

THE PERMANENCE OF EPHEMERAL: TSOI WALL 23 YEARS AFTER¹

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It became an academic convention to refer to ephemerality and temporality of graffiti and street-art. However studying some places as shaped by and known for these urban visuals, it is possible to consider them as constant and ever-present element of a city. A case under analysis is the Tsoi Wall, people’s memorial appeared in Moscow in 1990. The paper discusses how this city site gains its right to exist in multitude of cultural practices, interactions, and meanings assigned. The article reveals the role of creative sites for Soviet and Post-Soviet cities and explores who and why has been maintaining and protecting the Tsoi Wall for almost two decades.

Keywords: urban inscriptions, graffiti, street art, Tsoi Wall, people memorial, soviet and post-soviet cities, public space.

Introduction

The facades of Moscow city centre might hardly be defined as a space open for street art or diversity of urban communication that appears in messages, announcements or expression of opinion. Under the conditions of restrictive control

of twenty four-seven surveillance cameras, regular patrol checks and actions of watchful city dwellers who aim to keep the public space sterile², it is a challenging task to use the city

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² An example of complexity and multiple levels of control in public spaces in Moscow, the suddenness of its display as well as unexpected support street artist can receive from authorities one can find in the interview of Moscow writer Kirill Kto as he described the collaborative project with another writer, Pasha 183: “we went to draw together with Pasha. Using the projector at night he draw a word “Rodina” (Motherland – authors’ note) in flame made

walls as a newsboard or canvas³. The lifetime of newly appearing street art pieces is shortened consistently and straight-out by public utilities. They react fast and efficiently on the spontaneous colorful diversity of city life. “One should ask before painting out!”, this calling, a desperate reaction of street artists on ultra rapid demolishing actions of public utilities. It appeared for a short time on a facade in Moscow in autumn 2012 and soon was gone.

The case of Moscow is not a unique one. Temporal presence, evanescence of materiality and its ephemerality are the distinctive and only possible way for dwellers to use public spaces in the situation when the right for the city is only a declarative one. Theorists (de Certeau 1984; Volkov, Kharkhordin 2008) tend to describe the citizens’ actions that do not fit into the conventional scenarios for city as a kind of guerilla, partisan foray or temporal takeover of the city space. The fluidity of the city art is referred to in the recent series of spontaneous city sculptures by Brad Downey. The author intentionally mentions in the description of his artistic intervention the duration of its existence that can vary from several seconds to several days (Downey 2011).

The Tsoi Wall or the “object with the history” gives another perspective on city creativity and city communication as ephemeral and temporary. It appeared in 1990 as a spontaneous

reaction of the city dwellers to the tragic death of Victor Tsoi, a founder and front man of Leningrad’s rock group “Kino”. Today the wall is a place where past meets present. It exists in multiple modes and due to the contributions of many authors unnoticed in a daily routine, and the “keepers” of the Wall, curious passers-by and tourists that purposely include the Wall into their city exploration routes. The multiplicity and openness of the Wall allow to include it into different contexts and time series, to reveal it in front of completely different audiences and make it attractive for actual and virtual visitors, and, for sure, for curious passing-by theoreticians, like we are.

Studying urban inscriptions: theoretical perspective

Our initial interest to Tsoi Wall was provoked by curiosity to graffiti and street art. It tuned our optics as researchers and urban dwellers and influenced our sensitivity to urban visuals. We started to notice the things previously invisible for us, such as urban inscriptions. However, this interest cannot be described as our individual experience. Graffiti and street art actively invaded urban surfaces for years and gradually changed perception of urban dwellers, made them “visually sensitive”. We assume, that an increase of citizens’ visual sensitivity might be considered as one of the most significant cultural effects caused by decades of graffiti and street art. They stimulate different, often contradicting opinions and reactions, but at the same time graffiti and street art accomplish an important shift in city dwellers’ perception. Initially insignificant and therefore unnoticed drawings and inscriptions, one of a sudden acquired cultural value, became of an interest for passers-by. At the very same moment a city gained an ability to talk multiple languages.

One should admit that graffiti and street-art studies were not exactly ready to include these new subjects of research to the general research field. The tradition of study of urban

of dollars and the fireman who rescued the girl out of it... Then the policemen came. Someone from the neighbors called them as soon as they notice us writing. They didn’t care what we drew or why. The police understood almost everything immediately. They understood that this is something more than graffiti tagging and that it is not a right to take us up. They didn’t ignore the callout or the instructions they had. They recommended us to follow them and to stay away for 10 or 20 minutes and then come back to finish the piece”. The interview is available at <http://www.codered.ru/mag/streetart/history/628>, free access.

³ Besides mentioned penalties, the administration liability for graffiti tagging and posting in Moscow was harden in April 2013. The new surcease rates were several times higher. See <http://www.interfax-russia.ru/Moscow/main.asp?id=397594>, free access.

visualities is relatively new, but it turned out to be already quite rigid and incapable of studying spontaneous democratic forms of urban creativity. From the very beginning graffiti and street-art research focuses on studying those, who create art pieces. It can be peculiar communities such as subcultures or social groups (Brigenti 2010; Campos 2013; Macdonald 2001). Researchers' attention is dedicated to characteristics of social groups, such as race and gender (Green 2003; Lee 2011; Lynn, Lea 2005; Nayak 2009), their political attitudes (Raento 1997; Rancière 2006), involvement in criminal activities (Ferrell 1995; Halsey, Young 2006) or cultural production (Austin 2010). A process of an art piece creation is described, therefore, as a peculiar group practice and a system of specific competences, but not as widespread skill available to almost everyone. We assume that skills of creating inscriptions in cityscape should not be studied only as a competence of a peculiar group. It is more fruitful to study urban drawings and writings as a complex interweaving of communication skills obtained by urban dwellers, a property of written culture, and a result of gradual democratization of competences. Therefore we admit the fact that several decades after the first graffiti appeared a skill of using felt-tip pens and spray paint reached far beyond borders of cities' subcultures.

At the same time one should not consider graffiti and street-art studies as limiting for new subject of research. They also provide an opportunity to describe a special role of inscriptions in city space production, creation of visual environment of contemporary city. They also give an opportunity to reveal the way a city is shaped and dynamically changed by its citizens in series of writing practices. These relationships between city context and urban visuals might be defined as "a form of public address" (Iveson 2007: 143) or a form of civic engagement (Carrington 2009). The other perspective on graffiti-in-the-city relationships defines it as a "part of the site's narrative" (Schofield 2005: 76), stating that some places in the city are

known and exist only because of the visuals produced by urban dwellers.

Communicative nature of writings in the city is profound for inscriptions. They share some graffiti's main features, for example, a way they are produced, placed in city context and obtain no legal status (Brigenti 2010). At the same time, unlike graffiti, inscriptions are brief formulated messages that are easy readable and addressed to the lay passer-by. This specific communication possibility allows inscriptions to be not only the way of self-expression in the city context, but also to stimulate some feedback and spontaneous interactions.

In some cases inscriptions became a shaping element of a city site. One of the brightest examples is spontaneous memorials in public spaces that are shaped by inscriptions and supported through spatial and artistic practices and everyday rituals. These places are brought into existence by collective aspirations, fans' communities and touristic interest (Kruse 2005) and survive as long as the practices repeat. As a rule they are related to a significant place of a famous person's biography or their artworks. For example various places in Liverpool changed their meaning due to associations with John Lennon (Kruse 2005). Place de l'Alma in Paris became a place of public mooring after Princess Diana car accident (Phelps 1999). In Russian context the most well-known example are Victor Tsoi memorials known as the Tsoi Walls.

In the history of inscriptions in soviet and post-soviet cities these memorials were more than a place to express one's sorrow. Inscriptions and messages on the walls were the first forms of "the oppositional cultural practices" (Bushnell 1990), an amateur attempt to express oneself in the highly regulated environment of a soviet city, the first step to claim the citizens' right for it. However a change of the political regime brought a striking contrast. It was a shift between sterility and governed nature of city space and diversity of newly emerged everyday practices (Grubbauer, Kusiak 2012).

Tsoi Wall: a history of creation

In Moscow the Tsoi Wall appeared in one of the Arbat's side streets (the Arbat is a pedestrian street and one of the main sightseeing attractions of Moscow, see Fig. 1). It arose as a first move in the series of spontaneous actions for the commemoration of the death of the musician. On August 15th, 1990, just after the news about the singer's death in a car accident spread out, the inscription "Today died Victor Tsoi" appeared on the wall of the house number 37 on Krivoarbatskiy lane. The answer appeared almost immediately: "Tsoi is alive". In the course of several days the wall transformed into a commemorative place, where fans came to express their feelings and leave their messages of commemoration, confessions, write lyrics from the songs of "Kino" band, poems dedicated to Tsoi, as well as to play guitar or to sing his songs together. Soon enough the wall was covered with inscriptions, portraits of the rock-idol, Tsoi's posters and newspaper snippings (see Fig. 2).

After Tsoi's death the commemoration walls appeared in many soviet and later post-soviet cities. Some of them had a direct connotation with the singer's biography (for example St. Petersburg and Moscow), the other ones had a strong fans' community (as Minsk, Dnepropetrovsk, Smolensk, Sebastopol etc.). In a short perspective the commemoration walls in different cities became entirely covered with overlapping layers of inscriptions left by fans and sympathizers. The quotes from the lyrics, fans' inscriptions and emotional confessions appeared side by side with fans' names, dates and names of the cities they come from. In the big cities the Tsoi Walls became large-scale maps of memory. They revealed not only the sorrow of a loss, but also the collectiveness of the commemoration and its broad geography that linked the cities not administratively, but through the travel routes of the citizens and their mutual affection.

Tsoi Wall in a short time became "a sacred site in a cultural system that had grown up



Fig. 1. The view on the Tsoi Wall from the Arbat. April 2013 (photo by the article authors)



Fig. 2. Tsoi Wall in September 1990 (from ITAR-TASS archive)

in opposition to the dreary Soviet product, a space necessarily marked by devotional graffiti understood to represent specific values and attitudes” (Bushnell 1995: 59). Although at the times when rock music was a powerful way to express public opinion and the fans’ community was millions-wide, the Tsoi Walls around the country were generally valid and appreciated by public: as soon as they appeared they became known, discussed and visited.

Why Tsoi?

At the times of overall political and social changes of the early 1990s, Victor Tsoi became not only a rock-idol of soviet underground, but also the symbol of Perestroika (see Fig. 3). The first rock-club appeared in Leningrad earlier, in 1981. It was the first legal place both for musicians and their fans to gather. For the rock-movement it was a way to become known after the years of underground existence and

house concerts. This was a time when *Moscow World Service* radio station started broadcasting the newest music from the West. In this atmosphere Victor Tsoi and the other members of the “Kino” group introduced the fusion of punk and new wave style. Their style had something in common with the sound and drive of “Duran Duran”, “Damned” and “The Clash”. The lyrics of “Kino” songs varied a lot compared to the songs of other popular rock bands of the time. They were not as crabbed and mannered as the lyrics of Boris Grebenshchikov and his “Aquarium” group, not a rockabilly by Mike Naumenko and “Zoopark” band and not as humorous as Peter Mamonov’s and “Zvouki Mu” group. Victor Tsoi described situations and sketches from a “layman’s” life, easily recognizable by any soviet teenager. The lyrics showed the absurdity of the existing state of events and reluctance to accept it. Tsoi himself explained his popularity by a factor of a moment when people stopped accepting the existing state of events and conditions they lived in and wanted



Fig. 3. The performance of “Kino” in Gorky park, winter 1988 (photo from magazine “Ogoniok”, 1988)

to change them⁴. The symbol of the new politics of Perestroika became a song “Peremen!” (Changes!). It appeared in 1987 in the final scene of the “ASSA” film by Sergei Solovyov⁵. After its first performance, “Kino” group released the first legal records. Gradually its songs appeared on radio and TV. Tsoi introduced the new way to express oneself about the soviet reality. Together with the trendy western sound it became a destructive power stronger than censorship and prohibitions. On June 24th 1990 the “Kino” band gave a concert to a 70 thousand-large stadium “Luzhniki” in Moscow. It was the first big-scale rock-concert in the USSR and the

culmination of “Kino’s” musical career and the concert before the singer’s death.

The space of a ritual

During the 1990s and 2000s the functions of the Tsoi Wall have changed and expanded multiply. From the very beginning the Wall was not only a memorial, that keeps the memory about Tsoi, but also a meeting place, space for communication and a pilgrimage destination. The place itself was organized as a memorial. The portrait of Tsoi, candles and flowers were placed in a recession of the central part of the wall. It became known as an “altar” among the fans and turned out to be a literary shrine. For the past 23 years since Tsoi’s death it remained as a place where people left flowers, candles and Tsoi’s portraits. Another ritual that appeared among the fans’ community was to sit down next to the altar, touch it with a hand and put a stem-broken and

⁴ Tsoi’s interview in documentary “Rock” directed by A. Uchitel, 1987.

⁵ One should mention that during the first year the film audience was 17,8 bln. people, that made it smash-hit in the USSR. See the interview of S. Solovyov in documentary “Tsoi-Kino” (Directed by E. Lisovskiy, 2012).



Fig. 4. *The rituals associated with the Tsoi Wall. Celebrating Tsoi's birthday (photo by the article authors)*

puffed out cigarette. These symbolized the early death of the musician.

The commemoration practices varied for the past twenty years, among them are: the vigils at the wall and on-going replacement of flowers and candles. Sometimes they also presupposed an active participation in protection of the Wall actions that were common in the 1990s. In the 2000s the manifestations were mostly aimed at supporting the Tsoi monument erection⁶. During this time the close control of the Wall by the fans' community weakened, the vigils that were common before became rare. The protection they gave to the wall previously, now was substituted by the publicity of the place, its visibility and attention of the

passer-by. However this new way of keeping the place safe turned out to be delusive. In 2006 Art Destroy group started its campaign against the longstanding significance of Tsoi's oeuvre. The Wall was painted all over in a blink. It caused a strong reaction of rage among fans' community to the vexation of city dwellers. The comments on the actions also show the changes occurring in forms of control: "When in 1991 the Wall was established, no one could ever think that something of this kind can happen. That someone might come to the Arbat (!) and besmirch Vitia's memory. Then it would have been more risky than for a black person to enter a skinhead gathering"⁷.

The Tsoi Wall is also a place where every year the fans from all over post-soviet countries gather to commemorate Victor Tsoi's birthday

⁶ In 2008 the Foundation of Victor Tsoi's Remembrance founded in St. Petersburg. Its main aim was ability to apply officially for the memorial erection in St. Petersburg. Later the Foundation worked on the application for the monument erection in Moscow. Available from Internet: <http://fondTsoya.ru/>, free access.

⁷ The internet-discussion of Art Destroy act is available from Internet: <http://ru-tsoy.livejournal.com/75358.html>, free access.

on June 21st and his death anniversary on August 15th (see Fig. 4).

These are the days when fans change the Wall into a big art project working on big portraits of Tsoi. Gradually the Wall became one of the three main places for the fans' pilgrimage. The first two places are in St. Petersburg. They are Bogoslovskoye cemetery, where Tsoi was buried and "Kamchatka", a boiler-house, where Tsoi used to work. Currently it is converted into a museum and rock-club.

Back in the 1990s the Wall was a peculiar place of communication. Here one could leave or receive a message about a meeting time, appoint dates, gave concerts, listen to a cassette player, read poems or search for fellow-travelers for Moscow–St. Petersburg trips by suburban trains.

Interestingly, as soon as the new media and Internet started to develop and spread out, the virtual analogs of the Tsoi Wall⁸ at the Arbat appeared. The virtual walls perform the same function as the actual Wall at the Arbat did at the very beginning of its existence. They became the space to express sorrow, feelings, and a place to put poems dedicated to Tsoi.

New outlines of public spaces for a soviet city

From the very beginning the Tsoi Wall became a part of a complex porous city environment. Moscow life at the beginning of 1990s was unpredictable, carnival-like and eventful. Its marks can be found as 20-years-old inscriptions that remained on the wall from the very beginning. "Victor Tsoi's Lane", this handwritten sign appeared in the beginning of 1990. It shows how categoricalness of demands and the courage of those who claimed their presence in the city and their right for contributing adds to

the toponymy of the city. The spontaneous inscriptions became quite common in 1980–1990. John Bushnell who did a first research on soviet graffiti (Bushnell 1990), underlines that in the city visual environment of the 1980s the number of spontaneous graffiti and inscriptions grew dramatically compared to the visually sterile cities images of the previous decade. The most common places for inscriptions were the "nearest" places, they were protected by quasi-privacy of entrance halls, inner yards and garages. These special geographies of a graffiti revealed the open for action zones in the city, that were at the same time securely protected from the outer view by the privacy of sheltered space.

When a Tsoi Wall appeared in one of the Arbat's lanes, it became a breakthrough, a way to claim the inhabitants' right to use the significant city spaces. It also attracted the passers' by attention in different ways, by styles of the inscriptions, fan's community and by musical performances. The Arbat itself became a new symbolic centre of Moscow and the Wall was a part of this newly created atmosphere and added the new colors to it. It was founded at the same time, when the city became a place for spontaneous collective actions and self-organization⁹. The multitude of forbidden or non-approved events: discussions, concerts, exhibitions etc., that previously needed to be hosted in semi-private spaces, at that time were gradually allowed to be performed in public spaces. "The events, that previously were banished from official culture and were a part of an underground, suddenly joyfully broke out into the freedom" (Zakharov 1994: 140).

The spaces open for public actions became the symbolic centers of late-soviet cities. They appeared as a result of the mutual actions of the inhabitants. One of the major symbolic centers of 1980–1990 was Arbat street. Its influence was

⁸ See fans' sites for V. Tsoi's oeuvre. Available from Internet: <http://www.kinomani.net/index.php>, free access; Available from Internet: http://www.tsoi.si-city.ru/guest_1707004414.phtml, free access.

⁹ O. Pachenkov underlines a lack of possibilities for not coordinated by the authorities citizens' interaction in rear public spaces in the soviet city (Pachenkov 2012).

far beyond Moscow. The name of the street itself became appellative and ever since used to define pedestrian areas in different Russian cities. In late 1980 the reconstruction of the Arbat had just begun. It aimed for the human-oriented city space: "If today the eight million population of Moscow became familiar with a concept of the street as a place where one can see one another's faces, ... when people change the way they walk and their facial expression as soon as they reach the street, when they learn how to walk straight and freely, but not huddle on the noisy sidewalks, where they can hardly talk to one another. If we were able to meet those goals we had fulfilled the main function of the Arbat" (Kharitonova 1986). The very idea to use the street¹⁰ as a place for flanerier, entertaining and leisure radically changed soviet scenarios for possible city streets usage. In state-planned economy the transformation of roadways into pedestrian zones was an utopian idea. It officially stopped functioning as a transit space, meeting the interests of efficiency of public utilities or industrial areas. The Arbat became a street with all its multitude of street city life and therefore shaped a unique public space. It was of smaller scale comparing to the giant soviet city squares, but the one that shaped in a more natural way to a city landscape and everyday practices, giving the freedom for all the multitude of activities and encouraging them.

The Arbat after reconstruction became a place that combined the open air galleries and artists' workshops, places for street musicians and performing artists, political tribune and open-air market areas. It gave an attractive and unusual combination of activities for a soviet city, which most commonly has functionally differentiated spaces. The city life temptations, that were distributed before or hidden in the interior spaces, paraded themselves and were

within walking distance. Inhabitants have got an opportunity to "walk and gaze" on a regularly basis, to sink into a maelstrom of the city's entertainment, and observe and participate in the city life.

Almost immediately after reconstruction the Arbat became one of the main Moscow sightseeing places. Tourists that floated the street converted the experience of a street life into the main attraction of Moscow. The Arbat and its analogs, that appeared later in different soviet cities, came to be a place to overcome big city life alienation, as well as a place for curious on-lookers and active participants of emerging street life.

One should admit that the initial plan for the Arbat reclaiming the city planners hoped for, was far more different from the relaxed flanerier. In 1980–1990 the Arbat as a city place was first and foremost the place for collective actions, setting up spontaneous scenarios of public life, shaping the rules on the go (see Fig. 5). "Starting from 1986 the Arbat, as well as Pushka (Pushkin square) hosted the main political manifestations. The uniqueness of the Arbat was... that here they never were a goal in itself and never treated seriously. They were rather a farce, political carnival mixed together with city life everydayness: commerce, walks and entertainment. The Arbat was not a place to struggle for the beliefs, it rather aimed to live and do it in a fancy way" (Zakharov 1994: 140).

The fact that the Tsoi Wall appeared near Arbat street is a consistent outcome, that was supported by the atmosphere of the street itself. The emergence of the Tsoi Walls in other cities showed the typical scenario. They appeared on or next to the streets that were the centers of city life. Publicness and visibility of the Wall were the best guarantee for its renewal and protection.

Today the Wall is also a reference for the first activist actions in the city. It was the time when the citizens gained their right to take charge over the public spaces, and with zest got involved into place making all over the city. The

¹⁰ Pedestrian streets projects were quite rare in the USSR. Before the Arbat there were only two projects of renovation. Both of them were in Lithuanian cities: Siauliai in 1975 and Kaunas in 1982. However the Arbat renovation became broadly known and replicated in soviet cities.

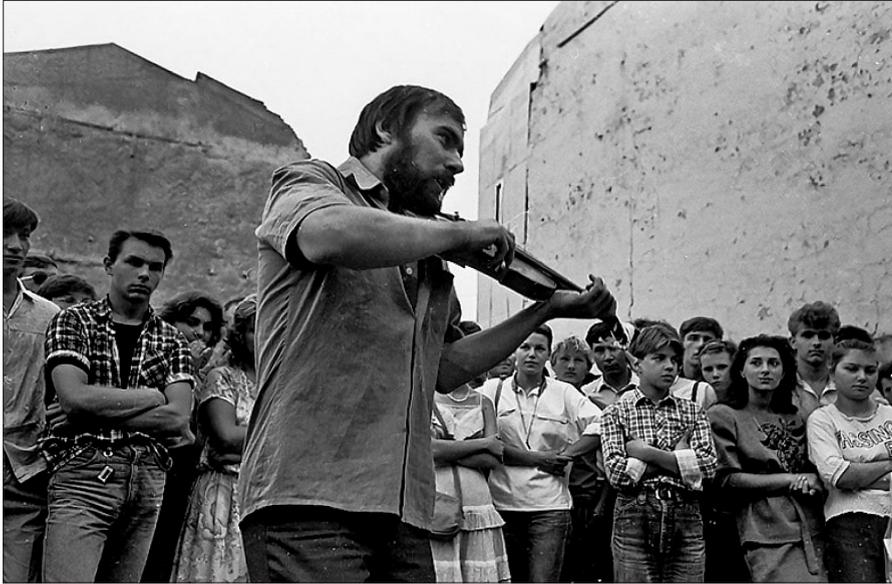


Fig. 5. *The Arbat at the end of 1980th* (photo by Igor Stomakhin)

dialogue that emerged on the Tsoi Wall, was sometimes extreme. It represented the rhetoric of prohibitions and threatening: “Those, who dare to paint out this wall, is a mortal foe for everyone of us”¹¹. This message was addressed to the public utilities. It also inherited the style of communication, familiar and recognizable part of culture of the everyday life. In a way it was a starting point for establishing the contact with authorities. However, even 20 years later it is a problematic task for public spaces in Russian cities.

The Wall appeared because of the unique atmosphere of the Arbat and serves as a reminder about city life of 1980–1990, a peculiar monument to the place itself and its ambiance. The manifestation activities of 2011–2012 clearly demonstrated that the centre of public life in Moscow has left behind the Arbat as a significant place and therefore underlined its present status of a touristic, commercialized

space. Cheerful and loony personages that created the aura of the Arbat in 1990, gave a place to “street professionals”. Dancers, musicians, artists, one might find there nowadays, use the built up brand of the street as a guaranteed income place. They often invent the rules for tourists to follow about amount to pay or the opportunity to take a picture. Street flea markets vanished from the Arbat long ago, instead they gave way to a repetitive diversity of coffee-shops and restaurant chains. A city dweller might find the same selection of places to eat next to any other metro station in Moscow, but for a tourist it gives a secure feeling of choosing from a familiar list of names.

The Wall 23 years after: openness of closed

The impression the Wall gives nowadays is that it has its own secret. The place one should be able to “read” putting together the lyrics’ quotes, pieces of the old posters, fans’ messages, dates,

11 It is one of the first inscriptions on the Wall. See: <http://ru-tsoy.livejournal.com/75358.html>, free access.

cities' names. One should also be aware of fans' practices to honor memory while being next to the wall. Nevertheless the wall doesn't feel like a gated place. Facing Arbat street, it attracts crowds of tourists. As a result the contrast between closed fans' community and openness to everyone emerges. The presence of the tourists shapes the everydayness of the place and completes its distinctive atmosphere.

Today the Wall as a city site is not literally the wall of the building or fence. It is rather the space between the first houses on both sides of Krivoarbatskyi lane. The Wall changes its shape following seasonal fluctuations. During the year the fans' inscriptions gradually spread on the walls of the nearby houses, capturing the opposite side of the street. At spring the public utilities renew the facades, keeping untouched only the piece of brick fencing that is known to be the Wall since 1990th.

The Wall creates the "extended space". On the opposite side one might find street musicians, accompanied by local homeless. Both groups are ready to talk, interact or ask for a coin from any passer-by. They appear at the place as if using one and the same schedule and occupy the place every evening, introducing their own vision of order and mooching the cigarettes left at the altar part of the Wall.

The Wall as a surface is made out of the hundreds of messages and layers of paint left by Victor Tsoi fans during the past twenty years. They reveal the over twenty-years-old history of the Wall, the struggles for keeping the space and its renewal. Staying at the same place the Wall constantly changes its color and pattern. The dark painted first inscriptions of 1990s are changed by the colorful diversity of 2000s. To see the wall one should examine it close by, within arm's reach, standing on the narrow pavement. From this perspective one can see the messages made by ball point pen or scratched with keys. Interestingly, it is the only perspective possible for the observer. Anyone who decides to approach the wall should squeeze in between the parked cars.

If taking a look at the Wall from Arbat street, the first impression one might get is that it is just another graffiti wall or street art project. This guess is a perspective of a big-city dweller for whom the inscriptions and visual forms are an inevitable part of the everyday visual environment. The impression is formed by multiple layers of messages and the style they are written in. The large-scale inscriptions are spray-painted with bright colors. However, the closer look of an attentive observer reveals the other logic of the place. Unlike graffiti, where the way of performing the tag aims to be a message coded for the majority of people, the inscriptions on the Wall are easy to read for everyone speaking Russian. The other reason is that graffiti as a culture gives a perspective of a graffiti-writer as a hero: anonymous, but with recognizable style (Campos 2013: 159). In case of the Tsoi wall these criteria are not relevant. "The last hero"¹² for this place is always Victor Tsoi himself. However the Wall gradually obtained another hero. It is a "collective author", "undefined us", thousands of fans, who share the grief, passion and faithfulness to the cult figure. Their devotion is strong enough to commemorate the musician and leave their confessions and names year by year for more than two decades. The shared feeling of "us" is a result of juxtaposition of inscribed names, nicknames, cities and unites signs not only due to the common surface or the way they are phrased, but also because of the awareness of the vague unity they belong to as fans: "If we forget Tsoi, who will remember us?" (the inscription on the Tsoi Wall in Minsk, spring 2013). The "peoples' origin" of the Wall is often used as a reason for its defense and right for existence. The Wall is created collectively and at the same time it makes meaningful the collective efforts.

Recently the geography of the Walls worth seeing was expanded by the Wall in Minsk. It

¹² This is a line from the same-named song by V. Tsoi and the "Kino" band, the album "Nachalnik Kamchatki" (1984).

is of interest because during the last 20 years it has changed location several times. The city administration used its efforts to remove the Wall from the public space. However by the efforts of fans of the “Kino” group, supporters and activist groups of citizens, it was twice moved to a new place and revealed to life. The Wall in Minsk is a place with a history. Its inevitable part is the memory about collective efforts and struggles for city’s public spaces.

One of the ways to see the uniqueness of the Wall is to take a closer look at the everydayness of the place, the practices that are performed here day by day. Its background is shaped by touristic Arbat street that is mentioned in every guide book and attracts crowds of tourists. Being a pedestrian street, the Arbat meets and entertains visitors with music, performances, caricatures, extraordinary museums and souvenir shops. Each of the “events” gathers its audience which aims to take a look, make a

picture and later give a coin to the performer. Such a neighborhood gives little chance for a special place to stay visible. It rather expects the place to become a gated one or to vanish gradually in-between the souvenirs shops. The Tsoi Wall in this context is interesting because while staying open for everyone (see Fig. 6) it does not oppose itself to a souvenirs’ street logic and does not mingle with it.

Krivoarbatskyi lane attracts tourists who walk from the head of the street. This is the only perspective the street that became visible for an accidental passer-by. The audience is diverse: young people, couples, parents with kids. They are of different age groups and it is obvious that for some of them “Kino” is a part of history kept by old records and for the other ones it is a remembrance of the early days.

The Arbat creates the specific rhythm for the space. As a rule the tourists follow the shows



Fig. 6. Graffiti writing on the Tsoi Wall (photo by the article authors)

performed on the street. As soon as the performance is over the tourists proceed to another one. Gradually the tourist crowd is shaped into groups moving from one attraction to another. That is why even in the most crowded days there are moment when there is no one next to the wall and at the next moment tourists start to queue in order to make a picture.

Public bring with themselves touristic attractions: gazing and taking photographs (see Fig. 7). The Wall is almost the only place along the Arbat which gives a sufficient background for making a picture. Most of the places at the Arbat are unsuitable because of the density of the tourist crowd. The free area for taking a picture is provided by cars parked in the narrow lane. The only possible way to make a picture is to use the free zones between cars. The places of interest are the large-scale inscriptions and the “altar” zone. The postures vary immensely: for some people it is important to commemorate the singer and touch the wall, for others it is the place where they can clown around and play. As a rule tourists prefer to stay inattentive and to wait for their turn to take a picture. However,

this civil inattentiveness is rather superficial, some poses once introduced, were copied again and again. For example, during the observation at some point tourist started to sit down on a walkway edge and to take pictures from foot spot.

The Wall changes a visitor’s perspective for a while. The touristic way of behaving fades away. Instead people start to read inscriptions carefully and stay longer at some locations. Leaving the place, people whistle away or pantomimic strumming of Victor Tsoi’s songs. In this sense the Wall has its own sound for everyone who comes along.

Conclusions

Almost two decades ago John Bushnell concludes his text on the Tsoi Wall predicting the soon neglect: “Probably this is why the Tsoi wall was both a major achievement of the counter- culture and a clear sign that a once creative movement had gone stale. The wall demonstrated the triumph of the oppositional



Fig. 7. Taking photos against the Tsoi Wall (photo by the article authors)

cultural practices, but there was no longer anything to oppose, no tension, no spur to creativity”. However the eventful life of the Wall shows the opposite. The Wall became the place of oeuvre “symbolism, imaginary, and play” (Lefebvre 2002: 367). Plenty of audiences extend its life sometimes in cooperation, sometimes in conflict or independent from one another. Together they create the multiple meanings and regimes of interaction with it. The Wall itself is not only the Tsoi memory site, but also the place that reveals the significance of multifaced and always changing collective “us” of identified or nameless visitors. Their inscriptions, images, photos bring day by day the Wall to life. The present of the Wall in a certain sense is equivalent to its past.

The Wall has been changing for almost 23 years. It makes us restrain from any type of predictions, but the changes.

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