

Infected Mushrooms or Diamond Quarry

(Graffiti Writing & Display Type)

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Abstract:

Street Art or Graffiti has many different philosophical explanations. As an ancient human behavior or human nature Graffiti or *Graffito* (in its original Italian name) leaved a mark on the world as a part of quest for eternity. But as a modern social phenomenon Graffiti is just an anarchistic reaction or vandalism against today's discipline of urban design and modern advertising, and is an unbreakable part of our cities feature.

This article surveys graffiti writing as a script and makes a dialectical comparison between display type and graffiti writing especially in legibility and pictorial quality. Also this regards graffiti history and advancements of its various styles to distinguish its manners, aims and effects.

This article regards Graffiti artworks as a meaningful visual Art and proposes a new description for Graffiti writing as a memento of some forgotten old calligraphic artworks especially in eastern visual cultures. It refers to similarity between graffiti writing and some old display calligraphy. Also refer to *Toqra* writing as a special old traditional usage of Persian calligraphy styles innovated for signature, devotion, glamour designing and...

Key words:

Graffiti, Display type, legibility, Persian calligraphy

Introduction

Nowadays, you are deeply affected by different titles in various display types especially used in advertisement while you are walking around the cities of the world. Against these regular designed types, there are some unexplainable scripts that make a great contrast in urban spaces and their special ambiguity attract your attention.

What are these strange colorful images which are sprayed out everywhere? Are these meaningless vulgarity or these are mysterious messages? Are these like a forged coin or like a big heritage? New creatures or like survivors of old periods? Are these unemployed funguses and infected mushrooms growing up under trees in a jungle and are dangerous or a worthy diamond quarry crystallized in history and is unique after discovery, mining and purring? Are these bubble writings which make nice details in cities feature but have bad impact in society's visual imagination or are they illegible writing which disturbs cities view but make a pleasure after solving?

Graffiti in its little form like tagging or large format throw ups plays an important role in Modern writing culture especially in display typography because it has a tested grace and makes a powerful impact in visitors mind. Graffiti artists describe their works as modern hieroglyphs or modern day's calligraphy. They display their messages by exotic types and use an enigmatic deformation in typefaces to make a puzzling in their compositions.

Reading experience

The legibility of a script depends largely on how it is designed formally and aesthetically, and how the script is handled in terms of design and typography. In the case of text type the important factor is that the content or the general context can be grasped rapidly and without difficulty. But for headings or display types it is important to attract the reader's attention first at all. So there is less concern for readability and more potential for using type in an artistic manner. Type is combined with negative space, graphic elements and pictures, forming relationships and dialog between words and images. Color and size of type elements are much more prevalent than in text typography. Most display typography exploits type at larger sizes, where the details of letter design are magnified. Color is used for its emotional effect in conveying the tone and nature of subject matter.

What about graffiti?

Graffiti like display type, is: usually bold, exciting, artistic, attention getting, shocking, beautiful, decorative, moreover deflect every letterform without any restriction aggressively and tend to have lesser readability deliberately.

We can suppose a scale extending between legibility and pictorial quality as two points and make a spectrum to explain differences between text type, display type and graffiti writing in reading process. If display type has a middle range and text type tend to have higher legibility, in opposite side graffiti writing tend to have higher pictorial quality.

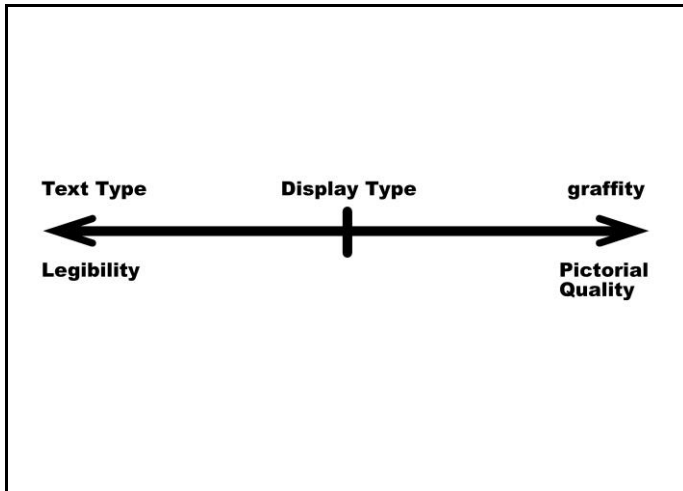


Figure.1

But graffiti scripts have several placements in this spectrum depend on genres for graffiti styles. Subsequently a brief segmentation describes this classification in legibility.

Genres for Graffiti Style

Really there are so many different types of graffiti it is difficult to classify it without seeing a specific example. The main categories of styles for graffiti especially in pieces are commonly known as *publics* and *wildstyle*. This is an unconventional but rational segmentation which encompass sub divided styles like *semi-public*, *semi-wild style*, *blockbuster*, *straight letter* and *abstract*.

PUBLIC STYLE

'Public style' is read easily by the public. Legibility is the key to this style. All aspects of this style are geared towards legibility or at least not to hinder legibility. This style is like *signwriting* in its look and intentions. There is an emphasis on name recognition.



Figure.2

Within the genre 'public' style there is a number of formats. These forms are many and include *straight letter styles*, *creeper style* (based on the common dripping styles of horror comics and the font), *Western Saloon*, or *Bubble letter*. The most popular straight letter style is the blockbuster. So popular in fact it really is its own genre within graffiti styles. 'Straight letter' styles are just that, letters with frameworks based solely on straight letters.

Writers trying to develop their own vocabulary within the public style lettering, often find the straight letter format too restrictive. Writers rarely stay within this genre. It is usually a style, which is preferred by inexperienced writers, as it tends to be a middle ground stylistically.

WILDSTYLE

"*Wildstyle*" is a form of graffiti composed of complicated interlocking letters, arrows, and embellishment. It is term that refers to a piece which is a deliberately painted in an illegible and complex fashion. The letters might be cut and sectioned beyond recognition. Another style is the spaghetti style where the letters are sliced and formed into skinny and rounded shapes that read like spaghetti. The letter is cut into slices that are interlaced and interplay between letters is encouraged within the *wildstyle* format.

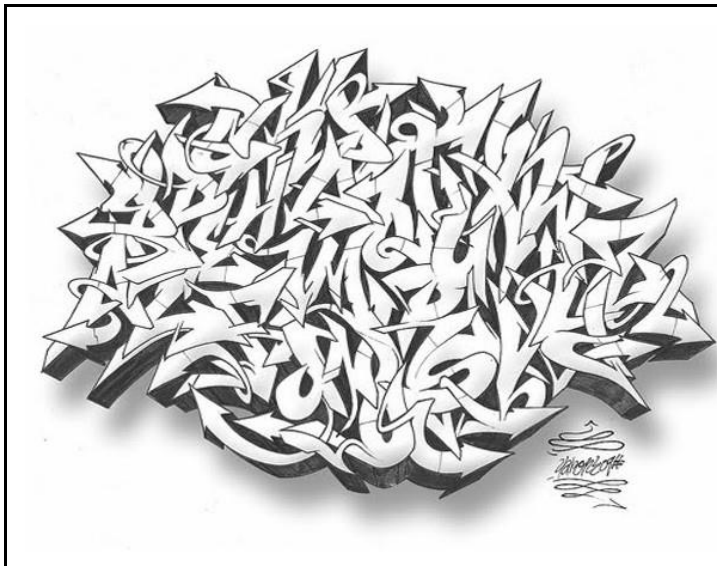


Figure.3

Exaggeration and interconnecting letter play is the key to a good *wildstyle* piece. This interplay between letters is often referred to as the flow of the piece. Writers generally accept that a good writer will have a good *wildstyle* piece in his repertoire. At the same time some well-known writers solely concentrate on this genre usually due to the desire to keep the public on the outer of this culture. A *wildstyle* piece is guaranteed to be illegible except to other writers and to all but the trained eye. It is often the case that a writer who wishes to exaggerate their outsider position will use the *wildstyle*.

To judge a good *wildstyle* piece, look for the way that the arrows are used. If the arrow adds to the flow of the piece, if it creates a dynamic movement, the style is good.

Usually a *wildstyle* piece is often filled in a way to accentuate the illegibility. Often though due to the complexity of this style a simple fill is chosen to reduce a complete loss of reading. This type of graffiti is probably the most famous found around the world, thanks to its complexity and high level of detail, and numerous examples can be found in urban areas.

Altogether in many graffiti writings legibility is the last matter for writers. It seems these are only an awkward deviation in letterforms to create naïve composition of meaningless writing. An important points that most be take into account is that in comparison with designed surroundings they attract passerby's attention louder. Now there are two main questions: Why? How? These questions cause two discussions about graffiti goals and manners.

1. Why?

Graffiti writers regularly use high stylized letters in their work exaggeratedly. Due to explore reasons of this uncommon writing a brief discussion on graffiti history is functional. There are various histories of graffiti with subtle differences. As a modern phenomenon graffiti begin started by

To begin with, Graffiti has a long history, which could be stretched to the cave paintings of prehistoric man. *Brewers Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* tells us - "(Ital. *graffito*, a scratching.) A name applied originally to the wall scribbling found at Pompeii and other Italian cities, the work of school boys, idlers, etc. in 1904, the first magazine to focus on toilet graffiti was launched: *Anthropophyteia*. Later on, during the Second World War, the Nazis used it for their propaganda machines. However, graffiti was also important for resistance movements as a way publicizing their protests to general public like *The White Rose*, a German group against Hitler in 1942, during the student revolts in the 1960s and 1970s and *pochoir* technique in France for stenciling.

In the 1960's in New York and Philadelphia, kids began to give themselves nick names as a public street identity, which they would leave on the walls of their neighborhoods. *Taki 183*, *Julio 204*, *Cat 161*, teenagers who achieved notoriety and respect by leaving his name and street number across the city, sparked copy cats when a reporter tracked him down and wrote an article about him which appeared in the New York Times in 1971. In the sub-culture that developed, the kids who could leave their names in the most inaccessible places could become folk heroes. It was an artistic battle against the power brokers in society, and breakaway from poverty and the ghetto. Through these pioneers, American graffiti was born. Initially graffiti artist often used their nicknames but soon tags got bigger and bigger until the first pieces appeared on New York trains. By the mid-1980s, there was not a single train that had not at one time been spray-painted from top to bottom. This phenomenon spread throughout the whole of the USA, firs in Europe, and at last in Asia and South America.

A quick look on this brief history convinces us which graffiti as the first visual aspect of human nature, also as a resistance against Procrustean powers in all over the world and all time, is an artistic reaction against two instinctive quests of eternity and sovereignty.

Graffiti writers use hand writing as a fast and unique writing. So graffiti scripts tend to illegibility. It helps writers to have sovereignty over themselves territory. Also it is a collateral for themselves individual styles.

2. How?

During an attractiveness competition with speculative advertisements graffiti scripts rub passersby's attention. They win this triumph in two steps: alienation and affinity.

At first graffiti scripts create a sense of alienation against frequent neutral surroundings in our modern cities, and make a metaphorical space ambiguously. Graffiti scripts create a surge against repetitive stagnation of surrounding and motivate everybody to gaze on these details and try to discover their messages. In most of graffiti masterpiece, observers must have an enough leisure time to incubate on these mysterious forms and discover every letter as a single form scarcely. So viewers adrift in their guesses to figure out this complicated puzzle of letterforms and get a joyful sense like a rapture of contemplation and be hypnotized by an interwoven phrase and transformed letters. In fact graffiti writers make a tricky sovereignty over observers mind.

After awhile audiences put away their exploring unselfconsciously and find themselves in a world of unknown signs. But they explore a sense of affinity with their inner call. It seems that intuitively we seek ambiguous forms and it gives us greater insight.

But it is not a modern aesthetic manner for scripts writing. It is an old manner used in eastern visual cultures especially in religious scripts and traditional calligraphy. In every eastern sacred art there is a monumental experience of this manner: A respectful sense with wonder and fear in front of mysterious and marvel forms. For example, decorative details and pictorial qualities in Persian letterforms help to artists to create mysterious composition skillfully. Undoubtedly audiences have a visual pleasure without any attending to content of phrases which evolve from this complicated geometry.

Observations/ Results

Totally what graffiti writers attached to letterforms to create an interwoven and illegible scripts, is a fundamental principle in design of Persian letterforms essentially. For instance cursive writing, reverse letterforms, unblock letterforms, and dots. For louder specification describe three styles of decorative Persian calligraphy subsequently.

Toqra

Toqra is a decorated and functional appeal of different calligraphy styles use for designed signature, seal, devotion, glamour designing and... there are many similarity between *Toqra* and tagging content of *Toqra* often is a name, nickname or slogan and it design for continual usage of special persons like leaders, mentors, and kings. Also occasionally decorative details and images cause a dramatic relationship between forms and contents. Cursive writing causes a cheerful rhythm in letterforms continuously.



Figure.4



Figure.5

Siah Mashgh

Siah Mashgh means black writing. It is a term used for an abstract old style of Persian calligraphy especially in *Nastaliq* style. This strange style evolves from calligraphers' practices to achieve skillful abilities in true writing initially but after a while upturn to a noble style. Like *wildstyle* graffiti it has sketch form and an aggressive composition creates by meaningless repetitive enhancement of letterforms or phrases frequently. So like *wildstyle* graffiti to the casual eye, the writing is often utterly mysterious and indecipherable.



Figure.6

Khatashi

Khatashi or *Khat-Naghashi* is a modern artistic appeal of different calligraphy styles. It is a combination of two old types of art: calligraphy and painting. This contemporary art innovated by Iranian artists five decades ago in 1960s and has all aspects of Persian traditional arts completely. Also as a modern art in confrontation with traditional calligraphy has a maximum similarity with graffiti scripts for instance, manipulative perspective, shaded effects, and multicolor scheme.

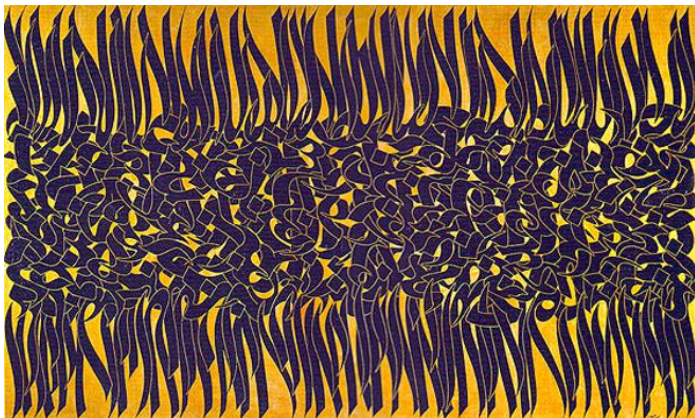


Figure.7

Conclusion

Graffiti script is not just a meaningless writing or anarchistic reaction against modernism. It is an instinctive visual communication which stimulates a powerful intuitive sense in everybody and its extraordinary geometry and complicated pattern evolve from an old traditional philosophy in art history. I suggest every researcher and communication designers to take it into account as a modern aspects of calligraphy, developed by a big stratum of society, and use its visual issues after exploring in advance design. Do not sell it short. It is not infected mushrooms. It is diamond quarry.

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