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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 intercommunication 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

- Street art: performative, ephemeral, site specific.

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/syncodochic, or a smooth mixture of these?

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 (absenta) as in what is shown (praesenta)” (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.
- 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.

Conclusions

- Street art is localational 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.

References