

# SHAKSHUKA:

From Graffiti Vandalism to Bio Mimics Graffiti (BMG) Installation

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*"Creative designer can find, in a garbage site,  
lot of potential aesthetics for his dreaming."*

Armand Abtan, 1944.

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This paper presents a cultural research based-typography, done in Tel Aviv on the famous graffiti walls flooding this multi-cultural metro city. The research process examines the vandal and illegal activities of individuals and some underground graffiti groups.

## Background

Shakshuka means "a mixture", symbolize the eclectics structure of Israeli lifestyle. Literally, a dish of eggs poached in a sauce of tomatoes, chili peppers, onions, and cumin. Traditionally, Shakshuka is served up in a cast iron pan with bread to mop up the sauce. Israel is a mix of micro cultures, mother tongues, and immigrants from all over the world. Israeli population is 7.7 million, 91.9% urban population of total population; 75.4% Jewish, 20.6% Arab and 4% other. The median age is 29.7 years, and Tel Aviv is the city of youngsters. This city is an economic hub, home to Stock Exchange, corporate offices, hi-tech startups companies, R&D centers. It is the country's financial capital and a major performing arts and business center. Tel Aviv is a multicultural metro city; it is known as "the city that never sleeps" and a "party capital" due to its thriving nightlife, young atmosphere and famous 24-hour culture. About half million residents and metropolis of 3.46 million, a hectic place for 2.5 million yearly visitors, packed with best restaurants, clubs, coffee houses, and bars. This hustle-bustle city is populated mostly of very young people, a Shakshuka mix of students, high-tech youngsters, artists, celebrities, homo lesbian's communities, and work-emigrants: many languages are spoken and written in addition to Hebrew. Tel Aviv Shaksuka include not only huge variations of graffiti languages, signage and ads, but also the urbanism view of the city: from Muslim to Jewish style, from Baroque to Bauhaus and to nowadays skyscrapers. Moreover, Tel Aviv's White City,

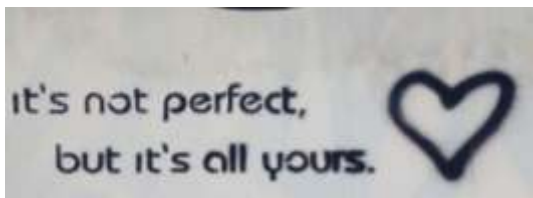
designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and comprises the world's largest concentration of Bauhaus buildings. Side to the global trend of mushroom skyscrapers, there are lot of artistic restoration projects of old and ruined buildings. The city center is heavy loaded by graffiti.

## Graffiti: Painting vs. Writing

Graffiti contain two disciplines of practices. One is **Painting Graffiti** (PG): the wall of cities transformed to free canvas, an opportunity of an artistic activity; some use it as a advertising platform to brand their style. Second, **Graffiti Writing** (WG): people message their hand writing on streets. There are two kinds of GW's: 1. **'Copywriters'** – we found four WG's theme groups on the walls of Tel Aviv: *Politics*, *poetics*, *sex*, and *Selfie*. *Politics*: voting for somebody, against Prime Minister or Finance Minister, Economic problems, Israel enemies, etc. *Poetics*: original poems, sometimes some rhymes, or a twist of a popular song. *Sex*: sexual organs, and male-strength statements. *Selfie*: signatures, nicknames, self-brand. We found that some of these GW's done with high writing skills and creatively designed; when others are just imitations, poorly done. 2. **Hooligans**: doodles on every public or private property – just vandalism 'against the world'. This group, use scribbles and scratches as a nonsense doodling without any creative intention. In this article, we will focus on Writing Graffiti. Many people think graffiti is an act of vandalism, an irritating eyesore. Others disagree and say that graffiti is creative and expressive art. In this paper we will argue the problematic issue of aesthetic values versus 'disthetics', the urban damages of these wrongdoing activities.



Shakshuka Culture: From left- mother tongue Doodling, Shaksuka dish, Shakshuka calligraphy (Hebrew, English, and Arabic)



Tel-Aviv Graffiti: From vandal doodling to poetic copywriting

The word 'graffiti' is based on the Greek word 'to write'. The word was then adapted by the Italians as a term used to describe the act of scratching with an edged tool. The earliest recorded graffiti was scratched out on a building close to the Sakkara Pyramid in Egypt about 3500 years ago; from Ancient Rome, Medieval Europe spread out all over the world, in era of no use of paper, posters, billboards, leaflets or mass communication. Graffiti, can be said, became some historical evidence about the hidden side of the past, before official documentation. In modern Israel, the most known WG's is a *Selfie* one: "Baruch Jamili", a name of a soldier who wanted to immortal his presence on the way to Jerusalem, during the Independence war.

## Graffiti is not Typography

Graffiti is not Typography. Typography is the toughest discipline in design, precise and accurate craft like watchmaking. It takes long years of practice to get an aesthetic sensibility, to explore the internal beauty, to gain the higher essence of it. A violinist will need long years of insisting praxis path to be called an expert, training and practice and climbing the highest quality - to be called an artist; dancer as well. In community centers there are some amateur chorus and bands; they play and sing for fun, satisfaction and love of music; they may also attend and enjoy some folk festivals. Most of them are talented, of course, and spend some spare time for practicing their roll; but they are not artist. The violinist focuses and rehearsals everyday all day, along his carrier life; challenges and compete others to hit a seat in the 'A' list of a symphonic orchestra. The same in football: playing with friends during weekends it is nice sportive activity; when playing as a professional player in a league is total different. So, to make it clear: Graffiti Writing (GW) has its own qualities, but it is not is not really typography; it is more of a cross between handwriting and sign-painting. But unlike either of those, graffiti is above all about self-expression hand-writing; not Typography.

Typography is the arrangement's technique of pre-existing letters into words and sentences, in order to make language visible and readable, in varied communication formats: Newspaper ads, books, posters, websites, etc. The arrangement of type involves the selection of typefaces, point size, line length, leading the line spacing, tracking and adjusting the spaces between groups of letters, and kerning the adjusting the space between pairs of letters. Typography always relates to technology, from Mesopotamian Ceramic letters and Block printing, to nowadays digital fonts. Understanding technical processes, side by side with study the cognitive ability of readers, are crucial parts of this craft. Typography with movable type was invented in 11th-century China; this movable type system was manufactured from ceramic materials, and was in use until the invention of wooden movable type. Metal type was first invented in Korea around 1230. But the real modern Printing Revolution started with the invention of the movable type and mechanical printing press, by the German blacksmith, goldsmith, printer, and publisher who introduced printing to Europe - **Johannes Gutenberg** (1395 – 1468). He developed specialized techniques for casting and combining cheap copies of letter punches in the vast quantities required to print multiple copies of texts. This invention started the knowledge democratization era, and the start of world literation. This was the typography birth – the shift from handwriting calligraphy craft to industrial graphics. The development of typefaces has long creative tradition in all cultures. Art movements and

innovative technology in the twentieth century inspired the flourish styles ready to use. Following the western fonts, we can trace the path from **Emil Ruder (1914-1970)**, **Adrian Frutiger (b. 1928)**, **Armin Hoffman (b. 1929)**, and **Wolfgang Weingart (b. 1941)** to **April Greiman (b. 1948)**, **David Carson (b. 1954)**, and **Neville Brody (b. 1957)**. The same happened and still continue in Hebrew, Arabic, Japanese, all Indian languages, etc.

### **Vandal Graffiti birth: New York City as a case study**

Hip hop is a broad artistic form that originated within a marginalized subculture in the South Bronx and Harlem amongst black and Latino youth during the 1970s in New York City. With four different manifestations: Rap Music - the rhythmic spoken rhymes, DJing, Break dance, Graffiti, and Street Fashion. It was originated by youngsters, as a street pastime, to express their poverty and violence underlying the city context. Hip Hop became a fast viral vibes, the world's favorite youth culture that crosses social barriers and cuts across racial lines; a center of a mega music and fashion industry around the world, when every country on the planet seems to have developed its own local rap scene. During the 80's a quality of life crimes throughout NY City, identified it as a problematic urban neighborhoods, with subway trains being increasingly inaccessible. Gangs' graffiti covered the subway trains in such vandalism, that commuters were frightened to ride. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani set up the 'Anti-Graffiti Task Force', a multi-agency initiative to combat the graffiti vandals in New York City, with a five-year program. Cleaning the scribbles from the trains, posting cops in every train station, and launching anti-graffiti campaigns; one, even banned the sale of aerosol spray-paint cans to children under 18. The law also requires that merchants who sell spray paint must either lock it in a case or display the cans behind a counter, out of reach of potential shoplifters. The Graffiti Train Writers movement was stopped, the city cure itself from a viral delinquency subculture.



Picture B: NYC - Decline of Graffiti Gangs

### **Graffiti Writing: legal and illegal activities**

No doubt, the NYC experience can be a case study about the urban standards and how 'disthetics' visibility problems can be solved. The facts are clear; the city succeed to transform from dirty-ugly and unsafe city to a fashionable and pleasant one. But some doubts are floated about the citizenship rights: can the creative needs of generation youth be blocked by a law? Is it a real crime? We found a list of five types of Graffiti nuances, printed in the NYPD brochure: "*Combating Graffiti -Reclaiming the Public Spaces of New York*". The list describes, but also analyzed, the cultural segmentation and profile of the young activists: **Hate graffiti**: is the

making of any offensive slogans, or symbols towards a person's race, color, religion, ethnicity, culture, or sexual orientation. **Gang Graffiti:** Gangs use graffiti to mark territory, send warnings to rivals or for economic gain. It may include letters, symbols, or numbers known to gangs and law enforcement agencies. **Satanic Graffiti:** appears throughout the City illustrating occult and satanic symbols. Pentagrams, crosses, inverted chalices, satanic words, and skeletal figures are a few examples of this category of graffiti. **Street Graffiti:** consists of "tags", "throw-ups", and "pieces". A "tag" is the vandal's street signature, applied quickly and repetitively. A "throw-up" is a more elaborate version. A "piece," short for "masterpiece," is a large mural-like drawing. **Generic Graffiti:** includes random markings, declarations of love, graduation events- "*Class of 2005*"- and other nonthreatening messages. Cultural Americanization process that swept many countries in the twentieth century has not passed over Israel. Considerable impact on the one hand shopping lifestyle and adopting the principle of individuality, freedom to initiate, freedom of expression on the other. The fashionable city center of Tel Aviv reflect to Hip-hop culture, which began in New York in the seventies, brought here, like all the world, the hip-hop music, rap, graffiti, break dancers, and the DJ'ing, considerable influence here mainly in graphic design, fashion design, and typography. There are people that post graffiti as an art' other as polluted street art. Over the past two decades, a new form of youthful graffiti writers has spread from its origins in New York City to cities throughout the United States, Europe, and other world regions. Tel Aviv, like other majority of world metro-cities, is Americanized by its capitalism lifestyle, shopping culture, and global trends of music, fashion, media, etc. Graffiti, as a part of the Hip Hop behavior trends are also adapted as a legal democratic of self-express activity. The local Graffiti reflects the Israeli culture with its Shakshuka flavors of origins, mother tangs, religions, and varied communities. Same like the New York Graffiti style, Hebrew and Latin letters here changed from the traditional thin style to wild - bubbly, block, and leaning letters. The writing is manipulated by the addition of characters such connections, curls, and arrows. Every Israeli trend starts in Tel Aviv as the desired place for visit, stay, and shopping. Tel Aviv subculture has underground writers and painters. 'The Tel Aviv Graffiti Underground' expresses their thoughts in some cultural levels: politics, economics stress, poetry, sex, and humor. They also promote their activities by short YouTube films, proud to share their 'anonymity' and illegal activities in a scout masters manner, such as masks, black uniform, etc. There is also a special shop, located in downtown city, for colors and accessories. They present wide collection of can colors in the shop window that actually promote illegal Graffiti. In NYC combating graffiti campaign, for example, it was not permitted to sale color cans to people under 18 years old, just like alcohol law. Tel Aviv municipality refrains from any action against local vandalism law.



The Graffiti shop window presentation, and underground group in action

The Israeli law Graffiti Vandalism is a crime punishable by one year jail term. Theoretically, any person caught defacing property without the express permission of the owner will be arrested. No enforcement of this law, open the door to Hooligans, side to Painting Graffiti's and



Writing Graffiti's, to continue to dirtying the city center buildings, walls, fences, stores, etc. Other perspective, Writing Graffiti is a spontaneous craft for free soul expression of young generation. There is no any public medium, free space, to deliver their opinions; have no money or political power to reach public media, and message their legal opinions. In the popular social networks, kids and youth have no any chance to interact their parents' generation. They have, by democracy, their own voice; they express their opinions on private and public property as 'new media'. Maybe, this dichotomy will need a shift, to convert an urban vandalism crisis to a new way of understanding the creative needs for self-expression, a free and aesthetic graffiti pop craft; place where city residents may enjoy creative outputs, and will join the activities as well.

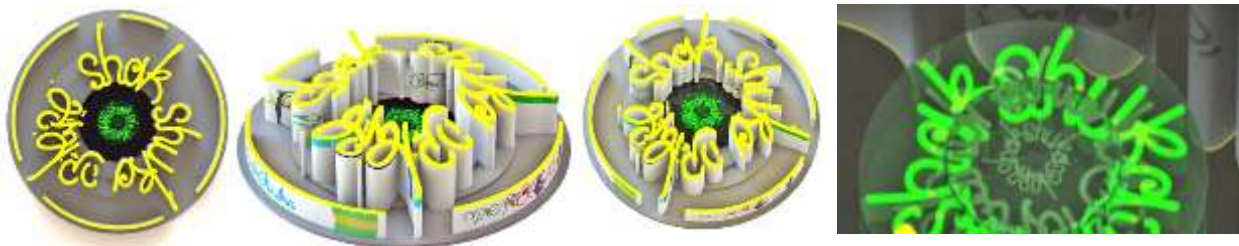
### **Bio Mimics Graffiti (BMG) Installation: from "Disthetics" to "Aesthetics"**

There are three main Writing Graffiti issues that led our ideation stage: First, tribe bonfire - there are community social needs to get some noticeboards or free canvases formats for self-expression. In Tel Aviv there are lot of youngsters that come and keen to stay because the night lifestyle and available jobs. They have no any chance, space and time, to deliver their authentic opinions, their social frustrations, politic struggles, and naïve will of 'changing the world', which is important for this social- networker generation. Second, residents' lifestyle - the Tel Aviv real estate is the highest in Israel, residents pay lot of money for their expected qualities in their neighborhood. They are daily shocked to face typefaces doodling on walls, fences, entrance to buildings, by bold content and vandal visuals. Third, Aesthetics and "Disthetics" - There is a cultural dilemma, related to beauty quality values of urban life style, the criteria for judging the aesthetic values. The Writing Graffiti subjects are sometimes racial, gender, ethnic, vulgar and insulting. There is no any aesthetic experience, but "Disthetics". It should be noted that the implications current term goes beyond philosophy and art and touching visual culture, social struggles, politic parties, and youth rebellion. Besides, it floats a design question about polluting the natural city aesthetics, and the balance value between vegetation and urban architecture. Is it Aesthetics or Disthetics- depends on varied answers of differences in gender, ethnic, racial, economic, age, and class. This distinctions and preferences affected the balance of power between groups, communities, and Shakshuka cultures in Tel Aviv society. These issues were in our mind , there is a real need for a new approach; creating free spaces formats for Writing Graffiti, may help to free every city from "disthetics", and help to develop subjective expressions to a 'community newspaper' walls. The research method framework leads us to get research insights, or better to say, creative insights. The research process focused on analyzing many street typefaces in Tel-Aviv. By checking carefully our data of the typeface techniques and structural qualities, we found a lot of visual creative qualities, social interaction, and poetics forms. We were really inspired by two concepts in UK and Japan: **First**, of the old Speakers' Corner in the north-east corner of Hyde Park in London; all kind of speakers - from all race, gender, religion, age - may talk on any subject, deliver their best or weird ideas, and message their own dreams. People circle the person in the center, listen politely to his presentation, and sometimes respond. There are free space and time for everybody to debate, argue, and 'solve' public problems. People, cultural minority in particular, realize the significance and sense of democracy. Second, Chindogu - the art of absurd invention, created by Kenji Kawakami in the 1980s, It merges the bizarre absurdity of a mad designer with the genius and innovation of an aspiring inventor. Literally translated, Chindogu means unusual tools. They

are everyday no utility and embarrassing to use gadgets, that are ideal for solving very specific problems into practical use. Our inspiration, from one side Hyde Park stage as a social steam button, and from other side Chindogu as a creative ingenuity - led us daring to find a solution that can balance the city aesthetics with the crucial need of self-expression.

Our idea is not to block the Graffiti activities, but to set up in the city's parks, a new cultural activity for everybody, an huge installation object for free writing activity, in two levels: for doodlers and for copywriters. **Bio Mimics Graffiti (BMG)** is a Shakshuka installation, that will be a city attraction for users and visitors; open space for Writers and typographers, in an open-source mode, when they are free spaces for everyone to communicate their thoughts by writing on given wall. People will come to enjoy the written walls, get the varied messages. This will lead to professional outputs of the Graffiti Copywriters. These activities will magnet typographer and graphic designers to use these new urban formats professionally; from this point, we presume, something new will be created - the birth of environmental typography as a cultural ecology. This change will foster all kind of copy Graffiti, the visual sensibility, and creativity, ability for abstraction, synthesis and aesthetical compositions. This expressions will contain outer and inner worlds of ideas, moods, feelings, experiences, responses, passions; the subjective voice will communicate better, will try to hit purely aesthetics besides practical function; The style will reach other design scales, from objective and nonobjective abstraction to naturalism and realism. The writing unity ingredients such as line, shape, form, texture, color, and size will find the given space balance for harmony by emphasis the ingredients variety, scale, proportion, and rhythm. BMG walls all over city will be free to use, anywhere, anytime.

BMG Installation 3D perspectives, Including Microalgae Technology Lighting



From left: Installation concept, Walls for free Writing Graffiti, Microalgae Lighting in a seating center

This kind of writing activities will shift vandal Graffiti to a public interest and understanding of Typography. We believe that such cultural idea will develop not only the typography practices, but will change the contents from negative approach to deepen social dialogues, and more important: from 'disthetics' to aesthetics. The BMG installation is based on our cultural sustainability approach, of fostering the city neighborhoods aesthetics, and letting the varied minorities to express freely their own voice. The design of site center involves the last cutting edge of Microalgae system, an advanced technology of Eco-Friendly Light. It is based on a , French biochemist, **Pierre Calleja**, patent; has developed lighting system that absorbs CO2 that is powered without electricity, absorbing carbon dioxide as it functions. Certain types of algae can feed off of organic carbon as well as sunlight, and in the process produce carbohydrate energy for themselves as well as oxygen as a waste product. The lamps are composed of a tube containing microalgae, as well as a battery during the day, the batteries are charged via photosynthesis of the algae, using both solar power and CO2 - both of which are usable by the plant life. These lamps consist of algae-filled water along with a light and battery system. During the day the algae produce energy from sunlight that is then stored in the batteries. Then at night the energy is used to power the light. Using Microalgae light has two reasons: lighting the installation space in night, and promoting eco city message as well. We tend to believe that this BMG idea will shift Graffiti from vandalism to positive activity of Shakshuka bone fire tribe.

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