

# Graffiti Art. Vandalism Overturning the Image of the Urban Landscape or Scope of Communication between Fellow Citizens?

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**Abstract** Protest, expression of opposition and objection to an action or situation, exists from antiquity until today. The means used to express it vary according to the importance of the events, their in-line and the effectiveness of the decisions taken. What's certain is that the more imaginative they are, the more resonance they have. Thus, graffiti is a dynamic means of protest, with a short or longer duration. Its advantage, compared to other means, is the power of visual communication, the process, that is, the visual transmission of information and messages. While at first reading the graffiti resembles no-use points on the walls, they then evolve into meaning-mediating messages and transforming concepts into visual representations. The economic crisis that is creeping into the societies of the states is an inexhaustible theme of political graffiti with many different expressions. Greeks - and not only - believe that the economic crisis is inextricably linked to poor political management and the wrong choices of governments. Its consequences lead to deep economic, social and political problems. They are combined with inexperience, unemployment, obsolescence and impoverishment, situations which exist, mainly, the middle and lower economic classes, and of course, emerge through a direct, sharp and caustic visual language in "street art". The symbolism of the graffiti created in the interest of the economic and political crisis, and their aesthetics, constitute the fundamental research field of this article. Contrasts, causticness, denial, ridicule, acidity and explosiveness are some of the visualized messages the viewer perceives. In addition, Gregory J. Snyder, a well-known sociologist at Baruch College, as part of a wide-ranging survey of graffiti, conducted many interviews with their creators, thus gaining their trust. Thus, he believes that writers can not only be understood as professionals of vandalism and social unrest, but as members of a diverse subculture that in most cases have "exploited" their experiences to build legitimate careers.

**Keywords** Graffiti Art, Vandalism, Communication, Writers, Street art, Pixação, Hobo tags

## 1. Definition: Graffiti

Etymologically, the term graffiti comes from the Italian word *graffito* – graffiti, the verb *graffire*, and means the imprinting of a drawing or letters on a hard surface, usually wall, with some sharp object. Archaeologists record in graffiti the ancient texts or drawings engraved on marbles, plinths or other surfaces [1]. More generally, graffiti means words or phrases written with some kind of ink on public surfaces [2].

In Greek the word graffiti refers to the verb *I write*, which according to Homer means *I carve lightly and later paint*. It is an anti-loan from the Italian graffiti, the verb

*graffire*, that is, i.e. engrave, design a Latin *graphiare*, *graphium*, stylus for wax engraving, ancient el. *I'm a bureau*. The word graffiti is Italian, the word *graphiare* is Latin, and is not associated with the ancient Greek word *I write* that is interpreted *I paint*, but with the ancient Greek word *office*, which means carve.

Interpretively, the term graffiti is attributed as the painting on the walls, the massive, that is, art movement that developed from 1968 – 69. It is defined as a mural created with a sprinkler, spray usually, mainly on built surfaces, walls or sidewalks and is a common way of personal expression or protest [3]. The protest is contained in the concept of graffiti, which uses it as a means of expression from the first samples.

## 2. Historical Data

The excavation of Pompeii brings to light many frescoes - graffiti created during the Roman era. Political slogans,

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protests, exactly what the graffiti of today expresses, but also blasts, spells, erotic verses written on the walls of pre-Christian Rome.



*Walls of Pompeii (500BC – 79AD)*

In the ancient Roman world, graffiti was a revered, often interactive, form of communication. The American classicist Rebecca Benefiel defines it as a means more spontaneous and authentic than recorded history and literature, which allows us to understand Roman society. It is considered a respectable means of expressing ingenuity, emotions and socio-political beliefs of all social groups. The contents of the inscriptions reveal the culture and intelligence of the scribe – an element repeated in today's graffiti – such as poem slurs, word games and numbers, drawings and wishes [4].

Chinese soldiers in the 16th century, design graffiti in the towers of the Great Wall trying to make time roll and give a sense of home to the frugal environment in which they and their families lived.



*Graffiti in Bei Tai of the Great Wall*  
(Source: <http://www.chinapictures.org>)

Graffiti, at the beginning of the 20th century, was used by political activists to declare and delineate an area to protect it from street gangs. In the 1930s and late 1960s graffiti was in the form of *cholos* in Los Angeles and hobo tags on train carriages. From that time onwards they began to form their current identity. *Graffiti Art* is the writing style that gang graffiti members had in Los Angeles (1930 onwards) and is based on English letters stained with brush. They wrote on the walls to define their territory. The absolute perfection of the line is the greater awareness of the truth in the opinion

of its creators. The inner world – character of the individual can be read by a drawing. Graffiti is a way of life and comes from the soul, which is why honesty and spontaneity are its building blocks.

*Hobo tags* are the designs designed on chalk or coal train wagons by migrant workers, the homeless, or the needy (hobos), who were travelling to find some work. The term probably comes from the western United States. The hobos communicated with each other with a system of signals and symbols to give information and warnings to their colleagues.

Later, in the years of the Vietnam War, the new generation was again expressed on the walls with words like Peace - Peace, Love - Love and LSD. The place of birth of graffiti, in its present form, the modern graffiti, is claimed by two regions of America, Philadelphia and New York. Around 1966, a movement called bombing began in Philadelphia, The New York. This term is still used today.

The most famous writer of the time, whose reputation transcended the boundaries of his neighborhood because of the interview interviewed by a New York Times reporter, was the Greek-American who signed under the pseudonym TAKI 183, which symbolized his name and the street of his residence. The reputation he had earned in doing so helped him survive in a tough neighborhood where the gangs dominated, because most people knew and respected him for his work. Later, gang members adopted graffiti as a means of expression and a way of mapping their areas. To clean New York's trains in 1970, it took 80,000 hours of work and \$300,000, according to a New York Times report [5].



*The first graffiti* (Source: <http://senseslost.com>)

### 3. The Social Messages of Writers

The economic crisis is identical to the political crisis and its effects are symbolized through graffiti with different points – symbols, depending on the technique, the substrate and the style – style of each designer. Their conceptual approach is concentrated in emotions such as anger, anger, the collapse and obsolescence of the political system, uncertainty, insecurity and the explosion to the limits of

violence. In graffiti the role of the designer – writer is double, that is, while he protests by expressing his opinion, he raises awareness of the citizens and troubles them. Most of the time the spectacle is not pleasant, it is not to beautify a cold colorless wall of a city, but to spur interest, to prevail over other graffiti.

"For me street art is a social calendar in public exhibition and I try in this way to touch as much as I can the truth because I think that finding the truth is utopian." denotes Bleeps in an interview [6].

In many cases, the semantic approach and graffiti messages are identical to the movement of social design - social design - in the field of applied arts. Social design as a stream of recent decades is based on the design of visual communication projects that comment on social issues in a caustic way. The social issues of concern to designers are economic, racist, environmental, political, labour, etc. One of their common points is the protest they express against the social issues of the country.

The difference between the works of social design and graffiti is mainly in the media used at the substrate level, in the time of life, in communication power and in public acceptance. That is, writers use stencils, stickers, designed themes that stick them to walls, paints, sprays, markers, etc., while the designers of social design mainly create posters that publish them on the internet, in presentations, exhibitions and events. Characteristically, the movement's creators say that "*designers who work for social design are the only ones who wish to be unemployed*" [7].

Thus, the graffiti seems to have taken the place of the poster on the streets but does not have the same communication power and resonance as it does. There is a perception that it expresses a person's subjective position, and so by a percentage of people it is not acceptable as a communication medium, because they consider it synonymous with vandalism [8]. The writer with his work tries to mediate messages understandable to an audience with different interests, of varying educational levels with emotional, political or social charge [9]. He rarely creates without being interested in communicating his own emotional charge with the recipient viewers. In addition to the material means he uses to visualize his messages, he composes themes that often exhibit intense sarcasm, satirical wit and caustic humor. The combination of the previous ones is observed especially in the urban landscape of megacities [10].

#### 4. Pichação

Pichação or Pixação is a unique form of graffiti, born in Brazil out of the need of people to protest against the social inequalities prevailing in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. It consists of encrypted phrases painted mainly on walls and empty buildings. Many pichadores (pichação painters) compete with each other to make them in high and inaccessible places, using techniques of free climbing and

dangerous descent that will lead them to the selected locations. An example of the event comes from the *Os Diferentes* Group, which "painted" the internationally known statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro. Of course, the writers were immediately arrested, but they boasted strongly about carrying out the difficult task.

It is therefore an angry form of expression and is part of the urban chaos that exists in the major cities of Brazil. Pichação is a vehicle for young people in the city who want to resoundingly express how they exist and how they are worth it. As a social protest, Pichação is fierce, provocative, but at the same time effective. It's an "attack" on the city, an attempt to "positively downgrade" it!

Pichação in Portuguese means tar. Its history begins somewhere between 1940 and 1950, with political statements painted on the street. In the 70s it almost disappeared, but in the 1980s, with slogans such as "the road doesn't need you" and "sold out," an offensive expression that concerns the world of show business.



Jacques Dutronc's nightmare - FRANÇOISE HARDY PICHACÃO (Source: <https://pure-evil-gallery.myshopify.com/products/jacques-dutronc-s-nightmare-francoise-hardy-pichacao>)

There is no country in the world where social inequality has taken on such dimensions as in Brazil. The first and main problem is the lack of a decent public education system. A system that produces illiterate and semi-learner young people, without prospects, plans and dreams. Due to lack of education, many young people in the country's metropolises are being pushed into drugs and prostitution.



Grafite e Pichação — A arte exposta nos muros da cidade de Maceió (Source: <https://medium.com/comunit/grafite-e-picha%C3%A7%C3%A3o-a-arte-exposta-nos-muros-da-cidade-de-macei%C3%B3-da62d6f20547>)

## 5. Graffiti in Greece

Graffiti first appeared in Greece in the form of a slogan on the wall and has a long tradition. The slogan, as we know, is a short phrase in which a social group expresses its aspirations, desires or disapproval of someone... or a message of anti-government or political. The slogan is also used as a code of communication and recognition among members of a group. Today slogans exist both in urban centers and on country roads. Others are racist, ecological, anarchic slogans, stadium slogans, religious etc [11].

During the German occupation, in the post-war period and especially during the dictatorial seven years, the slogan was identified with resistance. In all previous periods, the display of slogans on the walls of urban centres specifically required self-sacrifice, courage and courage, as there was a risk of imprisonment or even death. Painters often wrote slogans of people's awakening on the walls guarded by armed forces of the Resistance [12]. The transition is characterized by political slogans, protests and reactions of the Greek people. The Greeks, like every people, need animating and supporting them.



*Death to the fascists and Junta, National Technical University of Athens, November 1973* (Source: <http://www.athensguide.com>)

Graffiti in Greece in the 1990s is depicted as the movement of young people who form groups called crews, who design in the wagons of the trains of ISAP (Athens Piraeus Electric Railway) and the OSE (Hellenic Railway Organization). At the same time, the listening of rap and Hip Hop music, publications in magazines such as Spray can Art and the use of sprays, gave impetus to these groups and made them more popular. Shortly afterwards writers from France and the Netherlands visited Athens and helped their development. Starting from Athens and Thessaloniki it spreads all over the country. The graffiti teams started on the occasion of the Greek Hip Hop band Terror X Crew1. Favorite surfaces, the exterior walls of buildings but also abandoned cars, buses, trains, shop rolls. The next goal of the writers is the walls of schools that are an ideal surface for graffiti creation. School leaders react, complaints are made, but over the years the situation has changed and today you can see impressive and highly important creations in many

schools. Many are now looking for groups, and they have enough money to make the faceless walls of their buildings more pleasant and attractive.

The graffiti in the schools of the prefecture of Magnesia is the result of artistic creations of students and/or teachers, which took place within the framework of either the formal educational program or due to innovative activities, even as a protective measure to avoid inappropriate slogans and performances by extracurricular actors. Most of them are craftsmen that should be protected and preserved [13].



*Graphs in schools in magnesia prefecture* (Source: <http://www.eteachers.gr/mathites-ke-ekpedeftiki-gemisan-gkgrafiti-ta-scholi-a-tou-nomou-magnisias/>)

**"Homeless people are not invisible, they are human beings, we can no longer ignore them."** This is the new graffiti that captures Greece's crisis and poverty. The mural is titled: No land for the Poor, someone can see it the junction of Emmanuel Benaki and Arachovi Street in Exarchia. Its creator is the famous street artist **Wild Drawing**, also known as WD, who was born in Bali and is a graduate of the School of Fine Arts in Indonesia and the Ormerakis School of Applied Arts. As the mural says, (Dedicated to the Poor and Homeless here and around the Globe) the work is "dedicated to the Poor and the Homeless in Greece and around the world". The project was implemented with pole and roll within 4 days, 36 hours, and had no sponsor [14].



*A homeless man has been lying in the street and sleeping. This is how the artist Wild Drawing, known as WD, describes the problem of homelessness, creating a huge graffiti on Benaki Street in Exarchia. The design occupies the entire façade of the abandoned building and reaches about 10 meters in length. At the edge of the project on the left, WD dedicates the project to all the poor and homeless in Greece and the world.* (Source: <http://www.mixanitouxronou.gr/i-astegi-den-ine-aorati-ine-anthropi-den-gi-nete-allo-na-tous-agnooume-to-neo-gkgrafiti-pou-apatiponi-tin-ellada-tis-krisi-sis-ke-tis-ftochias/>)

The artists participating in the Athens Street Art Festival 2014 send through their artistic interventions political and social messages, while submitting their own opinion on the crisis, highlighting another Greece, active and present in European developments. As part of the second phase of the Festival, four leading Swiss artists of the genre, Bane, Robi The Dog, Safu and Chromeo, came to our country and painted in Smart Park, in public places and schools in the Municipality of Nice Renti, as well as in the School of Fine Arts. Bane (his nickname means in Greek «Ολεθρος») who made an impressive "lion roaring in front of the blue-and-white flag", tells us:

*"I come to Greece every year, and I have had several discussions about the crisis and its causes. Well, that's how the play came about. I understand that Greece has power in it. For me the lion symbolizes Greece, so I gave him the blue hue and painted the flag of your country in the background. I preferred to paint an impressive roaring lion rather than a frightened and withdrawn lion. Something that doesn't fit in Greece" [15].*



*Bane in front of the lion that symbolizes Greece.* (Source: <http://joytv.gr/%CE%AD%CE%BD%CE%B1-%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%BF%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%AC%CF%81%CE%B9-%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BD-%CE%B5%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%AC%CE%B4%CE%B1-%CE%BF-bane-%CE%B1%CF%80%CF%8C-%CF%84%CE%BF-athens-stree/>)

Wild Drawing's (WD) inspiration for the depiction of the owl, the graffiti created as part of the festival "The Little Paris of Athens" together with the Athenian Art Network in the area of Larissa Station in Athens, came from Jimmy Hendrix's motto "Knowledge speaks but wisdom listens". According to the creator, the owl symbolizes wisdom and at the same time is the symbol of the goddess Athena, the one who gave her name to the city of Athens. On the other hand, the owl as a bird is famous for its extremely good vision over long distances especially in low light. Today Greece, and not only, is experiencing a very dark phase and I think, as he says, that it is time for us to remember the wisdom of this creature [16].

## 6. Conclusions

Through our research we found that multiple interpretations of the term graffiti converge in the imprinting of words or images on a public surface with the aim of being a "resonant" protest, satire, communication, in a public place.

Political graffiti, as in pichação's example, is produced by a specific group of people but expresses the whole people. As a means of protest and as a means of communication in the form of the slogan or representation compared to other means it acquires special momentum. In recent years, the graffiti slogan has been characterized by humor, satirical disposition, causticism and tension, as is the case in the case of WD. From 2008 until today the economic crisis leads folks to marches, demonstrations, strikes, and alternative-style protests particularly imaginative, as is the case with street art.

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