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Approaching Athenian Graffiti and Street Art as a Multimodal Genre with GIS Application

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Highlights

- ❖ Graffiti and street art as an ever-changing form of public art and visual communication is naturally multimodal, focusing on verbopictorial relations (Bateman 2014; Stampoulidis 2016a, 2016b).
- ❖ The Athenian graffiti and street art scene is a visually alternative medium of inter communication during the socioeconomic and political crisis in Greece. The graffiti and street art activity on city's walls can be characterized as:

Interactive public medium of multimodal communication

Metamorphosis of public space

Open dialogue with Athenian society

Project overview in Cognitive Semiotics

- ❖ **Cognitive semiotics:** “an interdisciplinary matrix of disciplines and methods, focused on the multifaceted phenomenon of meaning” Zlatev (2012).
- ❖ **Street art:** performative, ephemeral, site specific.
- ❖ **Digital technology:** digital archive, GIS – Geographical Information System.

Research Questions

- ❖ Which rhetorical figures have been found so far and which are the most frequent?
- ❖ How multimodal manifestations of verbopictorial rhetoric interact and manifest themselves?
- ❖ What is the semiotic nature of different multimodal verbopictorial meanings: iconic or indexical, metaphoric or metonymic/synecdochic, or a smooth mixture of these?

Research goals

What?

- ❖ Empirical and experimental testing of suggested hypotheses on multimodal verbopictorial rhetoric in graffiti and street art.

How?

- ❖ Creating a corpus of pictures with rhetorical deviation (convention, selection, artfulness).
- ❖ Building up an explicit and reliable taxonomy of verbopictorial rhetoric in graffiti and street art.
- ❖ Promoting new multimodal verbopictorial rhetorical models and methodologies.
- ❖ Developing a georeferential online database for gathering, analyzing and visualizing data with the implementation of GIS (Geographical Information System) technique.



Sociopolitical Context

- ❖ 2008 revolution in Athens, after the shooting of a 15 year old student by the police on December 6, 2008 in Exarchia district, downtown Athens.
- ❖ The protest actions in 2008 constituted the onset of the sociopolitical and financial crisis.
- ❖ Mass student demonstrations in traffic areas signified the end of Greek society of the last decades.
- ❖ From May 2010 to present day, Greece has been part of three economic adjustment programmes.
- ❖ The public walls rapidly started transforming into an interactive social public magazine, as an attestation of all those sociopolitical processes in the Athenian public landscape.

Rhetorical structure of graffiti and street art

- ❖ **Convention:** the absence of shared pragmatic knowledge emerges as important boundary condition (Kennedy & Scott 2003).
- ❖ **Selection:** “[...] all pictures are unavoidably selective, and therefore rhetorical. The rhetorical intention is articulated by the selection of one view instead of another. The persuasive intent in pictorial rhetoric is manifested in what is not shown (absentia) as in what is shown (praesentia)” (Kennedy & Scott 2003).
- ❖ **Artfulness:** potential to provide pleasure (McQuarrie & Mick 2003).

Pilot study overview

- ❖ The Digital Archive of Street Art is a work in progress.
- ❖ 8 datasets.
- ❖ 158 pictures.
- ❖ Collection of data between 2008 and 2016.
- ❖ Geographical area: central Athens, Greece.
- ❖ Descriptive and analytical categories.
- ❖ Cognitive semiotic inquiry.
- ❖ Classification – annotation schema (metadata).
- ❖ Semiotic genres (Construction, Function, Circulation).
- ❖ Verbal, pictorial, verbopictorial modalities.
- ❖ Plastic and pictorial layer.
- ❖ Sign types (Iconicity, Indexicality, Symbolicity).
- ❖ Communication context – World knowledge.

Preliminary Results and Discussion

- ❖ High frequency of pictorial and verbopictorial metaphors and metonymies in graffiti and street art genre as crucial instruments for the representation of concrete entities.
- ❖ Conceptualization of abstract concepts of EU, financial slavery and economy, future, antifascism and antinazism, capitalism and consumerism, and political corruption among many others.
- ❖ Open and changeable georeferential database.
- ❖ Subjectivity issue is a weakness; the interpretations are strongly dependent on personal intuitions emerged from the observation of the picture.
- ❖ Inter-coder agreement method could be a reliability equivalent.
- ❖ The data will be freely available and downloadable.

Conclusions

- ❖ Street art is locational oriented.
- ❖ Verbal and pictorial integration based on various semiotic modalities is a visual testimony, in order to establish a spiritual bridge with the Greek society.
- ❖ The interpretation of graffiti and street art requires shared sociocultural Lifeworld.
- ❖ 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 public landscape.
- ❖ Complex multimodal verbopictorial nature of graffiti and street art

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