonymity. The public spaces regulated by official graffiti are realms inhabited by “strangers.” As commentators from Georg Simmel to Lyn Lofland have observed, urban public spaces are typically peopled by strangers (Simmel 1950:402–8; Lofland 1973).²⁰ Reflection on official graffiti reveals that the strangers who share modern public spaces are not simply atomized or alienated in that they share the social constructions imposed on them by the official graffiti, as “drivers,” “pedestrians,” “customers,” etc. For the lonely crowd, public spaces are rendered familiar and navigable by the regulatory impact of official graffiti. Modern highways

²⁰ For an intriguing discussion of “the modern stranger” see Harman (1987).

hold little mystery since they share the globalization not only of standardized road signs but also of all too familiar advertising hoardings and billboards. If our formulations suggest to you that official graffiti is some new, only now revealed, master project of governance which, when added to Foucault's "discovery" of the disciplines, reveals new reaches of some hidden hand of ubiquitous power, let us quickly repudiate such an interpretation. Our contention is more prosaic, yet no less significant for all that. Our consideration of official graffiti, and its expansionary capacity, uncovers much about the way in which hegemony is exercised and consent secured in the small daily acts of everyday governance. Yet our sense of hegemony differs from Gramsci's. He posited a more or less unitary agent, a dominant class, that by uniting its allies and acting on the dominated masses secured the conditions that rendered government of diverse populations possible. In contrast we suggest that our attention to official graffiti reveals something of the way in which not only does governance increasingly take place at a distance but its authors also remain noticeably invisible; it involves governance without a governing subject being present. We suggest that it adds distinctively to Foucault's theme that the government of conduct is centrally concerned with processes of normalization;²¹ it does so by drawing attention to the absent author and an unspecified authority that points to both a growing depersonalization of governance and a more prominent role of absent experts. These characteristics of official graffiti as a form of governance do not suggest that there are no concentrations or condensations of power, but rather that they often function without being overtly present or visible. In this sense we have suggested that official graffiti is an exemplary form of governance in postmodern modernity.

We have argued that official graffiti involves a form of governance that is both taken for granted and whose very ubiquity incites to transgression. We suggest that there is an important issue here which requires further work than our material allows us to explore. The study of compliance has been primarily concerned with attempts to measure the degree of compliance and to improve compliance rates (Rodgers & Bullock 1977). We suggest that this question can be fruitfully recast by bringing compliance and resistance together. Resistance is not simply noncompliance but is itself a constituent of compliance in the sense that forms of governance offering endless possibility for avoidance, displacement, and evasion can serve to provide conditions that make a dense network of governing livable so as to produce a normalization not experienced as unacceptably oppressive. A generalized compliance may be dependent on a relatively re-

²¹ We suggest that Foucault's concept of normalization and Gramsci's concept of hegemony inhabit a common field of inquiry.

laxed regime whose individual components elicit little or no moral indignation. A colleague who smokes in her office after normal working hours, a friend who parks in a prohibited zone to pick up dry cleaning, a relative who takes two pills because she forgot one yesterday all elicit little blame or repudiation. Yet the event of “getting away with it” produces a generalized acceptance of the dense web of governance that official graffiti puts in place.

In conclusion, we draw attention to the question posed by Jacques Donzelot (1991) concerning “the governability of democracy” which asks what it is that modern forms of government seek to govern and how it is they actually govern. While his immediate concern is to explore the current crisis of the welfare state, we suggest that our discussion of official graffiti points to one answer to his question. Today’s mass democracies, with weakened central governments and attenuated representative institutions and political parties, are on the one hand less able to govern, but on the other are impelled to govern more.²² Lacking strong forms of legitimacy, they increasingly govern in two extreme modes. They increasingly govern through the hazardous deployment of moral panics; a strategy that is by definition limited in the frequency with which it can be mobilized.²³ On the other hand, modern governments must increasingly govern at a distance. For example, key decisions are taken by agencies outside the constitutional structure of representative institutions such as central banks or international agencies. Governance through official graffiti lends itself to a form of governmental action that operates not only at a distance but also through absent experts; this form is so pervasive that it is precisely because of its seeming triviality that it appears so entirely normal by virtue of its deep penetration of the everyday world. Thus we suggest that concern with the governability of democracy needs to attend to the mundane, commonplace, and everyday forms of governance, of which official graffiti provides a significant instance.

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²² This brief sketch of the modern crisis of government draws on Touraine (1995) and Hobsbawm (1994).

²³ The construction of foreign enemies and “evil empires” provides conditions for overseas adventures just so long as the action is brief and losses are small. The invention of drug barons, pedophile rings, and the like allows for short-term mobilization, but the lack of concrete results mean that such projects can only sustain short-term active intervention.

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