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A Colorful and Multiform Language

Wall Writing Protest in times of Crisis in Athens

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A Colorful and Multiform Language “Wall Writing Protest in times of Crisis in Athens”

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Introduction

The Athenian urban writing as a visually alternative medium of intercommunication during the socioeconomic and political crisis in Greece. The street art activity on city's walls as a:

- Sociosymbolic expression via linguistic and imagery tools
- Interactive public medium
- Metamorphosis of urban space
- Open dialogue with Athenian society

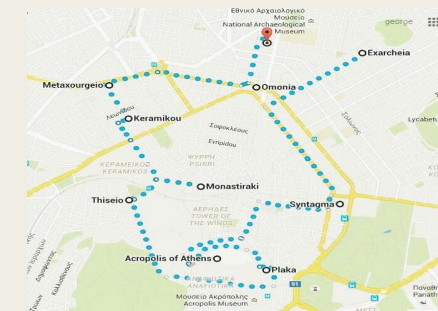


Figure 1 Fieldwork research in central Athens

Why Athens?

- “Athens is characterized by a sweet chaos that makes her so vivid! I love this kind of chaos because it gives me unexpected inspiration.” (Interview with street artist WD, February 2015)
- “Wall-fever has become apocalyptic, reflecting the heartbeat of a boiling city.” (Interview with street artist Exit, February 2015)



Figure 2 Exarchia, Athens (street artist: Absent)

Sociopolitical Context

- The word crisis was introduced into the contemporary Greek lexicon as the main key word slogan of the 2008 revolution in Athens, after the shooting of a 15 year old student by the police on December 6, 2008 in Exarchia district.
- The protest actions in 2008 constituted the onset of the financial crisis.
- Mass student demonstrations in traffic areas signified the end of Greek society of the last decades.
- The public walls rapidly started transforming into an interactive social public magazine, as an attestation of all those sociopolitical processes in the Athenian urban landscape. [van Leeuwen, 2005]



Figure 3 Monastiraki, Athens (street artist: Bleeps.gr)

Aim of Research

- Examination of the creative and artistic wall quotes from both linguistic and imagery perspectives. [Lester, 2011]
- Textual and pictorial matters are explored as means of uncensored expression through the prism of recent crisis. [Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006]
- The analysis is restricted to the verbovisual representations and non-linguistic sign systems.

Problem Definition

“Public writing constitutes an urban language expressing sociopolitical messages through the verbovisual code as a principal form of artistic expression.”

Research Question

What graffiti during the crisis on Athenian walls mean, and how the broader sociolinguistic implications of these assigned contextual meanings are ascribed?

- Type of message
- Thematic content (motifs)
- Intertextuality / Interdiscursivity [Fairclough, 1992] [van Leeuwen, 2006]



Figure 4 central Athens (street artist: Bleeps.gr)

Research Methodology

Qualitative empirical approach has been developed, as the focus is to qualitatively describe and analyze what kind of linguistic trends occur in Athenian urban writing.

- **Participant observation:** from mid-January 2015 until mid-March 2015, gave me the opportunity to explain the reasons they transform the walls into a sociopolitical magazine.
- **Photo documentation (around 1500 in total):** Some of them existed before carrying out this project. However, the preexisted wall writing projects have been also included in the data corpus, because they all address similar issues of current Greek crisis.
- **Eight semi-structured interviews:** from 1st of February 2015 until the 1st of March 2015. The sample consisted of eight male street artists.



Figure 5 Metaxourgeio, Athens (street artist: N_Gram)

Results

- The sociocultural and political changes give birth to a wave of popular sociopolitical wall commentary.
- Redefined signs and symbols, intertextual references, and culturally related subjects reconstruct the current Athenian urban linguistic landscape.
- Direct propaganda against social institutions and state authorities.



Figure 6 Exarchia, Athens (street artist: WD)

Conclusions

- A colorful and multiform language based on various semiotic modes as a visual testimony, in order to establish a spiritual bridge with the Greek society.
- A variety of economic and sociopolitical terms have been transformed into loaded words with an emotional effect on the contemporary Greek ideological context.
- A myriad of short, eye catching, and easy to remember slogans, with new or different connotative meanings in common use in the public sphere.



Figure 7 Psiri, Athens (street artist: WD)

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