

# **A Change of Face: Using Graffiti to Re-Imagine Spaces**

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## **abstract**

In much of the literature graffiti is connected to notions of defacing, devaluing, vandalising, participating in an illegal activity or exhibiting 'anti-social behaviour.' The aim of this paper is to show the change of perceptions toward graffiti as less of an act of vandalism or a criminal activity and more of a solution to many social and political concerns. The paper offers a way to re-frame graffiti as the solution rather than the problem based on a study of graffiti crews in Sofia, Bulgaria. The paper presents three cases of these crews, each attempting to address different social and political issues within the capital of Bulgaria. This paper is hoping to highlight how graffiti can be used as a tool to help reduce crime, showcase a critical subcultural communication that is inclusive of the community at large, and depict the aesthetic value that can be added to a place in order to re-design the space and people's attitude and behaviour. More importantly, the paper serves to show how graffiti can enable introspection and bring out not only the 'soul' from the wall, but also our own.

## **keywords:**

Graffiti, Re-framing Criminal Behaviour, Bulgaria, Case Studies, Designing-out Crime



## Introduction: Graffiti Framed as a Problem

In much of the literature graffiti is connected to notions of defacing, devaluing, vandalising, participating in an illegal activity or exhibiting ‘anti-social behaviour’. According to Stebbins it is vandalism<sup>1</sup> and Young considered it damage to property and lowering its value.<sup>2</sup> One frequently cited definition is that *graffiti* can be described “as writing or drawings that have been scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place”.<sup>3</sup> This definition highlights the most important aspect of graffiti – *intent*. Graffiti carry meanings hidden in messages just waiting to be interpreted. Some of these messages are simply to recognize that a specific person was in a specific place at a specific time such as a ‘tag’, but many can be much more elaborative such as political, economic and social critiques as well as defining the social order such as when defining gang boundaries, claiming a murder, or making a threat of some kind.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of this paper is to show the change of perceptions toward graffiti as less of an act of vandalism or a criminal activity and more of a solution to many social and political concerns. The paper offers a way to re-frame graffiti as the solution rather than the problem based on a study of graffiti crews in Sofia, Bulgaria. The paper presents three cases of these crews, each attempting to address different social and political issues within the same region of the capital of Bulgaria, before presenting a conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert A. Stebbins, *The Interrelationship of Leisure and Play: Play as Leisure, Leisure as Play* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). 102.

<sup>2</sup>Alison Young, *Judging the Image: Art, Value, Law* (UK: Routledge, 2005), 52.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See Derrick Watkins and Richard Ashby, *Gang Investigations: A Street Cop's Guide* (Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2007) and R. Blume, “Graffiti,” in *Discourse & Literature, Volume 3 of Critical Theory*, ed. Teun Adrianus van Dijk (Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1985):137-148.

## Understanding Graffiti: Typology and Aims

There are many existing studies of graffiti, the messages and meanings it is used to convey as well as interpretative frameworks that have risen as a result. Some of these studies have attempted to develop a graffiti typology based on aspects of graffiti such as materials used, scale or style (see: Gottlieb 2008). The system that will be briefly examined here as necessary for the objectives of this paper is a classification system that focuses on the difference of styles within the graffiti genre. In this system there are 9 main styles of graffiti: *tag*, *throw-up*, *blockbuster*, *wild style*, *heaven*, *stencil*, *poster* (paste-up), *sticker* (slap) *piece* (masterpiece). Figure 1 below describes briefly the characteristics of each style.

**Table 1:** Styles of Graffiti as obtained from Graffito Canberra: Exposing the Best of Canberra's Street Art<sup>5</sup>

Style	Colours	Size	Location	Repeatability
Tag	1	Small-Medium	Anywhere	With Ease
Throw-up	2+	Small-Medium	Anywhere	With Ease
Blockbuster	2+	Large	Easily Accessible	With Difficulty
Wildstyle	2+	Large	Easily Accessible	With Difficulty
Heaven	2+	Any	Hard to Reach	With Difficulty
Stencil	1	Small-Medium	Anywhere	With Ease
Poster (paste-up)	Various	Small-Medium	Anywhere	With Ease
Sticker (slap)	Various	Small	Anywhere	With Ease
Piece (masterpiece)	3+	Medium-Large	Anywhere	With Difficulty

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the different styles of graffiti please see the website of Graffito Canberra: Exposing the Best of Canberra's Street Art <https://graffitocanberra.wordpress.com/styles-of-graffiti/>

Understanding these 9 styles makes clear that graffiti incorporates various types of text ranging from linguistic to visual. As Keegan wrote, graffiti includes “a broad range of texts – single letters, letter combinations, single words, phrases, sentences – and graphic representations – pictures, diagrams, identifying artist(s) signatures (“tags”, “throw-ups”, “stencils”, “stickers”).”<sup>6</sup>In addition, there are other forms of graffiti such as the ones done by ‘Moose’ (Paul Curtis) who established the company ‘Symbollix’ that offers strategic cleaning to create graffiti that are environmentally friendly and that fade over time – creative ‘commercial cleaning’.<sup>7</sup> The different styles and text can be mixed within a single graffiti as well.

These different texts are all part of using graffiti as a unique mode of communication that bridges the linguistic and the visual. Graffiti exist within a paradoxical space where plurality and contradiction are inherent, where multiple social spaces exist simultaneously that may or may not be on opposing sides of the social spectrum, where various sign systems challenge each other, and where meanings, images and practices are contested.<sup>8</sup>“It is often not the words, images or messages of these forms that carries the most social traction or symbolic potential; it is their explicit mediating presence as a dream-medium of paradoxical space.”<sup>9</sup>This is what makes graffiti a unique mode of communication that transcends the written and the visual. Graffiti can connect city dwellers to a dream-space and “can act as ‘wish-images’ that bridge here and the elsewhere, the present situation and different possibilities”.<sup>10</sup>

The scope of graffiti is not limitless, however. Graffiti are anonymous texts, but often the themes relate to identity, resistance, oppression, aesthetics, or practicality.<sup>11</sup> Where a graffiti is used, can

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<sup>6</sup>Peter Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity* (UK: Routledge, 2014), 4.

<sup>7</sup>Please see <http://www.symbollix.com>

<sup>8</sup>Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*(Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 151 and Anne M. Cronin, *Urban Space and Entrepreneurial Property Relations: Resistance and the Vernacular of Outdoor Advertising and Graffiti* (Lancaster, UK:Department of Sociology, Lancaster University), 7.

<sup>9</sup>Anne M. Cronin, *Urban Space and Entrepreneurial Property Relations: Resistance and the Vernacular of Outdoor Advertising and Graffiti* (Lancaster, UK:Department of Sociology, Lancaster University), 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

<sup>11</sup>Robin Patric Clair and AmardoRodriguez, “Graffiti as Communication: Exploring the Discursive Tensions of Anonymous Texts,”*Southern Communication Journal* 65 no. 1 (1999): 2.

infer the type of message such as mass communication as drawn on visible surfaces often has political themes; categorical graffiti that is aimed at particular groups as drawn on private surfaces is often targeted with sexual, feminist or other such themes; individual graffiti is even more bound by the self.<sup>12</sup> Even in private “the writing of graffiti is an essentially social act”.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Ligia Lesko demonstrates how the art of graffiti can be seen as inner-city communication and as a means of public literacy, including a description on how the homeless people used graffiti (*bobo art*) on trains to mark safe places or leave each other various practical messages or how *Cholo* gang graffiti was used for the re-invention of identity and appropriation of the otherwise offensive term *cholo*.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the wide array of graffiti that exists and the many studies that examine its importance as a mode of communication, graffiti is still a criminalized activity connected to the damage of a property and lowering its value. The legal status of graffiti often depends on the permission of the owner of the property on which the writing or drawing occurs.<sup>15</sup> In many countries it is connected to the idea of ‘anti-social behaviour’.<sup>16</sup> An illegal activity confined to public spaces that arguably goes back to the ‘ancient world’. And yet, the arrival of graffiti “stars” such as Banksy, who is influential on a global scale have now begun to challenge the notion of graffiti as a criminal activity or as an ‘anti-social one’.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup>R. Blume, “Graffiti,” in *Discourse & Literature, Volume 3 of Critical Theory*, ed. Teun Adrianus van Dijk (Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1985): 139 and Robin Patric Clair and AmardoRodriguez, “Graffiti as Communication: Exploring the Discursive Tensions of Anonymous Texts,” *Southern Communication Journal* 65, no. 1 (1999): 2.

<sup>13</sup>E. Bruner and J. Kelso, “Gender Differences in Graffiti: A Semiotic Perspective,” *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 3,(1980): 241.

<sup>14</sup>Ligia Lesko, “The Art of Graffiti as Inner-City Communication and as a Means of Public Literacy,” accessed September 2017, <http://scholarworks.csun.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/140628/Lesko.pdf;sequence=1>

<sup>15</sup>Peter Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity* (UK: Routledge, 2014) and Troy R. Lovata and Elizabeth Olton, *Understanding Graffiti: Multidisciplinary Studies from Prehistory to the Present* (UK: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>16</sup>Alison Young, *Judging the Image: Art, Value, Law* (UK: Routledge, 2005), 52.

<sup>17</sup>Troy R. Lovata and Elizabeth Olton, *Understanding Graffiti: Multidisciplinary Studies from Prehistory to the Present* (UK: Routledge, 2016).

## Graffiti in the Bulgarian Context

This challenge of perceptions about graffiti being more than just an act of vandalism has become more widespread over the last years. This paper will particularly focus on graffiti as an emerging art form in the Bulgarian context.

There is no specific origin one can pin point of graffiti in Bulgaria, so the context for this paper comes from an event that arguably is one of the first to place graffiti in the realm of art in Bulgaria, rather than as a criminal activity. Similar to many countries around the world, in Bulgaria for many years there was a particular problem with graffiti in the public space, but rather than making sentences harsher for offenders, an innovative approach was considered. There is a monument in the park of the National Palace of Culture,<sup>18</sup> a monument that was meant to mark 1300 years from the formation of the first Bulgarian nation in its present geographical location. It was unveiled the same time as the NDK, however, after many years, this monument due to lack of upkeep and the natural elements has been falling apart. This monument after years of degradation is seen as an ugly socialist relic and yet the government for political and financial reasons has been unable to take it down or repair it.<sup>19</sup> Instead, the government financed a fence to surround the monument for safety reasons. It is this fence that became the canvass of a graffiti fest that has both short term and long-term consequences for the Bulgarian community's attitude toward graffiti.

A competition in 2007 titled Sprite Graffiti Fest challenged graffiti artists to cover the wall around the monument with prizes provided for the most creative and beautiful graffiti<sup>20</sup>. They have re-run the competition in the park many times since then. In the short term, the competition transformed the wall into an art canvas showcasing the best graffiti has to offer, but in the long run, that competition had much stronger and recognizable impact in the capital. A notable rise of appreciation of graffiti occurred in both young and old, which is why even the subway of the National

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<sup>18</sup>Translated from Bulgarian: Национален дворец на културата; abbreviated as НДК, NDK

<sup>19</sup>The monument has finally been removed in 2017 after being fenced off for more than a decade.

<sup>20</sup>Sprite Graffiti Fest official facebook website <https://en-gb.facebook.com/SpriteGraffitiFest/>

Palace of Culture was transformed and even re-named by city officials into ‘Graffiti Underpass’. Soon, similar underpasses covered in graffiti were created all over the city. These spaces were re designed using various signs and in the process established a mode of communication and expression. These spaces were transformed and re imagined as art.

Now the paper will focus further on 3 examples that will show the use of graffiti as an unique mode of communication; a) seeking to change community behaviour and bring out a reduction in crime, b) depicting a new mode of expression of a critical subculture within the Bulgarian context as well as c) illustrating how graffiti can be used to add aesthetic value to spaces and to bring out the ‘souls in walls’.

### **The Case of Three Bulgarian Graffiti Crews**

In Bulgaria the recent graffiti trend in addition to transforming whole underpasses has also grown to include the painting of 8-12 storeys soviet tower blocks, or to re design the soviet 60s architecture and the perception of those public spaces into beautiful art to be enjoyed by the whole community. In order to achieve graffiti on such scale both above and below ground, in Bulgaria has become quite common for graffiti arts to join in crews. The three case studies that would be presented here are of the Urban Creatures Crew, 140 Ideas Crew and the POdLEZNO<sup>21</sup> Crew. All three of these crews operate in the Sofia region and they all re design public spaces and places in a way to challenge the existing perceptions of the space as well as bring about a change of mentality or behaviour associated with a place.

#### ***POdLEZNO<sup>22</sup> Crew – ‘Reducing Crime’***

The POdLEZNO Crew specializes in the transformation of underpasses. As they describe it, unkempt underpasses can be very unfriendly, dirty, smelly and dark. These unkempt underpasses can be “depressing with their mono-functionality, lack of preservation and safety” (as translated from Bulgarian and obtained on their online current appeal to transform a new subway). As a result,

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<sup>21</sup>Translated from Bulgarian: ПОДЛЕЗНО

<sup>22</sup>The name of the crew ‘POdLEZNO’ is a play on words in Bulgarian with ‘POLEZNO’ meaning ‘useful’ and ‘POdLEZ’ meaning ‘subway’.

many of these underpasses are hubs for various crimes ranging from vandalism to assaults. The crew has made it their mission to re design subways as safe spaces in order to encourage the community to use them and bring about a decline in crime.<sup>23</sup> This is particularly needed for the 5<sup>th</sup> RPU (5th police region) of the capital Sofia where these crews mostly operate, which has maintained relatively high crime for the 2010 to 2015 period as obtained from labs.capital.bg.<sup>24</sup>

Their official logo is actually *Design and City Art* since what they do is purposeful design to change to feel of a particular place.

As the crew officially write on their website:

Sofia is a city with over 1 200 000 citizens, visited yearly by thousands of tourists. [...] but in it there are places where life just seems to overlook – like the underpasses. [...] The youth initiative “POdLEZNO” was created to experiment in an urban environment by offering a new interpretation of these underground public spaces, namely - saturation of these non-traditional places with cultural content. Light, live music, artwork, interactivity, dancing; events that will transform subways into cozy, lively, safe and preferred multifunctional spaces for those who live, work and raise their children in the city or just visit it. By sharing our culture, we also share our desire for change initiated by citizens for citizens' use.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>There is much research done in the area of ‘designing out crime’, most notably by the Design Against Crime Solution Center in Salford University, Manchester, United Kingdom for further reference please see Caroline L. Davey and Andrew B. Wootton, *Design Against Crime: A Human-Centered Approach to Designing for Safety and Security* (UK: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> For further reference see <http://labs.capital.bg/201601/csi-sofia#>

<sup>25</sup>Obtained from their official website <http://podlezno.com/>. Aside from that, from the website <http://bnr.bg/en/post/100725276/podlezno-volunteer-initiative-with-new-project-and-cause>, they wrote this important information “thanks to the people of the PODLEZNO Initiative some of the capital's subways already look much nicer and more modern. Young volunteers have renovated the underground passages. The projects they have already completed include: "Natural Underpass" near Borisova Garden, "Music Underpass" under Tsarigradsko Shose Boulevard and the "Time Travel Subway" in Poduyane district. They are currently working on a project for renovating lighting in underpasses in the Studentski Grad district. During the past weekend "POdLEZNO" presented the first music project of the team, proving that there is room for music and culture in subways. "The Music Underpass," which opened last summer proved a great setting for the video of the debut song of the initiative - "Someone Told Me." Singer and writer of the song is Dimitar Stafidov.

The following example is of one of their creations in the “Ботевградско шосе”<sup>26</sup> Subway.



Figure 1: Subway Art Creation by POdLEZNO Crew

This graffiti was created using luminescent colours and within the Native American theme. There is a focus on both the aesthetics as well as the emotion. As the crew suggests, one of the main reasons why they transform the underpasses in such ways is to get people to use the subways more, to make the safer and friendlier, as well as to change people’s perceptions of those places and spaces including by encouraging the community to participate in the whole process of re designing and transforming the subway space. This might explain why the photo you see here, which was obtained from 24chasa online publication, was taken two years after the wall was painted and as you can see there has been no damage. Suffice it to say, the POdLEZNO approach has made the subway

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Ivaylo Nedelchev joined with an electric guitar solo and Ivelin Lobutov also plays the guitar. Dimitar Krastev plays the bass, while Dragomir Rusev and the new mascot of the initiative – the dog Rila are drummers. The sound of the new addictive song was heard during a flash mob with a cause that took place on Saturday near the National Palace of Culture downtown Sofia, the Serdika metro station and the underpass near the Sofia University.”

<sup>26</sup>Obtained from their official website <http://podlezno.com/>

more accessible as well as has reduced graffiti vandalism, after all who would want to deface such a work of art?

This underpass, similar to most of their creations has a cultural element (not necessarily a Bulgarian one) as well as an educational element. Currently the crew is raising money for a new project, an “Educational Subway”. They raise most of their funds through crowdsourcing and numerous partners and they have local council support.

The PODLEZNO crew state that they hope to bring a decline in crime and influence the community at large, but an idea may not always have impact on reality. Well in this case, perhaps it did.

Since the rise of the appreciation of the graffiti culture in Bulgaria, there has been a noticeable decline in crime. The following graph is a summary showing crime trends for Bulgaria for the period of 2010 to 2015 as collected and obtained from Europa Statistics.

**Table 2:** Crimes Registered by Police in Bulgaria 2010-2015<sup>27</sup>

By Number	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Murder	148	128	141	109	116	129
	-					
Rape	211	157	187	164	148	119
	-					
Burglary	50479	47323	44462	45256	41246	38315
	-					

This data as presented in the graph clearly shows a decline in all types of crime listed.<sup>28</sup> Even if graffiti were not the direct cause for this decline, I would argue that it is at the very least a contributing factor. Further study would be needed to explore if there is a direct link between crime decline and the rise of graffiti in Bulgaria. That being said, graffiti may be a contributing factor because of the affordances it provides in terms of modes of

<sup>27</sup>Obtained from <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

<sup>28</sup>For more information also please visit [nsi.bg](http://www.nsi.bg) (the National Statistical Institute) and particularly <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/3818/престъпления-регистрации-от-полцията>

communication, innovation, and aesthetics as will be argued using the next two crews as examples.

### ***140 Ideas Crew – ‘Critical Subculture’***

The next graffiti artists that will be presented in this paper are the 140 Ideas Crew. This group formed in 2008 by Yeto, Teletto, Jermain and Flak. Similar to the POdLEZNO Crew, the 140 Ideas Crew also have local council support, but also partner up with schools and other stakeholders in the community. This crew works mostly over ground, on the sides of buildings such as schools or residential areas. Many of their graffiti combine art with moral lessons and/or political, social and economic criticism. The following example was created on the side of the 97 school in Sofia.



**Figure 2:** "Balance" by the 140 Ideas Crew<sup>29</sup>

This graffiti is titled “Balance” and depicts various animals engaged in a balancing act. “Often already existing formulas (slogans, sayings, short verses etc.) are taken up and altered slightly, or given different contents, frequently giving graffiti the character of parody or counterfact”.<sup>30</sup> This graffiti comes as both a social and political satire in a particular moment in Bulgarian history. The

<sup>29</sup>Image by Rom Levy, Street Art News, 2013.

<sup>30</sup>R. Blume, “Graffiti,” in *Discourse & Literature, Volume 3 of Critical Theory*, ed. Teun Adrianus van Dijk (Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1985): 139.

social balance within the country is very delicate with Syrian refugees trying to come through the borders and further into Europe. The political balance for the last decade has also been a never-ending balance between a few major but opposing political parties who have to work together in order to get the political machine to work. Graffiti is a great way to bring these balancing acts to the front since graffiti arguably provides an alternative mode of communication.

Graffiti is very uniquely placed to express various forms of criticisms either vaguely or specifically. In particular, some argue that may be related to graffiti still existing within the paradigm of subcultures. “Subcultures may be defined as sites of praxis, ideologically, temporally and socially situated where fantasy and experimentation give way to the construction, expression and maintenance of particular consumption identities”.<sup>31</sup> As a subculture in Bulgaria, graffiti exists in that space where rendering criticism is possible. Satire and criticism of self and others can help challenge people’s perceptions of the social, cultural, political and/or economic values within the Bulgarian context as well as lead to changes in their behaviours. For instance, because of the political balancing act for decades, in Bulgaria frequent political protests occur and change of power. Since 2009, no political party has managed alone or in a coalition to complete its political mandate of 4 years. Graffiti such as the one depicted above, allows for a conversation about the political situation to take place with humour rather than anger as a starting point thus enabling more members of the community to participate.

### ***Urban Creatures Crew – ‘Souls in Walls’***

Finally, the Urban Creatures Crew began as an illicit group of artists over a decade ago who were then welcomed and encouraged by the local government and community. Some of the main artists of the crew became known separately from their crew identity such as Bozko as well as Nasimo, who is actually the pseudonym of Stanislav Trifonov. This crew specializes in full

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<sup>31</sup> See Michael Saren, *Marketing Graffiti* (UK: Routledge, 2013) and Bernard Cova, Robert Kozinets and Avi Shankar, *Consumer Tribes* (UK: Routledge, 2012), 122.

building designs with educational purposes that often incorporate political and/or social critique. These designs are very impressive by their sheer size as well as their remarkable craftsmanship.

The following example of such large-scale graffiti is on the side of the 8-storey building, number 11 on bul. Vladimir Vazov, Poduyane.



**Figure 3: "The Girl with the Flower"**  
by the Urban Creatures Crew<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Otained from Bon Expose by Nasimohttp://urbancreatures.bg/

This is an impressive graffiti that has been attributed to Nasimo from the Urban Creatures Crew. This graffiti illustrates well the core idea of this crew, which is making the place come to life. The gaze of the girl is engaging as she sees something up high where we cannot thus inviting introspection on part of the viewer. As the crew argues, their designs are focused on creating what they refer to as “Souls in Walls”. They try to make the space itself come to life and bring out the soul of the place through the interpretative art.

Furthermore, Urban Creatures connect their art not just to aesthetics, but also similar to the other two crews, to encourage behavioural change. To use their own words from their website: “for us it is very important that the art we create is not one-dimensional, because the most significant change we are aiming at is the change of people’s consciousness.” This change in the mind can then lead to a change in behaviour, or as the local mayor Eva Mitova argues, ‘a change in the mind can lead to physical transformations’. Therefore, this graffiti serves to appease the eye, tell a story and entertain as well as communicate a message aimed at purposefully bringing about social change.

Graffiti has the ability to be used in these ways because as Clair and Rodriguez argue:

Graffiti level the playing field by getting past all of the factors— such as social status, hierarchical position, education, access, familiarity with the rules, expertise, communication competence—that advantageously privilege and benefit certain members against others. It is the only rhetorical form that affords such virtues.<sup>33</sup>

The independence of graffiti from any social norm structure is connected to the aspect of graffiti being a socially prescribed form of communication that is not a subject to norm or convention.<sup>34</sup> This means that graffiti is not static, it is a social process of meaning making that has imbedded within it a possibility for innovation. Following Michael Foucault and his idea that

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<sup>33</sup>Robin Patric Clair and Amardo Rodriguez, “Graffiti as Communication: Exploring the Discursive Tensions of Anonymous Texts,” *Southern Communication Journal* 65, no. 1 (1999): 2.

<sup>34</sup>R. Blume, “Graffiti,” in *Discourse & Literature, Volume 3 of Critical Theory*, ed. Teun Adrianus van Dijk (Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1985): 146.

resistance always counters power<sup>35</sup> and in relation to particularly graffiti as a resistant mode of communication<sup>36</sup> and mode of outlaw communication,<sup>37</sup> it is perhaps understandable that graffiti is often perceived in the nexus of opposing discourses, it is an anonymous challenge to mainstream discursive practices and messages. Nonetheless, graffiti has the power to approach social, political, economic and cultural issues in an innovative way, while presenting an aesthetically pleasing outlook— a beautiful way to bring out the social soul from within any wall.

## Conclusion: Graffiti Re-framed as the Solution

Graffiti is arguably about expression, aesthetics, communication of messages and meanings including feelings, values and ideas in addition to being an anti-social act. It is precisely its status as an anti-social act within the ‘elsewhere’ space that allows graffiti to code and decode messages and meanings that challenge existing hegemony, transmit information and its interpretation to provide alternative discourses, and challenge our perceptions of a space, place, and the self. Often graffiti reflects the political, cultural, economic and social contexts in which it is created similar to various art movements. But graffiti is also more than art. Graffiti has the power to re design existing places and re imagine existing spaces challenging our perceptions as well as our further behaviour. While site specific art can challenge our perceptions, our thoughts and our values, it does not challenge our actions as related to that place. Contrary even to site-specific art, graffiti has the power to be the solution for many community problems from making sites such as underpasses more acceptable to helping with economics by encouraging tourism. For instance, countries across Europe, such as Germany<sup>38</sup> and Bulgaria<sup>39</sup> are already using graffiti tours as a way to boost the tourist economy.

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<sup>35</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>36</sup>Susan Sontag, “The Pleasure of the Image,” *Art in America* 75, (1987): 129.

<sup>37</sup>Michael Keith, *After the Cosmopolitan? Multicultural Cities and the Future of Racism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 136.

<sup>38</sup>In Berlin, Germany <http://alternativeberlin.com/tours/free-tour/>

<sup>39</sup>In Ahtopol, Bulgaria <https://weallwrite.today/waw/please> see also <http://poleznite.com/2834/we-all-write-ahtopol/>

This paper was hoping to highlight how graffiti can be used as a tool to help reduce crime, showcase a critical subcultural communication that is inclusive of the community at large, and depict the aesthetic value that can be added to a place in order to re-design the space and people's attitude and behaviour. More importantly, the paper serves to show how graffiti can enable introspection and bring out not only the 'soul' from the wall, but also our own.

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## About the Author

**Luba Pirgova-Morgan** holds a PhD in Social Sciences and Humanities from Cardiff University, Wales, United Kingdom for her research on Images of Electricity. Before that, her MA thesis from the University of Aberdeen reflected her triple degree in International Relations, Sociology and Film and Visual Culture and focused on images of national identity and nationalism, while her MPhil in Modern Society and Global Transformations from the University of Cambridge focused on images of corporate culture. She currently works as a Research Fellow at the Design Against Crime Solution Center at the University of Salford, Manchester and her interests still include semiotics, images and perceptions of various phenomena.