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Vandal Practices as a Psychological Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Olga V. Kruzhkova
Ural State Pedagogical University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

Irina A. Simonova
Ural State Pedagogical University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

Anastasia O. Ljovkina
Tyumen State University, Tyumen, Russia

Marina S. Krivoshchekova
Ural State Pedagogical University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

ABSTRACT

Vandalism can be seen as a form of individual self-realization and expression of the individual and collective responses to change. In this paper, we intend to look at the meaning and motivations behind acts of vandalism. We also aim to classify cases of vandalism that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, we analyzed 80 cases of vandalism related to the COVID-19. The information was obtained from open online sources: publications in online communities and media found through the use of hashtags #COVID-19 and #vandalism. As a result, five categories of vandalism were identified: (a) vandalism as a mechanism of adaptation to change; (b) vandalism as a coping strategy; (c) vandalism as an unconscious defensive reaction to a threatening situation; (d) vandalism as resistance to change; and (e) vandalism as a reflection of the sense of social injustice. We found that vandalism during the pandemic was used mostly as a way of adaptation to change and as a coping strategy. Moreover, our findings have also demonstrated that social instability and transitivity in the crisis period stimulate people to rethink the current social order and search for new social forms, structures, and principles.

galiat1@yandex.ru
luboe05@mail.ru
a.o.lyovkina@utmn.ru
kmsolimp@mail.ru

Introduction

Vandalism is a complex social phenomenon. In urban spaces, vandalism is often a practice of direct or figurative communication that reflects current social processes. Both vandal acts and social manifestations arising around vandal activities express the needs and moods of some social groups or society in general. Vandalism generates messages which create significant effects and has a considerable influence not only on the communications within subcultural communities (Kuzovenkova, 2019) but also with the significant stakeholders in the public space: government agencies, opinion leaders and urban dwellers. However, vandal practices can also contribute to a person's inner work enabling him or her to cope with the pandemic-related stress (Kruzhkova et. al., 2018).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit most countries at the beginning of 2020, vandal manifestations reflected the perception of this global problem by individuals, groups, and society. Interestingly, COVID-related vandal manifestations are different in their content and character, as they address multiple socio-psychological aspects of the changes and problems on the individual and collective levels.

Social changes and reactions related to the COVID-19 pandemic are unprecedented (Hodgkinson & Andresen, 2020). This situation has significantly affected the social structure of communities, the quality of life, and the psychological state of most people. Recent research in the USA, Italy, China, Pakistan, Israel, Russia, and other countries show that coronavirus has immersed many people in anxiety and fear (American Psychiatric Assosiation, 2020; Balkhi et al., 2020; Führer et al., 2020; Kasyanov et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2020; Rossi et al., 2020; Somma et al., 2020; Tzur Bitan et al., 2020). These sentiments are reflected in certain behavioral markers: unwillingness to stay at home, absenteeism, buying more food than usual (Balkhi et al., 2020), buying weapons, domestic violence, irrational behavior, and escaping from quarantined communities (Galea et al., 2020). Such manifestations of acute and post-traumatic stress are a sign of a crisis associated with the violation of the psychological boundaries of personal space and the violation of the personal social life through the changing the very principles of human interaction with the outside world (Grishina, 2020, p. 1). The negative psychological effects of quarantine and self-isolation can be vast, significant and lasting (Brooks et al., 2020).

The imposed regime of social isolation and norms of social distance significantly limited the ability of people to communicate (Mosolov, 2020) and transferred all personal and business communications into a virtual format. At the same time, in this period, people experienced a growing need for communication compared to the pre-crisis 2019 year as they sought to gain a psychological "foothold" by engaging in social interactions and providing mutual support (Grishina, 2020). In the situation of high uncertainty, everyone chooses their destiny and decides what the task is: to survive, continue to function, change something or change them (Bazarov, 2020, p. 1).

On the one hand, quarantine restrictions impeded social activity, including crime. According to M. Eisner and A. Nivette, self-isolation and other restrictions preventing the spread of the COVID-19 changed the routines and usual patterns of behavior that led to the transformation of people's emotional states and, therefore, could sufficiently influence the crime rate (Eisner & Nivette, 2020). For instance, crimes related to vandalism in Sweden from mid-March to early May 2020 decreased by about 5% compared with the beginning of 2020 and the same period in 2019 (Gerell et al., 2020). Similarly, in Los Angeles, USA, the crime rate sufficiently decreased from the end of March to the end of April mainly because of the decrease in the traffic and mobility of residents. At the same time, vandalism in Indianapolis remained unchanged during this period (Mohler et al., 2020).

On the other hand, any restrictions often cause social resistance and unrest. The feeling of helplessness makes people desperate and forces them to seek solutions at any cost. A Chinese study showed that the COVID-19 pandemic both exacerbated the preexisting social inequality and also created new forms of social inequality (Qian & Fan, 2020). These consequences undermine the economic and social well-being of citizens and widen the gap between social groups, which increases social tension and may lead to protests and vandal actions. Thus, in May-June 2020, we could observe protest actions against racism in the USA and European countries, which resulted in the destruction and desecration of monuments to historical figures. Unauthorized street art objects and graffiti reflecting COVID-related problems appeared in the same period.

Restricted communications and limitations on the usual ways of self-realization turned vandalism into a "hyped-up" practice. Vandalism is an easily accessible medium of expressing one's own position or the position of one's group. It has a "ritual" character of conveying meaning through images or actions. A long period of complete uncertainty resulted in escalating social contradictions, increasing the level of anxiety and risks of social explosions. The lack of comprehensive information about the threat and the ways of ensuring maximum security results in a person's maladaptation to the new conditions, which often leads to a rise in magical thinking and conspiracy theories, for example, the use of "coronavirus mantras", or deliberately risky actions of ineffective symbolization (Žižek, 2020) and primitive forms of behavior. The latter stem from what Agamben calls bare life: reduction of behavior to the realization of the simplest basic needs, when people "are disposed to sacrifice practically everything—the normal conditions of life, social relationships, work, even friendships, affections, and religious and political convictions—to the danger of getting sick. Bare life—and the danger of losing it—is not something that unites people, but blinds and separates

them" (Agamben, 2020). In most cases, people don't tend to reflect much on their own reactions. Thus, vandalism as a projective practice has a large diagnostic potential in assessing the hidden intentions of individual and public consciousness.

In this research, we consider vandalism as a form of an individual's impact on the objects of the urban environment by changing the current state of these objects without the appropriate sanctions from the party that has legal rights to these objects (its owner or manager) (Kruzhkova et al., 2018). Vandalism can target different objects of the urban environment and it can take different forms such as changes of the existing objects or their destruction, creation of new objects. The degree of influence as well as the techniques and tools employed for this purpose can be varied. Vandal actions can have different consequences on the functional and aesthetic levels. Our understanding of vandalism encompasses the following aspects defined by Vorobyeva and Kruzhkova (2015):

- Vandals target someone else's property, which may be seen as valuable by others but not by vandals themselves;
- Vandals violate the laws or socially accepted norms of behavior and thus can be held legally accountable for their actions;
- Vandals damage someone else's property, changing its appearance or bringing it into complete or partial disrepair;
- Through acts of vandalism, vandals experience vivid emotions and adrenaline rush;
- Vandals seek self-affirmation—assertion of their own power over the surrounding reality;
- Vandals' actions are premeditated.

Our research purpose was to classify vandal practices as responses of individuals, groups, and society to the global threat caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, we addressed the following research questions:

1) How did the acts of vandalism reflect social reactions to the COVID-19 threat, pandemic measures, and their consequences?
2) How can COVID-related vandal actions be classified according to their socio-psychological content and character?

Methods

In the socio-psychological context, we investigated vandalism as a form of activity and behavior which expands the boundaries of the individual self-realization beyond the formally established social limits (Kruzhkova et al., 2018). Unfortunately, we have not found in the research literature any psychological classification of the actions of this type. To develop our own classification, we considered the motivation-based classification of vandalism (Callinan, 2002; Canter, 1980; Craw et al., 2006; Levy-Leboyer, 1984; Weinmayer, 1969; Zeisel, 1977), and the classification of vandalism by location, meaning, purpose, way of execution, design, etc. (Babikova et al., 2019; Kruzhkova et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the existing typologies and classifications

only partially meet the aim of this study, since they do not take into account the impact of crisis situations such as pandemics or other global threats. Therefore, to develop our classification of COVID-related vandalism, we also considered the classifications of coping strategies (Bobocel, 2013; Khazova, 2012; Kriukova, 2008; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Vaillant, 1977), types of personal psychological defenses (Conte et al., 2004; Cramer, 1991; Freud, 1936/1992; Plutchik et al., 1979), and types of collective psychological defenses (Stroh, 2007). We also used our previous studies where the forms of vandal behavior are analyzed in connection with defensive and coping behavior of young adults (Vorobyeva et al, 2016).

Materials

The data were collected from open Internet sources: media publications covering vandal acts related to the COVID-2019 pandemic with hashtags #COVID-19 and #vandalism. 68% of cases contained a direct reference to the COVID-19 and the other 33% appealed to (or were inspired by) the pandemic indirectly. The data and the results of their analysis in Microsoft Excel format are available at Mendeley data service (Kruzhkova et al., 2020).

We considered not only the cases of destruction or desecration of valuable material objects but also illegal graffiti and street art objects. 66% of the cases could be described as art, while the rest were purely destructive actions. The material for this study was selected according to the approach described in (Pavlov, 2014), where vandalism is understood as acts of changing a certain object of property without obtaining its owner's approval first. According to the 2017–2018 study (interviews, focus groups, monitoring of discussions on social networks, polls) in Russia, a significant part of the respondents includes both vulgar and artistic acts and artifacts into the category of vandalism (Rudenkin et al., 2018). Moreover, according to Simonova (2021), who conducted interviews with graffitters and street artists and monitored their online communities, they often describe their work as vandalism (Simonova, 2021).

Covering a broader and more diverse repertoire of uncoordinated acts of urban change has proven to be productive. As will be shown below, our strategy turned out to be a viable one: all the five types of reactions that we have identified contain both destructive and artistic cases of vandalism and are equally interesting for analyzing the psychological reactions of people to the pandemic.

The fact that 86% of analyzed cases received wide public approval and support in social networks indicates the sufficient potential of these data for reflecting not only individual and collective reactions to the pandemic but also overall social reactions.

Procedure

We analyzed 80 cases of vandal actions in relation to significant socio-psychological reactions and themes (markers): aggression, sarcasm, humor, hope, support of the new norms and requirements, protest, the perception of the novel coronavirus as a threat, fear or anxiety, positive assessment of the situation, pessimism.

We distinguished 5 categories of vandalism, each with its own specific combination of markers.

Table 1
Categories of Vandalism and Their Markers

Markers of vandal actions	Adaptation to change	Coping with a threatening situation	Unconscious defensive reaction to a threatening situation	Resistance to change	Depiction of social injustice
Aggression		+	+		+
Sarcasm				+	
Humor	+	+			+
Hope		+			
Support for new norms and requirements	+			–	–
Protest	–		+	+	+
Indication of danger		+	+		
Fear/anxiety		+	+		
Positive assessment of the situation	+			–	–
Pessimism					+

In the analytical data table, in each cell we marked "marker present" or "no marker" (Kruzhkova et al., 2020). Then we calculated the coefficient of belonging the particular vandal action (*x*) to the particular (*n*) category of vandalism (one of the five categories indicated in Table 1) according to the formula:

$$K_{xn} = \frac{\sum M_{xn}}{Q_{Mn}},$$

where K_{xn} is the coefficient of belonging calculated by dividing the sum of the markers detected in a particular vandal action (M_{xn}) by the total quantity of this category's markers (Q_{Mn}) (Kruzhkova et al., 2020). Thus, the coefficient may vary from 0 to 1. The belonging of each vandal action was examined in relation to each category. Then the assignment of particular act of vandalism to a particular category was determined by selecting the highest coefficient of belonging.

Results

We analyzed secondary sources (media publications, pictures, thematic social groups) and identified different socio-psychological messages conveyed by vandal actions, which led us to classify them into five categories:

1. *Vandalism as a mechanism of adaptation to change.* This category includes cases of unauthorized transformation of urban space aimed at reflecting new norms of social behavior. Sometimes a humorous component was used by the vandals to approve and consolidate new imposed social norms. At the same time, humor reduces the significance of these norms. However, their partial depreciation reduces the resistance to changes and encourages the adoption of the new rules of the game. Through vandal images and manifestations people can gain a better understanding of the threat they are facing and come to accept the fact of change. These images show

that the vandals are aware of this change and, through their actions, seek to reflect the new problems, practices, and life realities, and to rethink the existing values in the new context. They also seek to tell not only "social stories" but their own personal "stories".

The street-art work *Profilaktika* [Profilaxy] in St. Petersburg (Figure 1) represents an old TV showing only the typical TV test patterns with color bars. The picture depicts the world in a "special mode of functioning" with all its social and business activities temporarily frozen.

An interesting piece of street-art appeared in the Russian town of Bologoe: a famous adventurer and treasure hunter, Indiana Jones, finds the most valuable artifact of the pandemic time—a golden toilet paper roll (Figure 2). The idea of toilet paper as a treasure was also reflected in street art in other countries. For example, in Berlin, Germany, there is a drawing of Gollum saying "My precious!" to the toilet paper roll. The global hype around toilet paper, though hilarious, demonstrates a serious change

Figure 1

Graffiti Profilaktika [Profilaxy], Saint Petersburg, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], VK (https://vk.com/wall-86640238_629447).

Figure 2

Graffiti Indiana Dzhons i zolotoi rulon [Indiana Jones and the Golden Roll], Bologoe, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], VK (https://vk.com/wall-86640238_618809).

in the system of social values: simple household items, essentials began to be valued above the rest. The choice of the essentials to be portrayed differs depending on the national context: for example, in Russian cities there were drawings dedicated to buckwheat, which reflect an increased demand for this product in Russia and transmit a message similar to that of the drawings with toilet paper.

Many objects of vandalism reflected personal experiences and particular life problems that people faced during the pandemic. For instance, the cancellation of proms became one of the greatest disappointments for many 2020 graduates. The inscription in Figure 3 imitates traditional chalk drawings in the schoolyards devoted to saying goodbye to school life and reflects the changes brought by the situation of the pandemic.

The social isolation regime increased the risk of loneliness for many people: for instance, the image of the COVID-19 molecule quoting a well-known song (lyrics of Marina Tsvetaeva) about unrequited love *Mne nravitsia, chto vy bol'ny ne mnoi* [I like that you are not sick with me] (Figure 4) in a mildly ironic manner highlights the autonomy, atomization and loneliness of people during the lockdown. At the same time, this drawing emphasizes the need to keep social distance to stay safe.

The theme of love is often found in murals in different countries. For example, a mural in Brin (Norway) shows that the passion of lovers does not prevent them from wearing masks. A mural in Seattle (USA) claims that love is possible even in a gas mask (Figure 5).

The images we analyzed revealed an increased attention to the mask regime. Practically all over the world, unknown people put on hygiene masks on street sculptures. Both old and new murals spotted this modern "accessory". Masks added to the murals and street art reproducing famous masterpieces stimulated the viewers to rethink the "new classic" of the modern world. For example, street artist Banksy "put" a mask on the "Girl with the Pearl Earring" (Figure 6).

Figure 3
Inscription, Klintsy, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Ushli ne poproshchavshis'. Koronnyi vypusk*
[Gone without saying goodbye. Corona graduates], BryanskNovosti
(https://bryansknovosti.ru/ушли-не-попрощавшись-коронный-вы/).

Figure 4

Graffiti Mne nravitsia, chto vy bol'ny ne mnoi [I like that you are not sick with me], Perm, Russia 2020

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], VK (https://vk.com/wall-86640238_652479).

Figure 5

Mural "Pandemic kiss in gas masks", Seattle, USA, 2020

Note. From *Iskusstvo i koronavirus: 25 muralov iz raznykh stran* [Art and coronavirus: 25 murals from different countries], Interior+Design (https://www.interior.ru/art/9380-iskusstvo-i-koronavirus-25-muralov-iz-raznih-stran.html).

Figure 6

Mural "Girl with the earring", Bristol, Great Britain, 2020

Note. From *Iskusstvo i koronavirus: 25 muralov iz raznykh stran* [Art and coronavirus: 25 murals from different countries], Interior+Design (https://www.interior.ru/art/9380-iskusstvo-i-koronavirus-25-muralov-iz-raznih-stran.html).

2. *Vandalism as a coping strategy.* Vandal paintings of this category use humorous techniques to depreciate the threat. At the same time, they are aimed at highlighting certain aspects of the negative situation and/or pointing to the ways of coping with them. These vandal practices use animation, personification of the threat, and insults addressed at the threat. They may pretend to be performing a kind of 'COVID-19 exorcism'. An example of the murals in this category may be those portraying political leaders in the form of the COVID-19 molecule (e.g., Donald Trump's face painted as the coronavirus in Copenhagen [Denmark]). (Figure 7).

In different cities of Russia, one can find graffiti containing obscene language and referring directly to COVID-19, demanding it to leave. The expulsion and symbolic destruction of the enemy is an important act, indicating a coping function (Figure 8). An example of such symbolic action can be found in Harold Parker State Forest, USA, where the sign of COVID-19 was just crossed-out on a cut of a tree stump.

Everybody faces the threat of falling victim to the novel coronavirus. The fear that the virus can appear in your home, in your family is great. The vandal shows an attempt of a virus to penetrate the citizen's apartment in the way similar to burglars but the man in the drawing protects himself with a mask and stays at home (Figure 9).

Another image contains a call to wash hands ('Wash your hands') to prevent the spread of infection (Figure 10).

The feeling of hope becomes central to the public sentiment—a hope that one will not get infected or die, a hope for recovery, a hope that one's loved ones will stay safe, a hope that the crisis will end. This situation was reflected in a mural in

Figure 7
Mural, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2020

Note. From *Iskusstvo i koronavirus: 25 muralov iz raznykh stran* [Art and coronavirus: 25 murals from different countries], Interior+Design (https://www.interior.ru/art/9380-iskusstvo-i-koronavirus-25-muralov-iz-raznih-stran.html).

Figure 8
Graffiti "2020 vs COVID-19", Russia, 2020

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/co.vandalism/photos/a.899434856812041/3008768082545364/).

Los Angeles, USA, which says 'Cancel plans. Not humanity'. In this mural, a woman is depicted putting the symbol of hope in her inner pockets along with a prayer and a smartphone (Figure 11). The painting demonstrates the main resources for coping with the threat and also shows that the hope for the best implies changing plans and switching to remote modes of communication.

Figure 9
Paint on the door "I know you're at home!" Haifa, Israel

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], VK (https://vk.com/wall-86640238_632894).

Figure 10
Inscription Moi ruki. Tvoi novyi mir [Wash your hands. Your new world], Kazan, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], VK (https://vk.com/wall-86640238_678161).

Figure 11
Mural "Cancel plans. Not humanity", Los Angeles, USA, 2020

Note. From *Iskusstvo i koronavirus: 25 muralov iz raznykh stran* [Art and coronavirus: 25 murals from different countries], Interior+Design (https://www.interior.ru/art/9380-iskusstvo-i-koronavirus-25-muralov-iz-raznih-stran.html).

The next form of coping in vandal practices is constructive participation in the fight against the virus and manifestation of public concern. These vandal objects contain simple encouragements and advice. For example, fans of Spartak football team created a graffiti with the slogan *Boris' i pobezhdai!* [Fight and win!] under the windows of the coronavirus hospital in Kommunarka, Russia (Figure 12). They also drew a wrestler wearing a mask and holding a piece of soap clamped in a raised hand calling for action. All over the world many graffiti and murals dedicated to health care depicted doctors as superheroes and symbolically showing that their work is heroic work. Their great contribution to fighting with the virus is emphasized. These pictures became widespread both among illegal (vandal) performers and legal (coordinated) street artists (Iskusstvo i koronavirus, 2020). In this way, they remind of the importance of highly qualified medical care for COVID-19 patients and demonstrate public support to health care practitioners.

3. *Vandalism as an unconscious defensive reaction to a threatening situation*. In this case, vandalism implies active resistance to the new requirements and standards. Such actions demonstrate the vandals' failure to cope with the fear of the COVID-19 spread. Their aggression stems from primitive magical thinking and irrational beliefs as real problem solving is substituted by destructive actions.

Destroying cell towers is an illustrative example of this category of vandal actions. In the suburbs of Liverpool and in eastern England, vandals damaged at least 20 5G cell towers, suspecting that the novel coronavirus could spread through them. It can be assumed that the towers became an object of vandalism because people confuse the fear of diseases with the fear of new technologies which are sophisticated and hard to understand (Golby, 2020).

In early May 2020, a cell tower was burned near the village of Nogir in the Republic of North Ossetia (Russia) because the residents were scared that a new fifth-generation network (5G) would be built. The head of the region, Vyacheslav Bitarov, noted that many residents of the republic claimed that the coronavirus infection did not exist and it was invented for further spread of 5G networks used for irradiation and chipping (V Severnoi Osetii, 2020). Similar incidents happened in New Zealand, where 17 cell towers had been broken since the beginning of quarantine in the country (Pasley, 2020).

Figure 12
Mural Boris' i pobezhdai! [Fight and win!], Kommunarka, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Fanaty «Spartaka» narisovali graffiti v podderzhku bol'nykh koronavirusom v Kommunarke: «Boris' i pobezhdai!»* [Fans of "Spartacus" painted graffiti in support of patients with coronavirus in Kommunarka: "Fight and win!"], Sports.ru
(https://www.sports.ru/football/1084529039.html).

4. *Vandalism as resistance to changes*. For instance, in Kiev, Ukraine, in March 2020, a man who tried to enter a trolleybus without a medical mask damaged the doors after the ensuing conflict with the driver (Muzhchina razgromil, 2020).

The problem of self-isolation, which was central to most people during the pandemic, led to a large number of vandalism episodes devoted to this topic. A lot of graffiti dedicated to violation of the self-isolation regime appeared in cities, for example, Figure 13.

An interesting example of this type of vandal graffiti appeared in Moscow on April 1 (April Fool's Day): it depicts a pass written in the name of a certain person, allowing him to leave the house to draw these graffiti (Figure 14). It got more than 2,500 likes from the subscribers of the *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism] Community.

Figure 13

Graffiti K chertu vashu izoliatsiiu! [Damn your isolation!], Yekaterinodar, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], VK (https://vk.com/wall-86640238_678809).

Figure 14

"Graffiti pass", Moscow, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], VK (https://vk.com/wall-86640238_626895).

In April 2020, in Yekaterinburg, a tantamoresca depicting a dog on a leash appeared (Figure 15) accompanied by a sign saying: Stand here and take a picture. Keep walking. If you meet a police officer, say that you are looking for your dog, which you have just gone outside with. Show them a fresh photo. Repeat each walk. The object "plays" with the rule prohibiting walks except for walking the dog. The ban on walks was especially difficult for citizens to put up with. The image received more than 1,500 likes from the subscribers of the *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* Community.

5. *Vandalism as a reflection of the sense of social injustice*. During the pandemic, a lot of pictures reflecting the growing social pessimism and social injustice appeared. COVID-related vandal actions reflected not only the situation associated with the pandemic itself but also the general crisis. The deep social problems were reconsidered in the context of the pandemic. For example, in Samara, Russia, the street art entitled Annigiliatsia [Annihilation] created by A. Abstraktov on a shabby hut depicts not only the coronavirus crisis but also the crisis of the urban environment, which is "dying" as historical buildings are destroyed and the city authorities keeping a closed eye on the roots of vandal youth practices. This drawing was also a reaction to graffiti being likened to the coronavirus by the head of the communal services and to the persecution of street artists (Figure 16).

The *#Malen'kieludi* [#Smallpeople] art street project in Russia focused on the concept of social distance (Figure 17). The author showed how far people are from each other in many social contexts: The imposed physical social distance of 1.5 m is not as terrible as the social distance between those who work and those who have lost their jobs.

In many Russian cities, street art links the coronavirus crisis with the general spiritual crisis, implying that people are becoming more prone to mass panic and susceptible to mob mentality. The mural on the wall of the Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in St. Petersburg (V Peterburge zaderzhali, 2020) compared the coronavirus and the "new Jesus".

Figure 15
Tantamoresca with a fake dog, Yekaterinburg, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], VK
(https://vk.com/wall-86640238_635638).

Figure 16

Inscription Annigiliatsiia [Annihilation], Samara, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], VK
(https://vk.com/wall-86640238_652518).

Figure 17

Project #Malen'kieliudi [#Smallpeople]. Sotsial'naia distantsiia [Social Distance], Russia, 2020

Note. From *#Malen'kieliudi* [#Smallpeople], VK
(https://vk.com/malenkielydi?z=photo-127054882_457239759).

The theme of religion was also raised in several vandal graffiti located near Orthodox churches. Masked Jesus appeared in several cities of Russia, indicating the need to comply with the rules of social isolation and adherence to the mask regime not only in secular spaces but also in the church since such rules are equally important for everyone (Figure 18). Such image appeared near the Orthodox Church in Chelyabinsk. Its appearance was preceded by an online discussion regarding the introduction of fines for violation of the lockdown regime. Many citizens considered it unfair that the work of most institutions was suspended while churches continued their services without any limitations.

In St. Petersburg, a street art artist replayed the situation of drug sales through graffiti: a man in a protective medical suit writes an announcement about the illegal sale of a coronavirus vaccine. This drawing contributes to the reconsideration of the existing social problem of the widespread sales of prohibited substances and the new problem of the increasing fraudulent sales of "miraculous" antivirus drugs (Figure 19). Moreover, it raises the problems of legal acquisition of some foreign drugs and their high prices.

Figure 18
Graffiti "Masked Jesus",
Chelyabinsk, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Kontseptual'nyi vandalizm* [Conceptual Vandalism], VK (https://vk.com/wall-86640238_634723).

Figure 19
Graffiti Vaktsuna ot Kovid-19: 100% import, dorogo [Vaccine from COVID-19, 100% Import, Expensive], St. Petersburg, Russia, 2020

Note. From *Koronavirus v Peterburge: poslednie novosti na segodnia* [Coronavirus in St. Petersburg: the latest news for today], Fontanka (https://www.fontanka.ru/2020/06/05/69299335/).

Discussion

The pandemic is a completely new situation for most modern people, which provokes a strong emotional response both at the individual and collective levels. It is the novelty of the situation, the lack of effective, proven strategies for individual and group behavior, and the situation of uncertainty that makes people, on the one hand, make a conscious effort to accept the new conditions and adapt to the situation (including doing so collectively in reference groups), on the other hand, it triggers the work of the mechanisms of the collective unconscious. Analysis of vandal practices as a reaction of people, groups, and society to the COVID-19 pandemic provides some insights into the social reaction to the COVID-19 and the corresponding adaptation mechanisms.

Most vandal actions in our sample (30 out of 80 or 38%) belong to the first category of vandalism (adaptation to change); the second category (vandalism as a way of coping with the threatening situation) had approximately the same share of cases, 31%. The first and second categories are related to rational coping strategies or 'constructive' and 'useful' vandalism. According to D. Peyrat-Apicella and S. Gautier, constructive coping strategies in stressful situations force people to look for solutions at all costs, to develop unified solidarity, to eliminate gilt and overwhelming passivity to decrease anxiety and stress. These coping strategies are supported by a certain inner conviction: If I act, I will not be sick (Peyrat-Apicella & Gautier, 2020, p. 12).

The use of humor enhances the effect of constructive coping, reducing the level of stress and anxiety (Penson et al., 2005; Savitsky et al., 2020). Self-sustaining humor is closely linked to constructive coping strategies: seeking social support, positive reassessment, looking for a solution to the problem, maintaining self-control, and accepting responsibility (Khazova, 2012). In a situation of a common threat and high uncertainty, these coping strategies help people maintain the level of social and socio-psychological activity necessary for developing new rational behavior patterns and new models of social interaction. This is especially important for decreasing the uncertainty caused by the inability to use the usual ways to achieve the necessary and desired results (Likhacheva, 2010). As the borders were closing and the living space was narrowing, the levels of stress and frustration increased (Grishina, 2020). Vandalism has thus provided another way to show oneself and the world that public actions are still possible and that people have not lost their freedom—both the freedom of movement through urban space and the freedom of expression. In the situation of high uncertainty and common threat, even institutionalized forms of street art were marginalized, acquiring the features of vandal practices (the lack of coordination with city authorities, lack of permissions to print the images, etc.), since vandalism is more dynamic and reflective of the current agenda.

The third and fourth categories of vandalism (unconscious defensive reaction and resistance to change) included a significantly smaller share of analyzed cases: 4% and 3% respectively. They can be described as "protest vandalism" devaluing social change. They also imply rational rethinking of the new reality through meaningful

involvement with the "rebel" camp. "Rebels" express their denial of the new rules and prohibitions and even the terrifying reality itself through extreme destructive behavior including unauthorized walks and vandalism (Peyrat-Apicella & Gautier, 2020). Nevertheless, such behavior is underpinned by the irrational belief that there is no significant threat from the COVID-19 or that the real threat comes from completely different factors (for example, 5G cell towers). The pandemic situation gave rise to conspiracy theories based on the belief into the unnatural origin of the virus (Calisher et al., 2020; Somma et al., 2020) or its being no more than a cover for some other, hidden purposes. Conspiracy theories can also be seen as a form of a rational coping strategy used by a group to understand significant events and subsequent chaos or uncertainty (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). However, conspiracy theories are proliferating not only because of the need to cope with the trigger event itself but also because of other, more persistent factors such as economic crisis, political instability, etc. (Georgiou et al., 2020). Žižek notes that the pandemic has spawned a widespread epidemic of ideological viruses dormant in our society: fake news, paranormal conspiracy theories, outbursts of racism (Žižek, 2020). The dissemination of conspiracy theories and their support in social networks significantly enhances their attractiveness (Garrett, 2020). Thus, due to the absence of comprehensive information about the COVID-19 and the lack of trust in the official sources, the popularity of conspiracy theories supported by social nets grew considerably, which we noticed when analyzing the comments to the photos of COVID-related vandal actions.

Not all cases of vandalism that have occurred since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic were directly related to the current situation. Nevertheless, changes in the social living conditions, changes in the daily routines and lifestyle brought about by safety requirements destabilized the emotional background of social interactions. This, in its turn, triggered the splash of previously latent contradictions related to social inequality, racism, economic distress, political confrontation, etc., and, therefore, gave rise to different protest movements and manifestations of aggression, including vandalism all around the world. Such behavior can be provoked by the governments' attempts to enforce social control. American philosophers J. Flowers and H. De Cruz analyze the coronavirus crisis in the United States drawing on the classic ideas of J. Dewey and see the strengthening dynamics of "we are against them" supported by the political decision of the authorities to maintain a regime of bourgeois democracy, which can survive only if citizens are afraid of each other and divided, if they compete and do not cooperate (Flowers & De Cruz, 2020). Žižek, in turn, argues that the introduction of quarantine backfired and led to the ideological pressure to establish clear boundaries between the healthy and the sick, to isolate those who might pose a threat to an individual's identity (Žižek, 2020).

23% cases (18 out of 80) belong to the fifth category (resistance to change), which shows that the pandemic provoked the sensation of change in the locus of control, changed the rules of the game and thus contributed to the vandal activity not directly related to the new disease. Žižek aptly observes that the pandemic has given impetus to new forms of solidarity, and also demonstrated the need to control those in power, whose responsibility in the eyes of ordinary people started to grow: "You have power,

now show us what you are capable of!" (Žižek, 2020, p. 72). The analysis of the vandal actions that have occurred since February 2020 revealed a surge in the cases of World War II memorials being vandalized in different Russian cities: Moscow, Podolsk, Kaliningrad, St. Petersburg, Kronstadt, Nizhny Tagil, Artem and others. Vandals had picnics on war memorials (Dvukh muzhchin, 2020; V Primorskom krae, 2020), grilled kebabs on the Eternal Flame (Gotovivshii edu, 2020), and extinguished the Eternal Flame (Politsiia v Podmoskov'e, 2020). At the same time, those vandals who were caught and interrogated claimed that they did not feel hatred towards the veterans and respected war heroes (Gotovivshii edu, 2020). Through their behavior the vandals sought to express their rejection of the official discourse of which the Great Patriotic War memorials are seen as part of. Vandalism was made easy by the empty streets and squares where the memorials are located. While desecrating these sites, vandals challenge the establishment and subvert its official discourse.

The feeling of increased social transitivity fueled the numerous acts of vandalism in the United States and several European cities. The rapid changes (new social norms, rules, values, behavior patterns, etc.) together with the inability of the key political figures to solve COVID-19-related problems contributed to the impression that the established structures and hierarchies became weaker and created a feeling that a window of opportunity was opened for desired social shifts and restructuring of the social system. The possible directions of these shifts are described differently in the philosophical discourse, which in an abstract manner summarizes the strongest undertows of popular opinion. According to Vittorio Bufacchi, the pandemic brought humanity closer to the state that Hobbes in "Leviathan" calls the return to the natural state (Hobbesian state of nature). This state implies a constant fear of death as everyone is equalized in the face of danger at the fundamental level: people's financial status, gender, or race do not matter for the virus, and many aspects of cultural and social life (theatres, face-to-face communication, live events, etc.) recede to the background. Vittorio Bufacchi emphasizes that, as in the Hobbesian state of nature, the life in the COVID-19 era reminds of the emancipative policy of social cooperation and its huge potential: we are entering the territory of a new social contract, which will become the cornerstone of a new configuration of civil society (Bufacchi, 2020).

Žižek, despite the fact that he highlights the elitism of the possibilities of preserving the usual way of life, supports the idea of impending social changes. He also speaks of the prospects of cooperation and, despite the criticism, discusses the possibilities of the emergence of a new communism that overcomes the boundaries of national interests and raises the prestige of the local practitioner (Žižek, 2020). Agamben, on the other hand, speaks of the strengthening control through artificial support of panic. He points out that the pressure on basic needs has become a part of the norm. in order for total government control to become relevant and legitimate has become part of the norm. This pressure is aimed at making the government's total control appear both relevant and legitimate (Agamben, 2020).

In the situation of modern transitivity, the most interesting philosophical conceptions reflect such relevant problems as adaptation to the new conditions and the search for one's place in the changing world; ethical issues; change of the world

view; the choice of survival tools and the cost of these choices; loss of confidence in the established, official systems. The above-described philosophical interpretations are, in fact, the reflections of the different public moods during the pandemic in the ontological sense in which Heidegger (Heidegger, 1953/1997, 1927/2003) and Bibikhin (Bibikhin, 1989/2020) spoke about them. Moods become noticeable when they collide with other moods, through their mutual influence, they become more pronounced during the periods of change: Moods that form the non-objective "background" of life can themselves be shaded only against the background of other moods. Therefore, the correlation between the significance of the world and the mood is most noticeable when the mood or the significance of the world changes radically (Shkuratov, 2005).

Acts of vandalism—these uninvited changes of space, be it the destruction of a memorial or creation of a mural—express the mood of specific groups of people, as these vandal acts implicitly affect the mood of people not belonging to these groups. Collective sentiments, as it can be assumed, determine the types of vandalism. Mood—the feeling of oneself in the world, attunement to what this world represents for itself now, or the basic world view— determines the actions and emotions that will fill the lives of individuals and groups

It is important that the conditioning of vandal acts by mood, that is, that certain mood for seeing the world and feeling oneself in the world in a very specific way makes these practices extremely important for people who carry existential functions for them. Although from the standpoint of the research one can note the formal compliance of these actions with the criteria of vandalism, in the picture, in the mood for the world for these people, vandal actions are a necessity, part of the natural course of events, which makes the analysis of the assessment of such transitional states in the life of society through the analysis of vandalism liquid.

In the face of changes associated with the COVID-19, moods such as fear, horror, hope, boredom are manifested. According to Žižek, there is no longer the world around us, ready for us, waiting for us and looking at us (Žižek, 2020), a person must correspond to the environment differently, find a new position, then accept a new organization of communication with the world and adaptation to it (type 1 vandalism as an adaptation mechanism), and thus a new mood must be established. Fear as a fundamental category indicates an understanding of the boundaries of existence, clearly outlines the contours of what is worth fearing. Coping with fear, which reveals the fragility of the world that has changed so quickly, in which habitual orders and forms are destroyed, also affects self-attunement (type 2 vandalism as a coping strategy). Wild behavior corresponds to the feeling of oneself in the world that has become wild and where all the primitive means are now good and useful (type 3 vandalism as an unconscious defensive reaction to a threatening situation). Resistance to the moods of others, to the new images of the world and the new ways of interacting with it causes vandalism of resistance (type 4 vandalism as resistance to changes) and a reconsideration of compliance with established, official structure (Am I in accord with this world, with its hierarchy and institutional order? Is everything fair and working well? Can you stay in harmony with the environment?) (type 5 vandalism as a reflection of the sense of social injustice).

Conclusion

Vandalism as a socio-psychological phenomenon has existed throughout the whole history of human civilization. Nevertheless, vandal practices in the modern situation of social transitivity are performing specific functions both for individuals and groups. From the social perspective, vandalism has a diagnostic function as a marker of social problems and attitudes to them. The COVID-19 pandemic, being one of the greatest threats to human life and health, to economy, environment, social well-being, and political stability, was reflected in vandal actions, which expressed behavioral and emotional reactions to the current situation and changing reality. Thus, in a crisis, vandalism appears both as an effective instrument of reassessment of one's own and social capabilities and as an attempt to assert one's own place in the new world.

In this research, we identified five categories of vandalism: first, as a mechanism of adaptation to change; second, as a coping strategy; third, as an unconscious defensive reaction to a threatening situation; fourth, as resistance to change; and, fifth, as a reflection of the sense of social injustice. This new classification enriches previous studies on vandalism and opens new avenues for further research on the nature of vandalism in the pandemic era and, vice versa, on vandalism as an indicator of social tension and the prevailing public moods and sentiments.

The predominance of the first and second categories of vandalism in our sample expands the understanding of vandalism as a rational form of behavior, not only as an impulsive behavioral strategy. The sufficient number of cases of the fifth category indicates that vandalism is important as a marker of increasing social tension and also as a socio-psychological mechanism of reacting to crisis and stressful conditions. Our research findings have shown that social instability and transitivity during the crisis stimulate people to rethink the current social order and to search for new social forms, structures, and principles.

The broad social support for street art in social networks shows that such practices are considered as admissible in modern society. Our research opens up new prospects for monitoring public moods and sentiments in the times of crisis through semantic analysis of vandal actions and analysis of the motivations behind these actions. Our findings can be used for developing mental health and psycho-social support programs during the pandemic.

Limitations

The natural limitation of this study is related to the fact that the pandemic is still not over and can play out in 2021 and beyond. Depending on the changing life conditions and public sentiments, the features of vandal images may also change.

Due to the COVID-19-related regulations, we could not access the images and objects of vandalism directly and had to collect the empirical data by using the available Internet sources. As a result, we analyzed only the images and information that we found online.

The suggested classification should be supplemented with a more detailed study of the social-psychological aspect of vandalism not only in the pandemic, but also in other crisis situations and in the ordinary life. Moreover, since this research relies primarily on the information from Russian sources and online communities, it can be further expanded through the use of more diversified resources from different countries.

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