



Photo credit: Susan Ingram

Creative Thinking on the Conwy: Translated Memories of a Contested Transitional Space

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My tears are like the quiet drift
Of petals from some magic rose;
And all my grief flows from the rift
Of unremembered skies and snows.
(Dylan Thomas, "Clown in the Moon")

"[G]raffiti represent the immediate actions –
... contingent and arbitrary – of *demos* rather
than the utopian imagination of society....
graffiti are made for *demos* to do and to see."
(Pan Lu)

Conwy is a small medieval walled town on the north coast of Wales, popular among day tourists on account of its castle, one of the more spectacular of the fortifications imposed by Edward I of England on the principality in the late 13th century. Picturesquely perched on the edge of an estuary, Conwy castle stares tauntingly across its eponymous river at the rapidly gentrifying village of Deganwy, home to ruins, both of its own castle and a small settlement on the river that housed 19th-century gentry and the fisher, railway, and other working-class folk that served them. After plans were approved to install a luxury hotel and condo development around a marina dredged for that purpose, funding was also provided by the Welsh Assembly for a series of graffiti-murals to be undertaken by a local street-artist collective in a pedestrian walkway under the freeway whose construction had contributed to Conwy and nearby Lladudno, a turn-of-the century seaside resort at the end of the peninsula, now enjoying renewed popularity at the expense of the area connecting them. That area centers around the Deganwy Docks, a long-neglected site described on the evidence of a council meeting reported in the *North Wales Weekly News* on 5 November 1998 as “one of the biggest eyesores on the North Wales coast and a blot on the estuary” (Smith 10).

What this series of images, which I took in the underpass in July 2015, brings to our attention is the way that graffiti as a form of street art can not only capture and contribute to the making of local memories, but also make us aware of our assumptions about art and its production. When I saw the tag “Cream Soda,” I immediately took it as a signature and attributed to it an artist, feeling vaguely smug in not assuming that person to be a young male. A bit of online research revealed, however, that the tunnel project was led by the Conwyn Bay-based graphic artist Dime One and Cream Soda Productions and involved the local schools of Ysgol Maelgwyn and Ysgol Nant y Coed (“In Pictures”).

One sees that these artists have woven together their own personal dreams and memories with those of the surrounding area in a way that brings out how both have been buffeted by global forces and yet remain intensely personal. Both remain beholden to, indeed overwhelmed by, memories of the locality’s long chronicle of conquest, which dates back to Roman times (see Northall) and continues in the form of UK property development. The series was completed in the fall of 2010 and sealed “with an anti-graffiti coating, so if anyone puts paint or marker pen on the finished walls it will simply wipe off” (Ibid.). Five years on, one finds that the anti-graffiti treatment is proving appropriately futile as local youth are slowly but surely defacing the artwork with graffiti of their own.



Photo credit: Susan Ingram

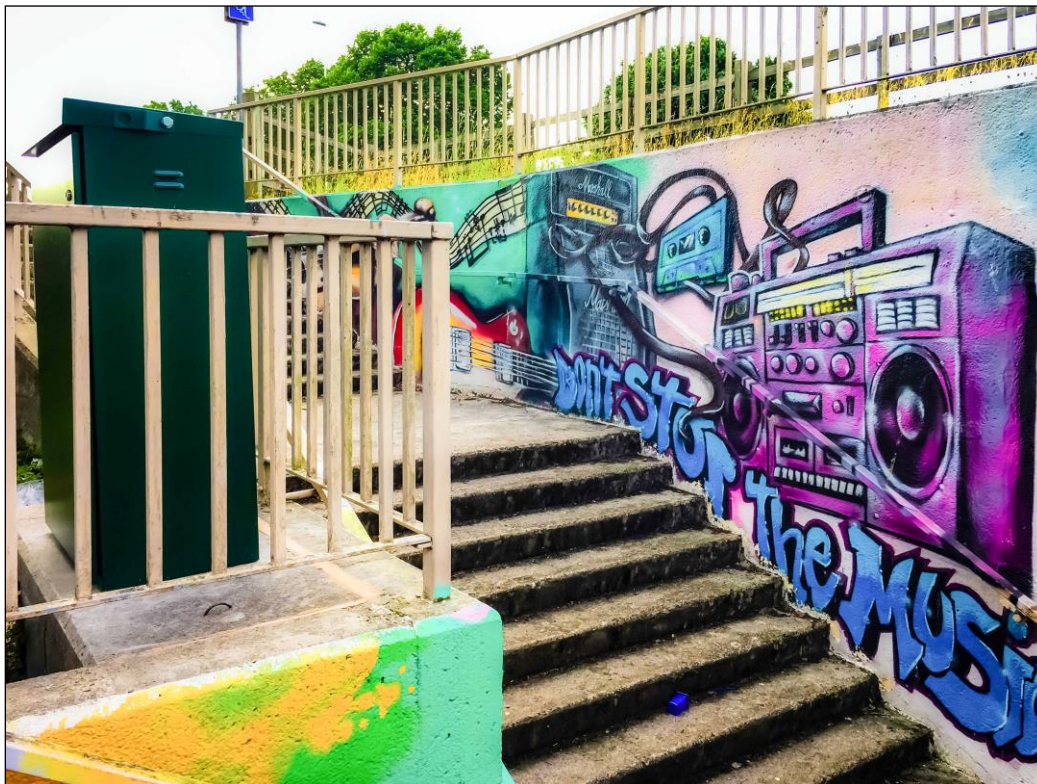


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