



THE THEN AND NOW: DECODING ICONIC STATEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY GRAFFITI

*George Nash**

ABSTRACT - The majority of contemporary graffiti is ascribed to personalised statements, mainly through the medium of tagging; textual insignia that displays the artist, the gang or the territory. However, despite this common theme there are many places in the world where graffiti is used in a historiographic way; sometimes displaying an anti-history or as political denial of past events. This paper will explore the semantics and rhetoric of graffiti that is associated with recent events and suggest that this medium of visual expression is polysemic; meaning different things to different people.

RIASSUNTO - La maggior parte dei graffiti contemporanei è associata a dichiarazioni di significati personali, principalmente per mezzo dell'etichettamento; segni testuali che indicano l'artista, la gang o il territorio. Tuttavia, nonostante tale tematica comune, ci sono molti luoghi al mondo dove i graffiti vengono usati in senso storiografico, talvolta esprimendo la negazione politica o anti-storica di un evento passato. L'articolo esplora la retorica dei graffiti associata a eventi recenti, e propone l'idea che l'arte rupestre sia polisemica, che cioè assuma significati diversi per diverse persone.

Graffiti is not the lowest form of art. Some people become cops because they want to make the world a better place. Some people become vandals because they want to make the world a better looking place (Banksy 2005)

INTRODUCTION

When does contemporary graffiti stop becoming an illegal medium of visual expression and an accepted art form? And, is contemporary and historic graffiti part of the narrative of, say, an historic building or monument; if so, should it remain *in situ*, forming an integral part of the history of the monument? Finally, and pertinent to this paper, are there elements within contemporary graffiti expression that extend beyond acceptable public decency and does society have the right to remove such imagery?

Within the modern world there is a tendency to express one's views, however trivial, through a set of recognised [semiotic] signs. These signs, sometimes in the form of graffiti, perform a variety of roles and are controlled and used by various social and subversive groups, mainly those associated with urban gangs and youth culture. Regarded by some as a scourge on present-day society, graffiti remains an important mechanism for expressing and gauging public and private opinion (Bennett & Watson 2002; Matthews, Limb & Percy-Smith 1998; Matthews, Limb & Taylor 1999). This form of visual statementing appears to have not even escaped the prehistoric rock art world; usually a modern addition to a fragile panel. Indeed, Whitley offers guidance on how modern graffiti can be removed from prehistoric sites (Whitley 2005). Graffiti is found in many places, uses a variety of media and conveys many different messages. The majority are on public display, but are only meant to be understood by a limited number of people; the likes of you and I are merely passive onlookers into a world of youth culture.

The media for the production of graffiti is extensive and its removal from, say, porous stone is difficult, time-consuming and complex. The most common media used include felt-tip marker pens, ballpoint pens, paint (brush or aerosol [spray paint]), and waxy substances crayons and lipstick; less used are engraving methods (scratching and carving) (English Heritage 2009).

All over our towns and cities, graffiti artists and taggers tend to spray-paint all the available surfaces of buildings and structures with their personalised insignia; particular targets are the numerous civic and public

* Archaeologist & Specialist in Prehistoric and Contemporary art, Department of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Bristol, UK



buildings that project the rule and authority of the state. These once strictly subversive and underground motifs, originating from America's East Coast during the early 1970s, created recognisable signatures for many street artists. However, within the last ten-years, urban graffiti style has become *mainstream* within the art world. Outside this restricted world of commercial gain is a disenchanting youth whose only voice is witnessed through the spray can. Despite the financial gulf between the two art forms, both commercially-influenced and urban youth art display similar rhetorical narratives and meaning; one current, the other reflective - here, contradictions exist.

In 2008 I wrote and presented five radio programmes for the BBC that focused on the underlying mechanisms that govern how and why iconic graffiti art is made.¹ These programmes used a number of prehistoric and contemporary examples from around Europe. Throughout, I was interested to see if parallels existed. Could comparative social mechanisms be drawn between prehistoric rock-art and contemporary graffiti? In this series three of Britain's most influential graffiti-artists – Manchester-based Kelzo, Birmingham-based Mohammed Ali (AKA: *Aerosol Ali*) and Bristol-based Banksy – were asked why they had chosen the medium of graffiti as an expression of their artistic behaviour and endeavour. Two of the three had originally started their graffiti careers as 'taggers'. Revealed in this series of programmes was that all street art had meaning and purpose, stating identity (through style), ownership and territoriality; attributes that could be argued for the execution and use of prehistoric rock art. Moreover, the execution of more complex imagery required design intentionality, forward planning and timing.

Tagging is an urban phenomenon and consists of personal insignia, usually delineating the territory of gangs or special individuals (Abel & Buckley 1977; Percy-Smith & Matthews 2001). The tag is produced anonymously and restricts knowledge of the identity of the tagger to their peer group using extreme and connected textual forms.

In the past it was considered that graffiti was directly associated with alcohol, narcotics and particular music genres such as *acid*, *acid house* and *hip-hop*. Graffiti is usually executed in a number of ways, from simple text, scrawled onto walls using marker pens or spray paint, to complex single, bi-colour and multicolour stencils (e.g. Figure 1).

RECENT GRAFFITI ARCHAEOLOGIES

When one considers prehistoric visual statementing, rock art and mobiliary art are usually the mediums that spring to mind (Reisner 1971). Contemporary visual statementing, however, can take on many forms, using a variety of materials, media and methods. Until recently, graffiti art had largely escaped comment from the archaeological community, although it had received some attention from sociologists working in specific fields of urban research (e.g. Matthews, Limb & Taylor 1999; Percy-Smith & Matthews 2001; Bennett & Watson 2002; Wilson 2008). Here, graffiti was considered a product of antisocial behaviour rather than a positive reference to social interaction and artistic endeavour and as a result a number of publically-elected authorities around the Western World produced legislation to make graffiti illegal. Technical advice notes from English Heritage (2009) suggested ways of removing graffiti from historic buildings and monuments. In its opening gambit, the English Heritage document defines the term graffiti as:

...words, scribbling or drawings used in the deliberate, unauthorised defacement of a surface. It comes from the Italian word graffiare 'to scratch'. These marks are visually disturbing and may cause physical damage to an historic building surface.

This step-by-step guide identified the problem of graffiti and suggested ways of removing it. Ironically and by contrast, the same heritage body produced a booklet that highlighted the importance of preserving and conserving historic graffiti, albeit in a military context (English Heritage 2004). The guidance document mentioned that graffiti held special meaning. From this document a series of questions arise regarding, for example, what constitutes meaningful graffiti and what the decision processes should be for removal or conservation of such media? The opening gambit states:

Military wall art appears throughout the United Kingdom, on or within buildings that are or once were in military use. Surviving works include murals, pencil sketches, stencils, instructional drawings, signage and simple graffiti, and incorporate both sanctioned and less official forms of decoration.

The content and extent of the artworks are as varied as their locations and reflect the immense variety of hands at work. There exist painted rural scenes in prisoner-of-war camps; defiant images in air raid shelters; emblems, badges, slogans and signs in hangars of the Royal Air Force and United States Air Force; names, dates and cartoons throughout;

¹ *The Drawings on the Wall*, made for BBC Radio 4 by Culture Wise Productions and first broadcast in February 2008.

and at some sites such as Greenham Common (West Berkshire), messages of protest and opposition in the form of painted images on buildings, fence posts and road surfaces. Although protest graffiti is usually found outside military buildings and establishments, it holds special meaning in the military context and can be essential to developing a full understanding of the site and its wider role in society.

Some wall art is located within sites already considered nationally important, while other examples are of great importance in themselves, even though their site or building is not of sufficient historic interest to merit statutory protection, for example through scheduling or listing.

Whatever the circumstances of its location, the management needs of wall art are often very specific and will be influenced by various factors, including the nature of the site and the extent and condition of the decoration. Conservation and permanent retention may not always be appropriate or even feasible, and there may be cases where careful recording is sufficient; in some instances, subsequent detachment or loss may have to be contemplated.

The following guidelines are intended to address these issues, covering the evaluation of significance, and the determination of conservation and management needs.

IDENTIFIABLE RESOURCES

In terms of graffiti as an archaeological material culture, several recent publications are worthy of comment (e.g. Taçon & Chippindale 1998; Baker 2002; Chippindale & Nash 2004; Nash 2010; Graves-Brown & Schofield 2011).

In a key text, Taçon & Chippindale (1998) coined the term ‘informed methods’. This approach relies on direct contact between artist and viewer (researcher) and was successfully used in understanding some of the problems associated with narratives incorporated into indigenous art in Northern Australia. Using informed methods, the researcher was gaining first-hand experience of witnessing the composition of the art as well as some insight to the mindset of the artist. This approach has been successfully used by Haines (2012) in her study on tagging within a suburb of Stokes Croft in Bristol and is certainly pertinent to this paper.

Similarly, focussed fieldwork along a prescribed stretch of coastline in North-west England revealed a limited number of engraved pecking sites that lay close to the shoreline and dated to the early part of the 20th century (Nash 2010). One site comprised mainly personalised textual insignia with occasional dates, both of which were pecked into the soft sandstone bedrock and free-standing boulders. There was amongst this assemblage the rare occurrence of engraved fishing boats and a curious labyrinth (Nash 2008). For this study the author was concerned with what the underlying mechanisms were for producing engravings in one particular place and concluded that the site, which measured c. 40m², was linked with nearby natural features which had developed a folklore history. Initially, the first graffiti on this site would form the impetus for further engraving episodes, usually associated with early - to mid -20th century holidaying.² This initial use of this site is important in that the performance of producing graffiti becomes fixed and established, later enticing others to inscribe their mark within an otherwise featureless coast-scape. The study also recognised text styles, composition, display orientation and specific themes; here, numerous artists were reclaiming elements of the coast-scape rather than the urban streetscape. The author would argue, however, that many of the themes surrounding both apply, such as personal insignia style, territorial statementing, and creating personal histories.

In an equally intense study, film maker Fred Baker (2002, 20) suggested that rock-art may have been executed in times or circumstances of stress, such as conflict. Baker’s systematic record of Red Army graffiti on the walls of the Reichstag building in Berlin shows the rhetoric used by the officers and men who scratched provocative statements following the final defeat of German military forces in 1945. These statements combine to create a polyphony that Baker refers to as the ‘landscape of the Reichstag’. Accompanying the graffiti text was a limited set of images; however, these are regarded as trivial and personalised. The messages, though, were poignant enough at the time of execution to establish a series of contradictory messages. In one way, the messages support the regime of Stalin and the struggle to fight, say, from Moscow to Berlin. However, there is historically much anti-Stalinist sentiment amongst troops against the Soviet Union’s totalitarian state.

Text, which varies according to Red Army rank, includes:

- ‘We Russians were here and always beat the Germans’;
- ‘A cock down the Fascists’ throat not Russia’;
- ‘Long Live Stalin, his army and soldiers!’
- ‘Death to the Germans, R.M. Boiko, Kiev’;

and, simply...

- ‘Moscow – Stalingrad – Berlin’

2 This area was a popular holiday destination for the ‘working’ classes during the late 19th and throughout the 20th centuries.



Using a similar approach to Baker, John Clegg looked at the mid – 19th and early – 20th century rock engravings along the foreshore of Iron Cove on Callan Point within Sydney Harbour, New South Wales. Here, he sets out to decipher the subject matter, the personality of the artists, and the perspective chosen in this harbour-cape (1998, 336-45). Both writing and imagery have been engraved onto the rocky shoreline. Within this repertoire are engraved animals, crescents, the figureheads of ships, fish, stars (both six – and eight – pointed), people, and an ironclad battleship (Figure 2). The text includes dates, which range between 1855 and 1922, and women’s names, including Josephese and Jamhambon. Carving this imagery would have taken considerable time and effort, and it is probably the work of day visitors to Callan Point. One of the artists was employed as a helmsman and another European seafarer (Clegg 1998, 345); as might be expected, the engravings have a nautical theme and their mindset is [British] imperialistic.

One recent archaeological study into contemporary graffiti deals with the chance discovery in 2010 of graffiti made by the [original] Sex Pistols line-up at No. 6 Denmark Street, London. The graffiti, made in the mid-1970s comprised mainly offensive text, cartoonish images of recognised people (including a self-portrait of lead singer John Lydon, guitarist Steve Jones and Pistols’ groupie Nancy Spungen) and corporate and national insignia; including crude representations of the Star of David and the Nazi Swastika (Graves-Brown & Schofield 2011). One could consider this imagery to be reactionary and naive but at the same time, it was made at a time in British history when popular music was considered bland and petrified. The death of popular music coincides with economic recession, partly compounded by a number of industrial strikes. The atmosphere of depression fuelled much dissatisfaction by the youth of industrial and working class Britain. It is at this time that further pressure was being placed onto youth sub-culture with an era of Post-war consensus politics and the rise of Thatcherism. At this time Punk Rock and its supporters were socially alienated and this was expressed through music and the performance elements associated with it including dress codes, body expression (piercing and tattooing) and graffiti.

ACTION AGAINST ICONIC

In terms of visual display, what do I mean by iconic? This sometimes overused adjective is, in my view, an apt term for describing some graffiti imagery, be it textual or pictorial. Iconic can have both positive and negative connotations, either way it is a thing, a symbol, an object or statement that stands out against the *mainstream*, representing a trend or movement however subversive. In graffiti terms, iconic statements are usually recognisable by all, rather than being a statement shared by certain peer groups or a limited audience. Icons can therefore be restricted to commercial branding, political statementing or, in the case of the Sex Pistols at No. 6 Denmark Street, to pop-culture. Clearly, these categories are extremely broad and can be sub-divided into many hundreds of sub-strands, several of which are discussed below.

Contemporary graffiti artists appear to abide by a simple rule: one should never graffiti (obliterate/ deface) over an earlier engraving/painting regime (Nash 2010). This appears to be a universal rule extending throughout many parts of the world and includes the simplest form of graffiti – tagging.

There are of course, within the contemporary graffiti world, several unique exceptions to this rule, one involving Bristol-based graffiti artist Banksy who, up until relatively recently was strictly *underground*, *legit* and subversive. Much of his stencil street art, once considered by the law makers of Britain and elsewhere to be illegal acts of defacement, was performed under the cover of darkness; his identity concealed. Following recent notoriety as a mainstream artist (and allegedly *selling-out*), a backlash from fellow graffiti artists resulted in much of his work being defaced or obliterated with whitewash, sometimes followed by new graffiti, in particular, in the city of Bristol – the *place* that gave him the notoriety (Figures 3a – 1c). A multi-coloured stencil, known as *the sniper* was located on a first floor gable wall belonging to a terrace of three buildings, opposite the Bristol Royal Hospital for Children in Upper Maudlin Street (Figure 3a). This iconic stencil remained unblemished until October 2011 when it was completely painted over in black paint and tagged, probably defaced by the [graffiti] crew *Team Robbo*.³ The sniper stencil, portraying an armed police officer and a boy poised to burst a paper bag to his rear remained part of the Upper Maudlin Street scene for a number of years. Following the removal of the Banksy stencil, the panel was stencilled with another iconic statement, that of the *Eton Posse* which was made by graffiti artist *Hoax* (Figure 3b). This crudely-constructed stencil showed the so-called political establishment – Messrs’ Boris Johnson and David Cameron engaged in throwing petrol bombs (at whom I wonder?). At some point in time during early June 2012, this Eton Posse stencil was also obliterated, painted with whitewash and replaced with a stencil celebrating Queen Elizabeth’s Diamond Jubilee (Figure 3c). The current stencil phase is believed (but unproven) to be the work of Banksy, who produced a

3 <http://www.thisisbristol.co.uk/New-graffiti-appears-landmark-Banksy-wall-Bristol/story-15164871-detail/story.html#axzz2VCfgd3ry>

striking multicolour stencil of the Queen with the equally iconic David Bowie-influenced red lightening flash across her face. The image was further enhanced with the Queen's eyes being closed, similar in pose to the David Bowie record cover – *Aladdin Sane*.

The three phases of stencil art on this wall are, in one sense, representative of anti-establishment statementing, especially the work by Hoax and, to some extent, the first Banksy stencil; both also display ironic humour. The *Queenin Sane* image though suggests a tribute to an iconic member of the British establishment using another – here, Banksy (or whoever) is also the *establishment*.

THE VILE AND THE VIOLENCE

Clearly, graffiti artists the world over are trying to convey messages/statements across a number of social and political spectrums. In the recent past, some graffiti art has become a legitimate product that has more than an intrinsic value to it. In each of the major cities of the world, a small number of self-promoting individuals have made their *mark* producing recognisable signatures across various parts of the cityscape. As suggested earlier, much of the subject matter is anti-establishment in form. Extending beyond this sometimes edgy realm though are artists that hold extreme views, usually political or paramilitary in form. Brighton and Hove Council have allowed one area of the city to be awash with numerous vibrant colourful apolitical wall murals. At the same time, the City Council has produced guidance for the removal of unwanted and offensive graffiti. The guidance lists certain words and images that are ageist, anti-faith, homophobic, personal, political, racist, sexist and swear words (similar guidance has been produced elsewhere).⁴

Political and paramilitary graffiti is indicative of the late 19th and 20th century streetscape; ironically what survives is now protected (English Heritage 2004). However, political feeling and sentiment, no matter how extreme, have been recurrent graffiti themes since the mid – 17th century, with rhetoric being traded between Royalists and Parliamentarians forces during the English Civil War (1642 – 1649).

Civil unrest in Northern Ireland, involving extreme violence between Catholic and Protestant factions has resulted in two contradictory graffiti forms; one promoting violence (or the memory of), the other promoting peace and reconciliation (Figures 4 & 5). In Dublin, graffiti statementing extends the reconciliation issue and states 'No to militarism' and 'no to the Lisbon Treaty' (Figure 6). This European Union treaty, ratified in 2009 replaces the Maastricht Treaty and included a number of controversial changes that arguably would affect the people of Ireland, such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the formation of a more powerful centralised European Parliament.

PLAYING POLITICS

Earlier, I briefly discussed the local approaches and attitudes to political statementing through the medium of graffiti. The statements, such as the memorial to fallen *heroes* fresco in the village of Ballycarry, County Antrim reveal a number of important contradictions (Figure 4). The centralised insignia shows the various national flag elements of Northern Ireland including the red hand, the red cross and the William of Orange (King Billy) crown. This insignia leads the onlooker to believe that there is a legitimacy between this memorial fresco and the imagery of the State. The *fallen heroes*, Brigadier John Gregg and Rad Carson were in fact members of an illegal organisation – the Protestant-run dissident Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF).⁵ The insignia suggests legitimacy but in fact the fresco reveals something very different. The Ballycarry fresco is a powerful narrative but will only be viewed by a limited audience; the same can be said for other graffiti images that portray Northern Ireland's bloody forty-year civil war. Collectively though, the myriad of messages conveyed from the various sectarian factions show a society in turmoil. Conversely (and ironically) the *Peace Wall* on the Falls Road in Catholic West Belfast treats the *Troubles* as a history book; the narrative of each panel portraying a significant event within the Civil War era. Here, artists combine recent history and other non-violent portrayals of Ireland's past to create a sense of multi-ethnic community and identity. Some panels even show subtle underlying tones of reconciliation. A few hundred metres away, across a physical divide – accessed via a number of Peace Gates is the mural art of the Protestant Shankill Road. Incorporated into the expected rhetoric of much of the graffiti within this area is the iconic red hand (National emblem); one panel displaying the three [red] hands stating 'WE [the Protestant Community] are PROUD, DEFIANT, WELCOMING' (Figure 7). In one sense this graffiti along with images of a bygone past represents a clear boundary marker, which in one sense is welcoming but in another reminds people outside the Shankill Road community of their territorial ownership to this part of West Belfast.

4 <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/environment/recycling-and-rubbish/graffiti>. See also: Collins & Cattermole (2004)

5 The UFF fronts the Ulster Defence Association (UDA).



Outside the artistic endeavour of Northern Ireland's political street-scene, graffiti artists, mainly through the medium of stencil art continue to express their views on geopolitics. Obvious candidates for graffiti ridicule have included former and current western leaders such as Tony Blair and George Bush – the so-called Axis of Evil (Figure 8) and Baraka Obama – Obamageddon (Figure 9). Dispersed amongst this rhetoric are racist slogans (Figure 10) and pictorial statements on past world events such as the bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001 (Figure 11). This particular monochrome stencil panel, superimposed over a multi-coloured pattern, recorded in Ljubljana (Slovenia) was one of many that challenged the official 9/11 storey; the message conveyed is clearly anti-Zionist.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: VISUAL ICONIC STATEMENTS AS PART OF THE STREETScape

Similar to other iconic statements within the urban environment, graffiti has its place, and as a result it has become a mainstream art-form. Its growing acceptance and popularity has led a number of town and city districts to have established legitimised graffiti areas/parks (e.g. Stokes Croft, Bristol and Seven Dials, Brighton). However, the mural art within these areas is considered tame with much of the meaning and rhetoric lost, despite its high artistic endeavour. As stated earlier, the one area where meaning and the power of the message has remained is West Belfast, usually within the side streets of the Falls and Shankill Roads. Although the themes in both areas depict historic events and peace and reconciliation, street artists have managed to subtly incorporate messages of defiance and political rhetoric into a number of murals that clearly demarcate the two ethnic areas. These and other more reconciliatory images define the setting of West Belfast and as such they are tolerated by the resident population and, of course the Health & Environmental Services Department of Belfast City Council. Ironically, the mural art, once considered offensive to opposing communities has now obtained iconic status and as such is protected. Indeed, graffiti is used as a form of social messaging at the so-called Peace Gates that divided Catholic and Protestant communities. Similarly, graffiti is also used to 'welcome' people into the Protestant Shankill Road area (see Figure 7). Taxi drivers sometimes offer tourists guided tours to the various Civil War hot spots and graffiti areas; here the pictures of civil war have become a commodity.

So far, I have discussed extreme and contradictory graffiti imagery that covers some of the walls of our urban centres. However, what of the passive artists whose political and religious convictions clash with social mainstreams. Over the past 15 years or so, western society has arguably become intolerant towards a number of political regimes and religions, including Islam. This intolerance is more than likely the result of a number of terror events that have involved the death and mayhem of innocents and has fuelled hatred via a largely right-wing media. Clearly, these acts of terror are supported by a small number of individuals, usually resident or [home-grown] nationals within the country they intend to attack (e.g. the 7/7 bombings in London). Against the numerous terror attacks and subsequent backlash, one artist – Birmingham-based Mohammed Ali (AKA Aerosol Ali) has been involved in a crusade to bridge these various factions through the medium of street art. His *art*, a vibrant fusion of street iconography, repetitive patterns and Islamic script has gone some way to connect people of all faiths, gender and politics. His work has been an important focal point within the street-scene, taking on such controversial issues as 9/11 and the Israeli-Palestine conflict (Figure 12). His work, recognised in many cities around the world usually conveys the same tolerant message. For example, when constructing his *Palestine* mural in Birmingham, Mohammed Ali stated:

Although I painted this mural not long after the Israeli Bombardment of Palestine back in 2009, the imagery is something that reflects any situation where innocent civilians are being attacked. The image of an army tank confronting a man in the posture of throwing a shoe is symbolic of the struggles that exist today; be it the Arab Springs or the attacks in the Middle East from foreign nations. The reality of war and oppression is something that has been present in my work over the years; waking people up to the reality of such things in an age where we become desensitised to it via the media. Painting this mural in a major theatre in my home city of Birmingham, took the message to a whole new audience. It wasn't just on a street corner of an inner-city neighbourhood – but right in the heart of the art establishments of the city.

END NOTE:

This brief paper has brought together a number of graffiti examples that extend beyond triviality of tagging and stencilling (although this media is considered by the author as an important field of research when confronting issues of meaning and metaphor). I consider the examples discussed to portray extreme subject matter that is not generally accepted by mainstream society. I argue that the underlying mechanisms within society are incorporated into many strands of the graffiti world, from the conflicts (spats) between fellow graffiti artists, to the extreme political and sectarian views held by some minority groups. The graffiti world uses these visual expressions, either via the spray-can or a carefully-executed stencil to show status (either amongst fellow artists or peer groups), territoriality (defining space and place) and identity; each through the media of art and style.

I asked at the beginning of this paper: Do certain elements within contemporary graffiti expression extend beyond the acceptable public decency and does society have the right to remove such imagery? The contradictory message from English Heritage (2004, 2009) to either preserve or remove graffiti is based on contextual behaviour; for example where it is located and what it represents. The paradox that is Banksy's work is just one of a number of dilemmas facing the so-called *establishment*. During Banksy's early career, local councils would not have hesitated in removing his numerous stencils. Today however, they, along with other established graffiti artists form an essential role in defining the street-scene. Despite Banksy's sometimes edgy installations though, some political and sectarian graffiti imagery display extreme messages that are used to shock and awe (e.g. Figure 10). Interestingly, this imagery sometimes remains in situ for many months, even years. The longevity of such iconography suggests a number of potential outcomes in operation including community tolerance, community acceptance and/or community passiveness. The portrayal of such imagery, however offensive it may be, does show that within our urban centres, a democracy amongst graffiti artists and their respective audiences flourishes, albeit in a superficial way (beyond the norm and everyday life)!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank colleague Thomas Wellicome for reading through this paper and making comments. Also thanks to Aerosol Ali for guidance in constructing the more sensitive sections of this paper. All mistakes are of course my responsibility. Finally, I would like to thank the Valcamonica Symposium team for their patience with the production of this paper!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABEL, E. & BUCKLEY, B., 1977. *The handwriting on the wall: Toward a sociology and psychology of graffiti*, Westport, Greenwood Press.
- BAKER, F., 2002. The Red Army graffiti in the Reichstag, Berlin: Politics of rock art in a contemporary European urban landscape. In G.H. Nash & C. Chippindale (eds.) *European landscapes of rock-art*. London, Routledge, pp. 20-38.
- BANKSY, 2005. *Wall and Piece*. Century Press.
- BENNETT, T. & WATSON, D., 2002. *Understanding everyday life*, Oxford, Blackwell
- CHIPPINDALE, C. & NASH, G.H., (eds.) 2004. Pictures in Place: approaches to the figured landscapes of rock-art. In C. Chippindale & G.H. Nash (eds.) *The Figured Landscapes of Rock-art* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-36.
- CLEGG, J., 1998. Making sense of obscure pictures from our history: exotic images from Callan Park, Australia. In C. Chippindale & P.S. Taçon (eds.) *The Archaeology of Rock-art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 335-46.
- COLLINS, S. & CATTERMOLLE, R., 2004. *Anti-social behaviour: Powers and remedies*, London: Sweet and Maxwell.
- ENGLISH HERITAGE, 2004. *Guidelines on its significance, Military Wall Art: conservation and management*. July 2004.
- ENGLISH HERITAGE, 2009. *Graffiti on historic buildings and monuments: Methods of removal and prevention. Technical advice note*. October 2009.
- GRAVES-BROWN, P. & SCHOFIELD, J., 2011. The filth and the fury: 6 Denmark Street (London) and the Sex Pistols. *Antiquity*, Vol. 85, 330, pp. 1385-1401.
- HAINES, C., 2012. Is graffiti symbolic? A study in the anthropology and archaeology of contemporary and prehistoric art (*Unpublished University of Bristol undergraduate dissertation*).
- MATTHEWS, H., LIMB, M. & PERCY-SMITH, B., 1998. Changing worlds: The micro-geographies of teenagers. In *Tijdschrift voor Economische en sociale geografie* 89(2): 192 – 202.
- MATTHEWS, H., LIMB, M. & TAYLOR, M., 1999. Reclaiming the street: The discourse of curfew. In *Environment and Planning*, A 31, pp. 1713-1730.
- NASH, G.H., 2008. The Heysham Labyrinth, Morecambe, Lancashire, Northern England. *Rock Art Research*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 227-29.
- NASH, G.H., 2010. Graffiti-art: Can it hold the key to the placing of prehistoric rock-art? *Time & Mind*, Vol. Vol. 3, No.1, pp. 41-62.
- PERCY-SMITH, B. & MATTHEWS, H., 2001. Tyrannical spaces: Young people, bullying and urban neighbourhoods. In *Local Environment* 6(1): 49-63.
- REISNER, R., 1971. *Two thousand years of wall writing*, New York, Cowles Book Co.
- TAÇON, P.S.C. & CHIPPINDALE, C., 1998. An archaeology of rock-art through informed methods and formal methods. In C. Chippindale & P.S.C. Taçon (eds.) *The Archaeology of Rock-art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-10.
- WHITLEY, D., 2005. *Introduction to Rock Art Research*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- WHITLEY, D., 2008. Archaeological evidence for conceptual metaphors as enduring knowledge structures. *Time & Mind*, Vol. 1:1, pp. 7-30.
- WILSON, J.Z. 2008. Racist and Political Extremist Graffiti in Australian Prisons, 1970s to 1990s. *The Howards Journal of Criminal Justice*. Vol. 47, Issue 1, pp. 52-66.

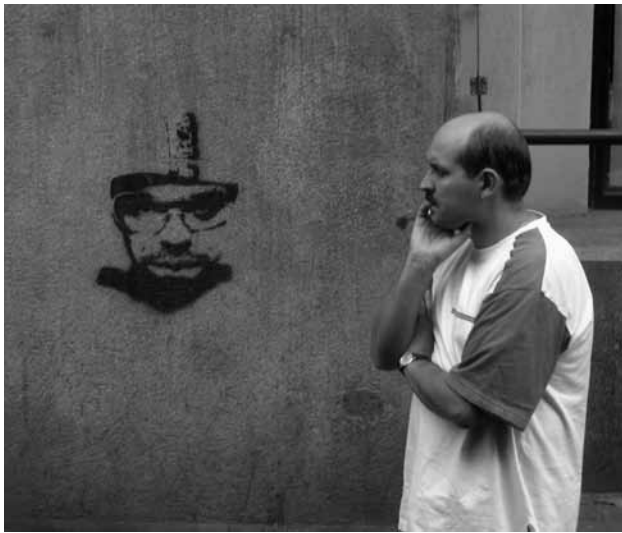


Figure 1. Passer-by pondering a stencil image in Thessaloniki, Greece (2006)

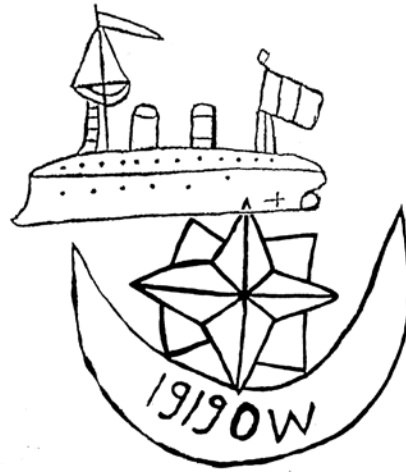


Figure 2. Battleship diplomacy in Sydney Harbour



Figures 3a – 3c The changing face of a gable-end wall: from Banksy's sniper to A Queen in Sane (Bristol)



Figure 4. Garden wall in the village of Ballycarry, near Carrickfergus in Northern Ireland commemorating fallen comrades of the illegally-formed Ulster Freedom Fighters



Figure 5. Bridging the divide: Irish hero snooker player Alex Hurricane Higgins, located between the Protestant Catholic Belfast



▲ Figure 6. Political statementing saying no to militarisation and no to the [EU] Lisbon Treaty (Dublin)

Figure 7. Contradiction and defiance, potent graffiti on the Shankill Road, West Belfast (2012) ►



Figure 8. 'Axis of Evil', a political view of the Anglo-American relationship of Blair and Bush (Bristol)



Figure 9. A cynical view of President Obama; stencil made several months after taking office (London)



Figure 10. Passive stencil r8 gud m8 [Rate Good Mate!] with 'I hate Ethnic's' scrawl above



Figure 11. Provocative stencil in the suburbs of Ljubljana, Slovenia asking who was responsible for the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York (photographed in 2008)



Figure 12. Reconciliation between east and west – fresco by Aerosol Ali (AKA Mohammed Ali). Note the central figure on a step ladder is Aerosol Ali (courtesy of Aerosol Ali)