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TOWARDS THE SEMIOTICS OF POLITICAL GRAFFITI: THE EXAMPLE OF SAMARA

Master Thesis

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I have written the Master Thesis myself, independently. All of the other authors' texts, main viewpoints and all data from other resources have been referred to.

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Introduction

Choice of topic. Graffiti has been an integral component of everyday urban life since ancient times. Despite the numerous differences, both ancient and contemporary graffiti in one way or another reflect the way social reality is constructed. For instance, graffiti might be very useful as a source to uncover the inexplicit social or political messages. Contemporary graffiti in the cities is rapidly changing; therefore, it sensitively reflects the way how the society interprets the processes running within it.

Nonetheless, ‘graffiti’ is still a vague term, both from everyday and semiotic perspectives. Therefore, it demands a precise definition. This study aims to operate with an everyday definition of ‘graffiti’; specified by the Oxford English Reference Dictionary, graffiti tends to possess the following characteristics features:

- these are writings or drawings;
- which are scribbled, scratched, or sprayed;
- in a public place (Oxford English Reference Dictionary: 1996) .

However, the object of the research should be delimited even further since this work focuses on political graffiti. Political will further imply the Greek ‘πολιτικός’, which is ‘relating to citizens’, ‘befitting a statesman, statesmanlike’, ‘belonging to the state or its administration’, ‘having relation to public life’, ‘suited to a citizen's common life, ordinary’ (Liddell, Scott 1996). Political thus will comprise all the issues related to governing the community, trying to influence or manipulate public opinion, using the categories which affect the whole community and various techniques to control it.

Although graffiti scene in the contemporary sense of the word has developed quite late in Russia (Ganz 2004: 128), political graffiti has a longer history, dating back to Soviet times. However, one of the main features of graffiti is its temporality, so that most of the objects

under consideration can be roughly dated as belonging to the period of last 5 or 10 years.

Samara, being one of the major Russian cities with over one million inhabitants, serves as an example to study the political views of Russian province on the basis of graffiti. Thus, the material for the research was gathered entirely in the city centre of Samara, Russia. Graffiti in Samara is officially allowed, but only in a number of restricted areas, and the sketches must be approved by the administration. Nonetheless, graffiti keeps appearing throughout the city and is quite difficult to control. At the same time, there are some additional attempts to 'disvalue' graffiti by the city administration, which creates slogans and propaganda pieces, or series of agitational inscriptions and embodies it in the form of 'official' graffiti.

Research on graffiti. Overview. Present-time graffiti research can be dated back only to the middle of the XX-th century. As Bart Bosmans and Alex Thiel claim, it is to a great extent non-academic and fragmented, and there are still no general research methods, methods of data storage or analysis (Bosmans, Thiel 1995: 20-23). As far as this corpus comprises a great amount of both academic and non-academic works, creating a complete bibliography which will represent the current state of graffiti research history is almost unattainable within the current study; although a short overview of the most significant contributions to the analysis of graffiti works, which are important for the history of the problem and for the present paper, is still possible. Since 'political' has a very broad definition in this study and the methods to study different kinds of graffiti can be very close, considering a number of general works was crucial to carry out the analysis of political graffiti evidence.

Roman Cybriwsky and David Ley in their article *Urban Graffiti as Territorial Markers* consider their material from the geographical point of view; according to them, graffiti analysis can be used to uncover certain behavioural patterns and social processes. They use gang graffiti in Philadelphia as an example to reveal 'tension zones', which manifests subcultural behaviour, in the city space.

Armando Silva in his article *Territorial Marks in the Construction of urban sceneries in Colombian cities* looks into the way how the urban space is 'marked' creating a 'social image' of the city thus 'personalizing' the city space. Graffiti is treated as one of the ways to mark territory along with store windows and paths. Silva also emphasizes the obscenity of graffiti as a factor reinforcing its representation. Graffiti also presupposes territorial bordering as a basis for cognitive mapping, so that the notions of limit, border, centre, periphery can be used to study graffiti.

John Bushnell, historian interested in the contemporary Russian society, has published his authoritative book *Moscow Graffiti: Language and Subculture* in 1990. Notably, he investigates the development of Russian graffiti since ancient times. He gives exhaustive characteristics to the graffiti ascribed to different subcultures, providing the reader with a detailed analysis of the nature of the social group and the works it produces; he also gives an insight into the history and evolution of Russian subcultures. He also provides a reader with a number of interesting insights into the way how Russian subcultures use language in graffiti.

Bart Bosmans and Axel Thiel in their *Guide to Graffiti-research* published in 1995 aim to provide a reader with an overview of the current state of contemporary graffiti research. They have collected a wide range of references to books, magazines, internet resources and articles dedicated to the study of contemporary graffiti; the references are accompanied with brief reviews to each study.

Nancy Macdonald as a researcher is mostly interested in so-called 'subcultural graffiti', however, her deep inquiry into the social group of graffiti writers from New York and London is still very important to the study of any kind of graffiti. In *The Graffiti Subculture. Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York* she investigates the ways how the graffiti writing is used to construct masculinity and claim power, giving important clues to analyse the

works and their interaction in the city space.

Current graffiti research presumes that the main aim of political graffiti is to be seen, and, in contrast with subcultural graffiti, to be understood by a large number of perceivers and to influence their political views. A number of authors working with graffiti keep describing it as performance or highlighting its 'performative' features (e.g. Bowen 2013; Cybriwsky, Ley 1985; Hebdige 1979, Macdonald 2003, Silva 1990).

Methodological basis. Thus, political graffiti is primarily oriented to the public, and studying it is important to uncover the current features of the social agenda. The aim of political graffiti is to get the public attention and manipulate it by the categories which affect the whole community, using various techniques to control it. However, the impact political graffiti produces is often dependent on how noticeable it is and which methods does it employ to attract the attention. These categories are also important to distinguish how influential the graffiti is and how can it characterize the current political situation.

The work claims that the evidence to reveal the potential influence of political graffiti splits into two categories, which identify its textual and perceptual features. Being an application of textuality to the environment, graffiti can be studied as a communicative unit, and, therefore, can be evaluated on the principles of textuality applied either to an individual inscription or to a group of them. These principles are withdrawn by Robert-Alain de Beaugrande and Wolfgang Dressler, in their *Introduction to Text Linguistics*, who also claim several parameters for the text to be perceived easily. In addition to that, several of John Bushnell's observations concerning the use of language in graffiti use are used.

It is necessary to mention that graffiti in the city space can be characterized as text from two points of view; where the first perspective concerns the text as a linguistic phenomena, and the second considers graffiti as an aggregate of inscriptions in the city space, which is close to the

notion of the city text originating in Tartu-Moscow school.

However, the attention of the perceiver is also dependent on the visual representation of the work, as well as its spatial arrangement. Peter Stockwell's interpretation of figure/ground is applied to distinguish the features of graffiti which make it likely to be noticeable. In addition to that, the theoretical basis for territorial bordering caused by graffiti as it is elaborated in the works by Roman Cybriwsky, David Ley, Armando Silva, Nancy Macdonald and Anti Randviir are used to analyze political graffiti.

In addition to that, this work makes an attempt to apply the concept of defamiliarization elaborated by Viktor Shklovskij to the study of graffiti, as well as the semiotics of slogans introduced by Yuri Levin.

Research question, hypothesis and aims. Thus, the study of political graffiti is important to reveal certain social processes, which might be somehow 'hidden' from the perspective of studying different sources. The investigations which have already been done in this field have elaborated a number of useful instruments which can be applied to the study of political graffiti in connection with some instruments for textual analysis and the analysis of cognition.

So, the research hypothesis is that the analysis of communicative properties of political graffiti might facilitate to reveal the most memorable and influential examples of it and thus give some insights to analyse the current political environment in the given area.

This research question presupposes a number of more specific aims of the paper, namely:

- to reveal the features of political graffiti as a source;
- to elaborate the analytical framework to analyse graffiti in accordance with the first aim;
- to review the collected gathered graffiti data, describe its characteristic features and

analyse it pursuant to the set methodology;

- to reveal the current political power lines in the designated area.

Structure of the paper. In accordance with the research question and aims of the work, the given paper consists of an introductory part, three chapters, conclusion, references and three attachments. The first chapter explains the methodological side of the research, and the second chapter presents the description and analysis of the political graffiti examples found in Samara. The second chapter also contains the attempt to reveal the current political power lines in the designated area. In the third chapter the analyzed data is summarised to make some conclusions regarding political climate; in addition to that, further analytical perspectives on studying graffiti are provided. Attachment 1 is included into the current work while Attachments 2 and 3 are provided on the attached CD-ROM.

1. Political Graffiti: Instruments for Analysis

1.1. Data Gathering

The object of analysis is the political graffiti found in the city centre of Samara, Russia. This work analyses the characteristic features of one hundred seventy-five graffiti, among which fifteen are stencils and two are pictures without any interpretive inscriptions; the majority of the material features verbal messages, which might be at times accompanied by a picture. The process of gathering data included the examination of the major streets of the city centre (see Figure 1) and the embankment, which resulted in approximately a seventy kilometre-long route.

Some graffiti are written in English although most of them are in Russian; therefore, each inscription is provided with a close English equivalent. All the inscriptions have a reference to the corresponding photograph from the Attachment 1.

The analytic procedure included reviewing and grouping the collected data; subsequently graffiti were provided with group descriptions; recurring patterns and common elements were revealed. Then, these categories were analysed according to the characteristics which can potentially attract the attention of the perceivers, and therefore can serve as a basis to describe the political climate in the given area. Each graffiti is analysed independently or within a minor group of inscriptions done in an analogous manner or topic. In addition to that, territorial bordering as a consequence of creating graffiti is analysed separately for thematic groups.

The territory under observation is limited to the historical centre of Samara (see Figure 1),

since in this part of the city large amounts of people are concentrated due to their job duties or public events; at the same time, this area is a popular destination for walks and city tours. The analysed territory comprises the parts of the two oldest city districts, Leninskij (the population of which is 65127 people) and Samarskij (the population of which is 30736 people in 2013) (Russian Federal State Statistics Service Bulletin 2013). This area is considered to be a business centre; it also possesses a lot of old wooden architecture, historical buildings and various landmarks and is also far from the commuter town.

Only those examples of political graffiti which are easily seen, accessible and readable from the street are taken into consideration since political graffiti has to be available for the public and to produce an impression on it.

Chronologically the material for the work was gathered between November, 2013 and March, 2014. Due to the impact of natural (sunlight, precipitation and so on) and human factors (covering or rubbing off the inscriptions), ageing of buildings et cetera graffiti is regarded as a short-living source so most of the objects under consideration can be roughly dated as belonging to the approximate period of the last five or ten years.

Thus, in this work political graffiti is delimited to four major categories, which have to deal with graffiti on:

- current politics (comprising the issues related to state and local government, major political figures, forces and activism);
- motivators, slogans and propaganda;
- politics as it is interpreted by city subcultures;
- group containing stochastic political issues.

1.2. Political Graffiti as a Source

Graffiti as a historical source helps to uncover an ‘unauthorized’ side of the everyday life, and in case of its political nature it might be useful to study the current state of political climate; graffiti in that sense is one of the most open and easily accessible sources.

Many scholars state that one of the main characteristic features of graffiti is its orientation to the public (West-Pavlov 2005), and, therefore, its ability to capture public attention. Just like in marketing, graffiti aims to promote itself and to be consumed. Moreover, political graffiti, according to Alain Badiou, can be defined by being available and addressed to everybody, and, therefore, becoming a ‘universal truth’, a ‘thought of all’ (Badiou 2005: 141-152). Graffiti thus enacts the slogan ‘the personal is the political’ and makes a strong connection with performance (Schechner 2002: 137).

Furthermore, a number of authors keep highlighting the ‘performative’ features of graffiti (e.g. Bowen 2013; Cybriwsky, Ley 1985; West-Pavlov 2005). Graffiti is understood as a performance in the sense of the message the drawing conveys and the way it is done; although graffiti can be also considered as a special case of performance, which is represented by a slightly ‘distorted’ and extended in time impact. In general, applying the theory of performance to graffiti aims to concentrate on the analysis of the effect produced by the inscriptions rather than trying to reveal an authorship, original purpose or target audience.

Political graffiti can be defined through its existence in the social space and the ability to construct certain spheres of social reality. The graffiti phenomenon is society--oriented and intended to be seen; several scholars sum up graffiti by ‘I am’ or ‘look at me’ (e.g. Bowen 2013, Hebdige 1979, Macdonald 2003). Therefore, the work of graffiti can metonymically be considered as an actor. The need for an audience is emphasized by drawing in the places that are highly visible and, therefore, provoking an observer to react. In this sense graffiti is close to the everyday definition of performance, introduced by Richard Schechner in his work *Performance Studies*, where ‘to perform’ is ‘to show off, to go to extremes, to underline an

action for those who are watching' (Schechner 2002: 28--29). In most countries marking or painting property without the owner's consent is considered defacement and vandalism; if the writer breaks the law by definition, it gives additional power to the message.

The 'double identity' metaphor is often applied to graffiti, so that the trace on the wall becomes a 'virtual self', and lettering style can be compared with clothing (Macdonald 2003: 202-217). In that sense it is close to Marshall McLuhan's terms; in particular, it helps to store and channel energy, define self socially; clothing is an extension of skin (McLuhan 2002: 132). 'Clothing virtual self' can be compared with character creation in the theatrical stage. Needless to say, a certain graffiti might not necessarily be a true or original expression of one's viewpoint, especially in the case when it is political. Graffiti allows the main actor to stay both 'noticeable' and anonymous at the same time. In the case of political graffiti even aliases are rarely used. According to Dixon and Bortolussi, the absence of the author changes the nature of text processing in fundamental ways, e.g. readers might adopt a different style of processing than they would if the writer is present (Dixon, Bortolussi 2001: 18).

Similarly to the choice of name in subcultural graffiti, the political inscription acquires the characteristics that 'tags' should have. It is important for an inscription to 'stand out', to carry certain connotations and more impact, sound 'cool' or convey a combative attitude to play a more important role in the process of constructing a political image. Analogous to subcultural graffiti, the most communicative notions are that of strength, power, control and disturbance, and impart a sense of power and dominance (Macdonald 2003: 198).

The sense of dominance and control is often achieved by simple repetition; similarly to the case of 'tags', political graffiti writers often tend to use the same inscriptions more than once within the city space, or they might also use popular patterns or plots which have already appeared in different cities or countries. Repeated plots, recurring themes and similar messages are a common occurrence, especially in the same area. The content of the political

graffiti might also reproduce the existing slogan, ideological conviction or a successful iconic message. The task of making similar messages is even easier in the with stencil graffiti.

Political graffiti is a ‘make belief’ public presentation, which has a power to create the very social reality it enacts. Its ‘make--belief’ features have a power to blur the boundary between the everyday reality and what is shown, so that it is easy to believe the ‘real’ status of inscriptions (Schechner 2002: 35). It is one of the essential tasks of political graffiti, particularly in the case of ‘official’ graffiti or any made-to-order political inscriptions. Political graffiti is often not neutral, trying to instill certain beliefs.

The political message graffiti conveys might often be understood as a prevarication. This kind of ‘artistic effect’ was characterized by Viktor Shklovskij as defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) in his work *Art as Technique*. According to Shklovskij, art aims to impart the sensation of objects as they are perceived instead of grasping them as they are known. The technique of art is used to make things unfamiliar, and under these circumstances the difficulty and the duration of perception increases. Art aims to give vision, but not recognition (Shklovskij 1990: 67). Thus, somehow defamiliarization is violating the semantic expectations of the reader.

Political objects do not always come in the expected form, and they also might be different from how they are presented by the media. Therefore, the familiar, which has already formed an opinion about itself, might often become unfamiliar; perception is thus subverted and introduced into the everyday life. Defamiliarization has an ability to disarray social practices.

Graffiti as a political practice becomes ‘free of life’, it manipulates and rearranges it; objects are replaced by symbols, and perception becomes automatized (Shklovskij 1990: 62). The purpose of graffiti then is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known, its technique is to make politics ‘unfamiliar’ (Shklovskij 1990: 63). Graffiti defamiliarizes by manipulating the conventional image. It presents an ‘image’ of politics, but

does not allow an ordinary citizen to analyse it, trying to impart a superficial judgement; trying to seem actual politics, it is only an incomplete, subjective and even more ideologically loaded representation of it. Therefore, the political object as a process of governing the society is not important anymore, and politics is deprived of its actual context. Furthermore, political messages intersect and interrupt each other while the anonymous authors are being shifted.

In other words, politics in the form of graffiti is seen only how it is presented, without any deeper inquiry. Politics and its major actors become 'unfamiliar', they are associated with standard characteristics (e.g. 'reliable candidate') or slogans (e.g. 'A.C.A.B.'), creating the illusion of the 'ultimate truth', or 'popular' truth, advertizing a particular attitude to politics. The objects are represented allegorically, and there is no aim to bring the reader close to understanding; they acquire new, often superficial attributes. As a result, familiar and recognized subjects may seem unusual. Thus, the objects are defamiliarized, not by a concrete spectator, but by the politically profitable perception; so that there is a clear attempt to impose a proposition. Likewise, defamiliarization serves as means to force individuals to recognize and remember artistic language (although, it might also help the reader to suggest authorship).

Slogan technique is often used to manipulate in politics; graffiti can be employed to do it especially when it is initiated officially. This technique is often used in political graffiti since slogan structure makes an inscription memorable, easy to reproduce and often uses rather simple language. Yuri Levin assumes that a slogan is a cliché which possesses a 'frame of a statement', the gaps of which should be filled in. Slogan is a cantation par excellence, and the aim of it is to form a model of reality (Levin 1988: 69-85). The definition he operates with is based on Great Soviet Encyclopedia, which states that it is a short written text expressing the guiding idea, task or requirement. However, it can be claimed that a slogan should be also repetitive and recognizable, otherwise even a well-built structure will not work ideologically. In the light of figure/ground theory, slogans become even more significant to attract the attention of the spectator.

As Anti Randviir assumes, slogans as a genre are very close to graffiti; he claims that the defining characteristic features of this similarity are temporality and textual length (Randviir 2011: 98). It is necessary to mention that this list can go on; in general, some graffiti might be categorized as slogans; although slogan-type graffiti might not necessarily be a praise. This comparison might bear fruit to uncover the mechanisms, which make the work memorable, and, therefore, influential.

Yuri Levin, whose work was already mentioned before, distinguishes inter alia between three types of slogans; each of this types is an incantation and has a power to model the surrounding environment:

- ‘Appeal’ (призыв), the main function of which is a call to action; has a particular addressee; contains three elements: agent, predicate and patient;
- ‘Glorifier’ (здравица, прославление);
- ‘ascertaining’ (констатация), the main function of which is inculcation; addressed to everybody; consists of an introductory part and significant object; although, if such slogans are repeated too often, they tend to lose their illocutionary force.

The reaction of the perceiver is supposed to correspond either to the desire to implement the action (change of behavior), or having an illusion of belonging (Levin 1988: 69-85).

In addition to that, one of main characteristics of graffiti in general (and political graffiti in particular) is obscenity and shocking content, which reinforces the impression. Armando Silva has described the ‘traditional graffiti’ with a reference to its obscenity as a special power of representation (Silva 1990: 56). Although new, original, shocking, avant-garde is mostly a different combination of known behaviors or the change of behavior from acceptable and expected to shocking and unexpected, shocking the observer is one of the dominant principles defining graffiti.

1.3 Political Graffiti as Text

Several representatives of Tartu-Moscow school highlight special semiotic functions of the city: it carries certain information concerning various aspects of human life which is fixed in social signs, so that it can be considered a text (Lotman 1992a: 9-22). The concept of text, being one of the central in Tartu-Moscow semiotic school, is rather broad: text is something that has specific meaning from the point of view of the carrier of culture and has an integral function from the point of view of the investigator of culture (Maran 2007: 283). For example, Toporov understands city text as all the messages transmitted by its streets, squares, monuments, people et cetera (Toporov 1995: 259-367).

Thus, graffiti *inter alia* represents an application of textuality to a lived environment and thereby a transformation of the self (West-Pavlov 2005: 226, Schechner 2002: 137). Therefore, text linguistics can be applied to the study of graffiti to a certain extent: not only to consider graffiti as a verbal message, but also as an aggregate of information spread within the city space and transmitting itself to the observers.

To be more precise, text linguistics is understood as the study of how texts function in human interaction; it is important to mention that these texts should be communicative; otherwise they are not able to transmit a message and can be treated as non-texts (Beaugrande, Dressler 1981). Textual characteristics of graffiti presume understanding it as a linguistic text and, therefore, as it was mentioned above, a communicative unit. This work aims to apply several elements of text linguistics analysis to graffiti inscriptions; text linguistics here should be understood as a branch of discourse analysis, although the messages have to be analysed independently from their social background and socio-psychological characteristics of the authors or readers.

At a general level, discourse comprehension is shaped by discourse genre and expectations

from it. As a genre, graffiti is very close to an utterance; although it is written, it mainly consists of one sentence (or it can also be a noun phrase or predicate), represents a form of a dialogue, being

addressed to the public, often subjective and observer dependent. To be more precise, graffiti can be considered a dialogue presuming that response is possible, but only in the course of time; interaction is possible only to some extent. The boundaries between different graffiti inscriptions can be distinguished by blank space or the shift of the author, similarly to more traditional forms of text.

Political graffiti corresponds to the genre of expository texts since it has a goal to explain or persuade, describing facts or principles. The knowledge of a specific type of genre might provide the reader the strategies to encode (e.g. expecting protest from graffiti), so that readers can decide which information is critical for adequate comprehension, and hence focus their attention on the material (ignoring or focusing the attention on something) (Zwaan 2006: 728-729).

According to Beaugrande and Dressler, graffiti as a communicative unit should satisfy seven constitutive principles of textuality: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, situationality, intertextuality, informativity (Beaugrande, Dressler 1981). If these conditions are not satisfied, then the textual unit is considered to be 'non-text'.

Thus it is important to define the above mentioned principles. Cohesion has to deal with the relations between surface elements in the text as a sequence (these can be words, grammatical dependencies, syntax, recurring patterns, junction, intonation) (Beaugrande, Dressler 1981: 48-80). Coherence concerns if the configuration of elements which underlie the surface text are accessible and relevant (Beaugrande, Dressler 1981: 84-109). The notions of intentionality and acceptability are interconnected; intentionality presumes that the author of the text should intend to make it cohesive and coherent, to make it correspond to a specific goal or plan.

Acceptability deals with the text receiver, who should admit that the text is cohesive, coherent and relevant (Beaugrande, Dressler 1981: 113-136). Situationality presupposes that the text should be relevant to the situation of occurrence (Beaugrande, Dressler 1981:163-179). Intertextuality concerns the factors which make the utilization of one text dependent upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered texts (Beaugrande, Dressler 1981: 182-205). Finally, informativity concerns the extent to which the occurrences of the presented text are expected or known. Highly informative occurrences are more demanding, but more interesting; although, the receiver should not be overloaded with new information (Beaugrande, Dressler 1981: 139-160).

This is a very useful apparatus to analyse texts, although due to the peculiar properties of graffiti as a source, not all of these principles can be equally applied to the actual analysis. For example, the level of cohesion, coherence and informativity can be only presupposed, and the categories of intentionality and acceptability are nearly impossible to figure out without sociological inquiry. However, they can still be used as more abstract categories. Situationality and intertextuality are the parameters which can be operated a bit more freely, but still all of these parameters cannot just be ascribed to the text.

Therefore, analysing the text as a communicative unit allows to make conclusions related to how easy the text is perceived, and, therefore, how influential it is. In addition to that, Beaugrande and Dressler list three regulative principles that master textual communication, which are efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness; these categories are also important to reveal if the text is likely to be perceived easily. Efficiency depends on the use of a text to communicate with a minimum effort; effectiveness deals with leaving an impression and creating favourable conditions for attaining a goal; appropriateness is the agreement between textual setting and the ways in which the standards of textuality are upheld (Beaugrande, Dressler 1981).

According to Zwaan and Rapp, new information is always comprehended in the light of the already known, and linguistic cues par excellence have a power to activate background knowledge, which facilitates understanding (Zwaan, Rapp 2006: 737). Graffiti as individual inscriptions can also attract the attention by means of linguistics: linguistic cues directly influence the perception of discourse, helping the comprehenders to integrate the information, so that language can indicate which information is important (Zwaan 2006: 730). Therefore, considering graffiti as a textual message is important to consider graffiti perception on the whole. Moreover, as John Bushnell assumes, graffiti writers express a strong sense of cultural appropriateness of the language (Bushnell 1990: 217), therefore considering linguistic features is very important to reveal the current state of the community.

Some specific aspects of language use become more significant in the process of studying graffiti. In this case, the principal grammatical operation consists in selecting the social lexicon that best reinforces the message (Bushnell 1990: 54).

John Bushnell in his work *Moscow Graffiti: Language and Subculture* also highlights the role of linguistics means that help to construct positive or negative formula in graffiti. According to his observations, negative epithets in graffiti are highly specialized. Conversely, praise is generic: mostly same words and emblems are used, and most common positive modifiers are pictorial, but the vocabulary of it is considerably poor. In addition to that, the words might be insulting only when they are attached to proper emblems, and, in contrast, they lack meaning if they are misapplied (Bushnell 1990: 47-48, 55).

Besides Bushnell detects the properties of using English and native language in Russian graffiti scene. His general observation is that English words enjoy prestige by default, irrespectively of their precise meaning while native slang conveys hostility and has a certain shock value. Therefore, the use of English is more typical of praise, or might also highlight the case to which writers attach importance, powerful values (Bushnell 1990: 54, 197, 217).

1.4. Political Graffiti: Conditions of Cognition

According to Jamie Ward, attention is the process by which certain information is selected for further processing, while everything else is discarded (Ward 2010: 129). In the context of the city it can be assumed that the perceiver's attention is mostly passive, so that one is not intentionally searching for a specific object (Eysenk, Keane 2010). In the city space attention might be often captured by graffiti which is often characterized as 'provocative', 'illegal', 'criticizing', especially if it is dealing with politics. In addition to that, attention is a key factor to understand the role of graffiti in forming the political climate; the more attention the picture or inscription attracts, the more impact on the public it has. Therefore, this study considers graffiti from the point of view of how likely it is to attract public attention.

Thus, the concept of 'performativity' helps to reveal certain characteristics of graffiti, which reinforce it to 'stand out'. The attributes which can roughly be indicated as 'cognitive' therefore serve as a major origin of performativity, and are represented by a number of interconnected characteristic features of the inscriptions, which are able to influence the sensory input, mental processes and attention.

In the case of graffiti, the spectator's attention can be attracted either by certain common or unique perceptual features, or certain features shared with other objects; these features in all the three cases can correspond to colour, visual representation stylistics, visibility, size, figure, etc. In addition to that, attention tends to be directed to locations in space (Eysenk, Keane 2010).

One of most important aspects to define the distribution of the perceiver's attention is figure/ground relationship, which originates in gestalt psychology. Peter Stockwell in his *Cognitive Poetics* explains that the perception of a literary text is organized via figure/ground

relation, where the figure is understood as an element 'standing out' against a more uniform background. Foregrounding is seen as a deviation, 'newness' that draws attention to itself (Stockwell 2002: 19). The part of a visual or textual field that is most likely to be seen as a figure can share some of the following characteristics in comparison to the opposite background:

- it might use language creatively (for instance, employing repetition, unusual naming, innovative descriptions, creative syntactic ordering, puns, rhyme, alliteration, metrical emphasis, various kinds of tropes);
- possess well-defined boundaries, be more concrete, detailed, brighter, attractive or stressed (this case also implies to being the main character or object and having certain psychological and personal traits inscribed);
- precede the ground in time or space (be or on top of, in front of, above, larger than the rest of the field);
- indicate movement or action; dominant features of style (Stockwell 2002: 13-26).

Figure/ground analysis can be applied either to individual inscriptions or to the whole complex of graffiti in the city.

Political graffiti is a cultural practice that implies spatialization features, intensively challenging social space, physical or virtual; this kind of inscriptions possess a certain sign language and visual codes related to spatial arrangement of the nearby inscriptions.

Graffiti par excellence presumes territorial bordering, which functions as a basis for cognitive mapping (Ley, Cybriwsky 1974; Randviir 2011; Silva 1990). Thus, graffiti has a potential to signify the territory politically by means of spreading the inscriptions throughout the city; this is true for any graffiti, intentionally or unintentionally, explicitly or implicitly (Randviir 2011: 88-121). Armando Silva in his article *Territorial Marks in the Construction of Urban Sceneries in Colombian Cities* explains that the space use refers not only to symbolic

procedures, but also to social behavior strategy (Silva 1990: 50).

Anti Randviir in *Transdisciplinarity in objects. Spatial signification from graffiti to hegemony* explains that the relationship between graffiti and space is twofold: space is assigned its symbolic value, and, on the contrary, the latter is possible if one has already apprehended the symbolic essence of this particular territory (Randviir 2011). Thus, the location of the object can naturally be taken into consideration from two standpoints:

- on the one hand, the mutual relations between the inscriptions in a certain limited space, as well as the way a particular place increases or decreases the effect an inscription might produce;
- on the other hand, space is changed by an inscription so that it is important to consider the logic of arrangement of graffiti text as an aggregate in a given territory.

Nancy Macdonald outlines several tips for deciphering them for the case of subcultural graffiti; this approach is also applicable to political inscriptions, since the logic of arrangement and struggle is very similar. Thus, positive or friendly attitudes can be expressed by means of:

- arranging one graffiti close to another (indicates attention, although might be suitable only for a younger or unknown writer);
- putting graffiti on the one level with another (way to say 'hello', or a sign of respect); dedicating pieces to other writers or crews (sign of respect) (Macdonald 2003: 204-208).

There is also a number of ways to show superiority or confrontation:

- placing one's name above rather than beside (which can roughly be interpreted as 'I'm better than you');
- crowding another writer's name with more than one of your own or adding a larger name (this kind of message implicates the discourse of 'I'm more than you');
- touching graffiti with another graffiti or covering it (this action presumes 'pushing' an

individual aside or ignorance) (Macdonald 2003: 208-213).

In this sense, a face -to -face confrontation or stages of a physical fight/war can be metonymically enacted; to broaden this perspective, one might consider the ‘fights’ as oppositions ‘counter-culture versus mainstream’ or an opposition between subcultural groups representing cultural mainstreams on the political basis (Macdonald 2003: 204 --213; Randviir 2011: 96).

Graffiti can also be a medium to control space in general, to influence the way how people make sense of it and act there. It possesses the ability to map the territory: to claim spaces, emphasize borders and margins, centres or non--spaces; these practices structure the determining conditions of social life (de Certeau 2002: 96). For instance, certain marginalized spaces might be considered as permanent sources of political discourse manifestation; the public might review this area for new inscriptions. These spaces can be official zones for graffiti writing, under-bridge territories, subway or railway areas, trains, abandoned buildings, certain parts of the city. In this sense the spaces that never had any significant role in the social agenda can be introduced into the everyday life.

‘Virtual’ social space challenge can also be exemplified with producing new political subjects, unknown earlier (Cobarrubias, Pickles 2008: 42), although that might be a ‘defamiliarized’ connection (see above).

Conversely, the power of the message is dependent on its location. For the political cases in particular, location plays a decisive role from the perspective of potential influence; compare political pieces in public and private space. Graffiti written on significant objects ‘enjoys the same power’ as the object itself (Cybriwsky, Ley 1985: 494; Macdonald 2003: 203); the same applies to tourist attractions and places popular among the citizens. Spatial context is also important: light and physical surroundings; visibility and accessibility should also be taken

into consideration.

Recurring patterns that were mentioned above can also serve as means of territorialization. It is necessary to mention that repetition is very useful for political purposes (especially in the form of a stencil), and being employed by both formal and non-governmental purposes, thus makes the boundaries between formal and informal even more obscure, as well as between mainstream and subcultural discourse (Randviir 2011).

According to Armando Silva, the notions of limit, border, centre, periphery can be introduced to the topic of political graffiti if one has to deal with how it is spread within the given territory. These terms might be used to characterize the lingual or visual spreading of graffiti, or to designate marked and unmarked territory. The notion of 'point of view' is used to delimit the area where graffiti is concentrated, and 'mise en scene' - for the focus from which one can examine graffiti, and how this process is run (Silva 1990: 51).

Thus, Silva presumes that urban scenery is that 'mise en scene' which localizes the representative codes of pragmatic subjects, enunciating and, therefore, defining a group of citizens and the interaction between them (Silva 1990: 54).

Some spatial and textual graffiti messages can still seem non-informative from the first sight; however, these messages might still make sense for the perceivers with specific background knowledge (e.g. local people). In this case one of the most important examples is covered graffiti, which being covered inaccurately or thoughtlessly might have even more powerful message. Consider, for example, covered inscriptions, which were well known in the community before, or slogan-like inscriptions that are at least partly readable.

1.5. Summarizing the Methodology

Thus, political graffiti has to deal with social space and has to be seen to ‘perform’, sometimes interacting aggressively with the audience. Political graffiti tends to create a number of similar messages or borrow them, repeat certain slogans or iconic messages to make belief. Graffiti reveals certain relativity to performance functions aiming to meet the requirements of the specific categories of public, serving for community or identity purposes, sometimes tending to occupy an authoritative position. In the sense of spatialization graffiti is able to create space, influencing it even after the event, and it is also dependent on its location.

Therefore political graffiti is interpreted as aiming to attract the attention and forming the political climate in a certain area by means of it; political climate therefore is understood partly as learning experimentally from the surroundings, acquired by means of becoming accustomed to the political inscriptions surrounding the perceivers.

Consequently, the array of political graffiti found in a certain territory should be examined according to the following steps:

I. The collected data should be reviewed and conditionally categorized to provide certain graffiti with group descriptions;

II. Recurring patterns and common elements should be revealed, as well as unique perceptual features;

III. The above mentioned categories should be analysed according to their cognitive and textual characteristics, namely:

- textual characteristics, which involve evaluation of graffiti unit as corresponding to communicative or non-communicative; potentially ‘non-communicative’ deviances should be analysed according to their influence on the overall meaning of the inscription.

- colours and visual representation stylistics, visibility, size;
- location in space, by means of which the way how graffiti messages interact is revealed, as well as their ability to map the territory and the logic of arrangement of graffiti text as an aggregate in a given territory.

2 Analysing Political Graffiti in Samara

The observations made in the city centre of Samara (Figure 1) resulted in more than one hundred political inscriptions detected. They were found in easily accessible places, despite the fact that city administration is trying to clean the city out from graffiti. The inscriptions found in the city centre were divided into groups depending on their thematic focus.

2.1 Graffiti Related to Current Politics, Government, Major Political Figures and Forces, Activism

2.1.1 Political Graffiti Dedicated to State Issues

The first subgroup of graffiti is formed by the inscriptions related to state politics, government and major political figures. In the observed territory state politics and the implementation of policy is mainly ascribed to Vladimir Putin, a number of major political organizations and the police.

For instance, the graffiti from Figure 2 possesses the words ‘Путин лох’; the first word signifying Vladimir Putin can be roughly defined as ‘Naive person, scam victim, sucker’, and is accompanied by a schematic representation of a smiling face, similarly with the graffiti from Figure 3. Analogous inscriptions appear at least two times more (see Figures 4, 5); one of them (Figure 5) is already done with the use of larger font and, therefore, is more noticeable. Notably, all graffiti are made with the use of cheap materials (three out of two with black or red marker), three out of two are written in similar small font, in two cases out of three the inscriptions are accompanied a smiling face. The handwriting is also similar so it can be supposed that these graffiti are made by one person or group. An emoticon leads to the suggestion that graffiti might belong to the representative of the younger generation familiar with digital communication.

The effect could be acquired by the combination of a swear word with the name of a well-known politician even despite the poor representation. In addition to that, all of the inscriptions despite their small size act as figures due to a wisely chosen background, which is either monochromatic or non-communicative to an ordinary citizen (e.g. a graffiti tag on Figure 2). The text corresponds to the seven standards of textuality and should be easily perceived, although it has a rather low level of informativity; the shocking value is achieved with the use of a rude characteristics. Textual structure is well-chosen since it is 'slogan-like' and easy to remember; the words should be familiar to most of the potential viewers; the structure of the inscription corresponds to an ascertaining slogan.

These graffiti are rather aggressive (mostly due to swear words and a fact of an attack on a famous politician), although the most aggressive attitude is shown in Figure 5 due to the large sloppy font. The font is very easy to read, as if the writers aimed to be understood. Some of the inscriptions are accompanied by smiling faces, and in combination with small font it can produce an impression of trying to look like non-politics, not trying to occupy a significant place in the city space. An emoticon in half of the cases influences the meaning greatly, especially jointly with marker and small font. The message is somehow 'unconfident' to present itself and tries to clarify the tone of the statement, to soften the aggressive tone, therefore it is not likely to be considered highly influential. There is no combative or controlling attitude. The object is deprived of the context and has a new 'ultimately true' characteristics, although the observer has no idea why this politician is given such a characteristics. This kind of inscription appears four times within the analysed territory, which does not seem to be a lot, however in comparison to the other inscriptions it seems to become a recurring pattern.

Similar conclusions can be partially applied to the inscription 'Putin is a thief' ('Путин вор') (see Figure 6). However, here a smiling face nearby might be a coincidence, since it is made in

a different manner, paint and colour. In addition to that, here a smiling face has a more aggressive appearance and, therefore, more combative attitude.

The inscription is done in a rather small but more expressive font, with the use of marker. The background here is overloaded with communicative details, which impede the perception. This inscription is not likely to be interpreted as benevolent: the aggressive inscription is working jointly with a clown-like face. It has an ascertaining slogan structure; it is also an effective communicative unit, and might work as a slogan, although it was seen only once. Similarly to Figures 2-5, this is an invective with no explanatory context.

Another example, connected with the current president, is the graffiti 'R-evolution', depicting the figure of Vladimir Putin, who uses scissors to cut the letter «r» off the word 'revolution' to make 'evolution' out of it (see Figure 7). Crossed out and covered with dirt, it is still readable, but only for a limited group of spectators, who are familiar with the original version of this graffiti (see Figure 8, found on the Internet). The picture is out of colour, but the traces of dirt look fresh, as well as the tags covering it. Notably, the original version of graffiti does not express any particular political views, as far as it can be interpreted both as pro-Putin and anti-Putin, depending on the attitude to 'evolution' and 'revolution' as political phenomena; somehow it raises a philosophical question on the nature of the political situation.

This graffiti is highly likely to attract the attention of both the opponents and supporters of Vladimir Putin and evoke a strong reaction: both a picture and the substance covering it might be a reason for it. The connotations of this graffiti, dirt and the objects depicted on it are so intense that they might cause a negative attitude even towards ascertaining that looks neutral, or at least is hard to interpret clearly. In terms of Nancy Macdonald, this is a metonymic fight, although it is hard to distinguish which political forces were involved into it. Therefore, it has a certain 'combative' attitude since the stages of the fight are very easy to uncover; this 'combative attitude' is exactly what makes this passe inscription be a figure against a

background which is close to the colour tone.

Creative language use and the use of English in connection with covering dirt might work as a figure here. It is also highly communicative and effective as a widely-known graffiti. The inscription is done in English, although it is not about praise; it is merely used for the sake of making the inscription sound 'progressive'; in addition to that, the word play is more effective in English.

Only two of the found inscriptions are dedicated to United Russia (Единая Россия) party (Figures 9 and 10), which are very similar and can be analysed jointly. The first one (Figure 9) contains only one word designating the members of this party (Единоросы) with an added (probably at a different time) word 'bitches' (суки) in a different colour (Figure 9). Here one can see the evidence of both fight and support: the second word was added later, and both words were covered by a third party. It might have been renewed once (at first the inscription was made in blue, then the first word was covered; after that it was written again in black), it is covered by hardly distinguishable inscriptions made with white chalk. The second one (Figure 10) provides the members of 'United Russia' with the characteristics of thieves ('воры'). This inscription has some traces of 'fight' as well, although it hard to distinguish if the analysed inscription was covered, or if it was used to cover something else. Both of the inscriptions are situated close to each other; they are not well visible, and, therefore, quite old. They are also likely to be made by one and the same person; and, probably covered by the same person as well, since the styles of writing and covering look pretty much alike. In addition to that, the first word written in the same way ('Единоросы' instead of 'Единороссы'). This is an attempt to create an ascertaining cliché: same subject, the same structure with different predicate are used; in addition, it carries the connotations of disturbance and combat, shocking by an aggressive attack on the party members. The inscriptions are still figures due to being provocative and having specific predicates and a well-known and recognizable political figure as an object. Both inscriptions seem to be

conceived as efficient, effective and appropriate, although there are too much common perceptual features with other graffiti, they are hardly noticeable or readable and appear only twice; therefore, the communicative properties of them are rather low.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (КПРФ) are characterized as betrayers ('КПРФ предатели') in Figure 11, which is similar to the previous examples by the structure of the sentence: the object is accompanied by negative characteristics and forms an ascertaining (see Figures 2-4, 6, 9, 10). The inscription from Figure 11 intersects with other inscriptions made with chalk and tags; interestingly enough, the background has one covered, but easily readable inscription related to Dmitry Azarov (see further). These two inscriptions do not seem to interact in the sense of their content, although the inscription related to CPRF is dominant, which, in addition to offensive characteristics, gives it a combative attitude. It tends to be efficient, effective and appropriate with properly applied negative formula. The first word is partly covered with a tag; therefore, only the word 'предатели' becomes a figure, being more clear and shocking.

Graffiti stencil 'За (у)родин' can be very close to a joke (see Figure 12), since the word 'motherland' ('родина'¹) is transformed by adding one handwritten letter to it, so that it switches to 'ugly' ('уродина'). In addition to that, the last letter is covered by a billboard, so that it gives the graffiti certain sarcastic connotations; the whole inscription can also be understood as 'for ugly women'. The combination of creative language use and making political praise sound offensive makes it a figure against the surroundings. The original slogan is deconstructed so that it becomes a new one while the slogan cliché stays the same, remaining an appeal. Therefore, it is a battle between party supporters and a defamiliarizing force, which makes the original inscription change its meaning completely and thus manipulating the party image. The final result appears to devalue the original inscription,

¹ the stencil refers to Rodina party (Motherland-National Patriotic Union)

making it 'non-political'. It is communicative, although coherence, intentionality and acceptability are questionable; the message also might not be perceived easily. The inscription is partially rubbed off and rather small, which makes it hardly noticeable.

One of the handwritten inscriptions is related to Yabloko party (Яблоко) (see Figure 13). This inscription possesses the set very low communicative properties, since it contains only the party name, without any characteristics given to it. Although the inscription is noticeable against the background, it is still rather small and is not likely to produce much impression.

Another subgroup contains the inscriptions against the police: 'All cops are bastards', or 'A.C.A.B.'; they appear at least eight times: as a stencil once (Figure 14) and handwritten in other cases (Figures 15-21). Several of them might belong to one author, as far as similar font or colour are used (consider Figures 15-16 and 18-21). The inscription itself represents a popular slogan, widely used in graffiti around the world. It seems to be very provocative and aggressive as an idea, especially considering Bushnell's statement on the use of English language in Russian graffiti (see above). In that sense it is twice anti-Russian as a protest against the police and an inscription made in a foreign language. It has a certain combative attitude and tends to repeat throughout the city a lot, which makes it an ascertaining slogan. Additionally, all the inscriptions are done with bright colours and are very easy to read, and, therefore, tend to attract attention and act as figures in the city space. Nonetheless, their communicative properties are quite low; they might be considered as tags (see further) due to their appearance and the position close to other tags or tag-looking inscriptions (Figures 17, 18, 20) or attached characteristics (e.g. 'A.C.A.B. лох' in Figure 16). Only once this acronym appears in the form of a phrase which it stands for (Figure 19). Notably only one stencil is made (Figure 14), but it was never seen again in the territory under observation. In addition to that, certain background knowledge is required to understand the meaning of this inscription, so their effect cannot be very high. Therefore, the content of these inscriptions might appear to be a non-text for most of the observers.

Another form of offensive graffiti against the police is ‘Cops suck’ (‘Мycopа cocyr’, Figure 22), which is combative mainly due to the first slang and rather offensive word, while the second is hardly readable. The second word, as in the case with Figures 2-4 gives the same essence of ‘being shy’ to make an announcement. The handwriting is rather sloppy; for example, the letter ‘p’ in ‘mycopa’ is written so that it can be easily mixed up with English ‘r’; ‘y’ in ‘cocyr’ is written similarly to Russian ‘и’, so that it is hard to conceive. Big font makes it noticeable, however, similarly to the previous case, understanding the inscription requires the knowledge of slang, which narrows down the audience. It is still provocative, offensive and aggressive, aiming to humiliate the significant political force. It is clearly seen and serves as a figure against the surroundings. Although it cannot be the figure in the context of the city district because it is hardly readable, so that the content can be grasped only by a motivated spectator; therefore, it possesses low communicative properties.

Another example of an anti-police graffiti is a stencil ‘Militsiya² loves us’ (‘Милиция нас любит’, Figure 23). The stencil is very small, the picture itself is blurred, and even the inscription related to the picture cannot be read, so that the observer can be aware of the actual content only if he knows the original (Figure 24). This is possible since the same stencil has already appeared in other Russian cities (e.g. Vladivostok) and in Ukraine³, and these examples are clearer and are available on the internet. The graffiti itself depicts a policeman beating a man lying on the ground. The stencil is relatively small, accompanied by a swastika (Figure 25). The stencil displays a certain combative attitude, and it tends to shock the observer; the picture and the inscription are properly attached, although their combination introduces a defamiliarizing element: an exaggerated praise is transformed by the illustration to it. This stencil has a potential to attract attention, however it is hardly readable; thus, it is

² former official name for Russian police (before 2010)

³ at least these cases are registered by the media

non-communicative. The swastika which accompanies it also tends to be dominant due to its size, and it might divert the perceiver, underplaying the value of the stencil.

2.1.2 Graffiti on the Local Political Issues

The inscriptions related to local politics, government, political figures and local political activism are represented by a greater amount of graffiti. Several graffiti are related to Dmitry Azarov, who is the current head of Samara. His surname is accompanied by the characteristics of ‘dog killer’ (‘убийца собак’, Figure 26), ‘phony rabbit’ (‘дутый кролик’, Figures 11, 27), ‘phony thief’ (‘дутый вор’, Figure 28), or just ‘phony’, with one part of the expression covered though (‘дутый’, Figure 29). Considering each of these graffiti in detail, one might notice that they are rather similar: all of them are either done with sloppy handwriting or covered, which makes them difficult to perceive. Nevertheless, the original concept to attach a fixed rude characteristics to one and the same object worked rather well in this case: this kind of combative attitude in connection with repetitions (e.g. ‘phony’, which was seen four times) results in the appearance of an easily memorable ascertaining. ‘Dog killer’ potentially has the same impact, but still appears only once. ‘Phony’ epithet is also a good example of a highly specialized negative formula used in political graffiti; being rather absurd in connection with ‘rabbit’ or ‘thief’, the word ‘phony’ reminds of a floating signifier, although it tends to become a stable characteristics. However, this text is communicative only for the local people.

Graffiti related to local political figures can have a form of an invective: ‘Zhora is a coward’ (‘Жора трус’, supposedly related to Georgij Limanskij⁴, Figure 30), or offensive form: ‘Let’s finish fucking Zhora’ (‘Дотархаем⁵ Жору’, Figures 31-33) with a wordplay in the first part of

⁴ Georgij Limanskij, head of the city within the period from 1997 to 2006;

⁵ this wordplay is hard to translate; it is formed by the combination of two words ‘дотрахаем’ which roughly means ‘finish fucking’, while the author reverses two letters, and it turns into ‘дотархаем’, which already has a reference to Viktor Tarkhov due to the consonance of this word with his surname

the inscription. All these graffiti are related to one and the same person, and might be a part of a campaign to make his rating lower before the elections. They all use swear words, or word plays that are quite aggressive and might attract attention by means of that in addition to repetitions. Figures 31-33 are likely to be called slogans, since they have an easily memorable structure and tend to repeat throughout the city, although these appeals are not relevant any more, since these inscriptions should have appeared around 2006 due to the upcoming elections. Similarly to the previous instance, it is communicative only for the local people.

Graffiti ‘Тархов - не’ (Figure 34) concerns Viktor Tarkhov⁶ attaching an unfinished word⁷ to his surname. The incomplete phrase tends to attract attention aggressively, and invites the reader to think of a proper ending for the word. Although this inscription has a potential to become a slogan (it is clearly seen and readable and talks about a major political figure), it still does not work as such. Figure 35 represents a similar inscription (‘Тархов - козел’), where the characteristics is close to ‘jerk’, having typical features of graffiti which uses swear words against political figures (similarly to Figures 2-5).

Some inscriptions are dedicated to less important figures, and, therefore, one of their functions is to introduce these new political subjects to the city life either by negative characteristics or praise. Notably, these graffiti tend to repeat throughout the city centre much more often: e.g. ‘Koshelev⁸ is a bankrupt’ (‘Коселев банкрот’) was seen at least eight times (Figures 36 - 42). All the inscriptions dedicated to Koshelev are done with the use of similar materials and font, and they might be written by one person. They are always clearly seen and noticeable, although sometimes covered with paint. It always tends to be figure, and, notably, often the

⁶ Viktor Tarkhov, head of the city in 2006 - 2010

⁷ it is likely to be a swear word

⁸ this inscription refers to Vladimir Koshelev, who is involved into building business and regional politics and used to be a candidate for mayoral elections

place for the inscription is well-chosen, e.g. these can be building sites or fences which enclose old dilapidated houses (Figures 37-42). In addition to that this graffiti aims to look non-political, however is highly likely to be connected with the involvement of the object into politics. This inscription has become a slogan within the given territory; although the characteristics of its communicative potential is two-fold: it is definitely possesses the standards of textuality and is likely to be easily perceived and attract much of attention as a recognizable pattern; however, people might also become tired of it. The graffiti produces defamiliarizing effect, since it tries to draw the reader's attention away from Koshelev as a politician.

The inscription 'Lektorovich⁹ get out of Samara' ('Лекторович вон из Самары') was seen two times (Figures 43-44). It does not tend to be figure against the walls on which it is inscribed, since the graffiti itself seems to be old and partially rubbed out; although the aggressive tone might make it more noticeable. These graffiti presuppose an implicit invective and its appearance does not seem political similarly to the previous case. Although one of the graffiti (Figure 43) contains a neighbouring expression 'судья тварь' ('judge is a slut'), the interaction with which might give an insight on the reason to expel this person from the city. As many of the above mentioned cases, this graffiti is slogan-like, but does it does not work as a slogan.

The next category of inscriptions might also express support, but, mostly less famous figures are supported. For example, all the inscriptions related to Mikhail Matveev¹⁰, seem to be supportive: 'Go Matveev!' ('Матвеев вперед', Figures 45-47) or just 'Matveev' ('Матвеев', Figure 48). The first three examples out of these four seem very similar despite the different background and handwriting; despite the slogan structure they are hardly communicative since

⁹ related to Sergej Lektorovich, regional businessman and politician

¹⁰ Mikhail Matveev is the regional дума deputy;

they are hardly noticeable, being rubbed off. In addition to that, this kind of praise uses very primitive language. ‘Doctor Kogan¹¹, go’ (‘Доктор Коган вперед’, Figure 62), ‘Orlov¹² win’ (‘Орлов побеждай’, Figure 59), or such covered supportive graffiti as ‘For Tarkhov - Zvereva’ (‘За Тархова - Звереву’, Figure 63) and ‘Zvereva forever’ (‘Зверева навсегда’, Figure 64) can be listed among very similar examples with the same characteristics.

More complex forms of political support are expressed in the following inscriptions: ‘Shustov¹³ is a reliable choice’ (‘Шустов - надежный выбор’, Figures 49-58), ‘Lektorovich is our mayor’ (‘Лекторович наш мэр’, Figure 60), ‘Limanskij, people are for you’ (‘Лиманский, народ за тебя’, Figure 61). The first series of graffiti dedicated to Shustov is somehow analogous to the above mentioned case concerning Vladimir Koshelev: all the graffiti are done with the use of similar materials and font, and they might be done by one person. They are not always clearly seen and noticeable, although it can be considered a slogan; the characteristics of its communicative potential is ambiguous: it is a recognizable pattern, however it might become annoying and non-informative. The last two examples appear only once, and it makes them non-recognizable; in addition, both have been covered, and that makes them very close to a non-text.

Political initiative from the citizens is not well-present in city, although there is a set of three inscriptions made on one wall surrounding the remains of a recently burnt wooden house. These three inscriptions are highly likely to be perceived as a triptych has an important function of introducing a new political subject, ordinary citizen’s voice. The first part of it says: ‘Fire victims unite!’ (‘Погорельцы объединяйтесь!’ Figure 65), where the words ‘fire victims’ was masked with red paint, graffiti tags and papers ads but later appeared again. It

¹¹ Yuriy Kogan, candidate for mayoral elections in 2010

¹² Sergej Orlov, city дума deputy elected in 2005

¹³ Aleksandr Shustov, former Дума deputy

can be supposed that the main aim of the ‘battle’ in that case was just to make the inscription lose its significance, but not to cover the graffiti. The word ‘unite’ (‘объединяйтесь’) still can carry certain political connotations, but it becomes very abstract and loses the aggressive meaning. Another try to add the word ‘Fire victims’ in a slightly different colour can be witnessed in the upper part of the wall, and after that the graffiti becomes even more performative due to the readability of the ‘battle’. The inscription is very noticeable, mostly due to its location (on the wall which blocks the sidewalk, so that the pedestrian will have to face it), visual representation (large visible font and bright colours) and a combative attitude, serving as a figure for a quiet street. It has a structure of an appeal and touches upon important problem, but it is never repeated in the analysed territory, where a huge amount of old wooden architecture is concentrated. The place reinforces the value of graffiti since the fire topic is touched upon right in front of the burnt house. The communicative properties of this inscription are potentially very high.

The second part has an inscription ‘(Who) lives in our apartments’ (‘(кто) живет в наших квартирах’, Figure 66) has the word ‘who’ covered with a billboard. The remaining part of the inscription is crossed out and partially covered by paper ads, so that this part also has the traces of ‘fight’. Here the billboard attracts much more attention as far as it is bigger, more colourful and has a more coherent message while the partially covered graffiti loses its meaning¹⁴. This structure is potentially less powerful than the previous; though it is very noticeable.

The third part of the wall has an inscription ‘People live here’ (‘Тут живут люди’, Figure 41) written in blue with a postscript (preceded by a dash, so that we know that it was made later and is definitely related to the original inscription) in red ‘hobos’ (‘бомжи’). There is also another inscription covering (or being covered with) the one made in red, which is related to

¹⁴ the first word can be seen only if one takes a look behind the billboard

Vladimir Koshelev (see above). Similarly to the previous cases, it is partially covered with paper ads and the billboard. Therefore, these three inscriptions form a kind of a opposition, when one side (business, political structures and subculture) tends to subdue the manifestations of ‘ordinary citizen’s’ voice and defamiliarize it. If ‘бомжи’ presents itself as a mockery, then ‘Коселев банкрот’ in this context reminds the stylistics of contextual advertising. This ‘battle’ in this context is likely to become a figure since the easiest thing to grasp on this wall is chaos of letters. Thus, the latter inscriptions manipulate the former image, depriving it of the context so that it loses its initial protest connotations. Thus, it is pretty hard to consider it communicative, although the original idea seems to be good.

2.1.3 Current Politics: Spatial Arrangement

The spatial arrangement of these graffiti tends to signify space politically, assigning the it with certain political messages. Consider the Map 1 where the red pointers denote the inscription related to the state, and blue ones - to local political processes. The inscription related to the state are uniformly distributed throughout the city centre, although there is a chain of inscriptions (Figures 6, 9, 10, 14, 16), which suggest the idea of a purposeful arrangement. However, the visual stylistics and topics of these graffiti are totally different.

Local political graffiti evidence is distributed in a different way; graffiti is concentrated on the border of the historical centre (consider the congestion of Figures 41, 47, 49-52, 54-57, 65, 66). Notably, Figures 49-52 and 54-57 depict the graffiti concerning Shustov; in respect that they look identical it can be supposed that this political actor aims to control that area. In contrast, graffiti dedicated to Koshelev are more evenly distributed.

Upon the whole, this category of graffiti tends to concentrate on the borders of the designated space and avoid the places with greater concentration of people, keeping to quiet narrow streets and mostly deflecting the zone near the river.

2.2 Motivators, Slogans and Propaganda in Political Graffiti

Traditionally graffiti is considered to be ‘protest’ art (e.g. Bushnell 1990). However, Samara has several zones allotted for graffiti and controlled by the city administration, i.e. by the dominant subculture (e.g. part of embankment, see Figures 67 - 69). Nevertheless, some graffiti still support city administration and the policy it pursues within the given area, even being out of the territories delimited for graffiti. In that sense graffiti might become even more close to slogans or to the genre of propaganda poster; at the same time, this phenomenon is somehow devaluing other political graffiti and the idea of graffiti in general for a given area. However, non-ideological motivation might be also included into that group. These inscriptions can be conditionally named ‘social motivators’, and presume the use of messages to inform, educate or influence the receivers; in general, they can be very similar to agitation posters or slogans.

Despite the attempts to fight graffiti, city administration tends to write on the walls itself. An example of such activity was found in one of the courtyards of the city centre. The inscription says: ‘Samara city administration. Courtyard where we live!’ (‘Администрация городского округа Самара. Двор, в котором мы живем’, Figure 70) and promotes the city project of courtyard renovation. The place for this inscription was chosen intentionally, and the background was prepared beforehand, so that the inscription is clearly seen due bright colours and big font. This inscription does not present itself combatively, although it might seem a bit aggressive for the courtyard space. Graffiti in that case can be compared with a slogan; this example is similar to a slogan not only by its structure, but also by the purpose and technique. It is memorable and repetitive, since the project should have involved more courtyards. In contrast with other examples of political graffiti, it is well-done and well thought out; the author aimed to produce certain impression and be understood properly. Notably, it even has a project logo on the right hand side. This text is communicative, although acceptability and

situationality are questionable, since it remains unclear whether political propaganda is relevant in the courtyard.

One of the most important and common types of motivators is a number of pieces dedicated to football topic; the city was being planned to become one of FIFA hosts in 2018. This series of graffiti introduces football as a new political subject. The graffiti have appeared shortly before the visit of FIFA committee, so that the target audience might be not the citizens, but the committee itself. Consider, for example, ‘Hundred years of the Samara football’ (‘100 лет самарскому футболу’, Figures 68-69), as well as a social commercial ‘2018’ (Figure 71) and ‘Russia 2018 Samara embodies the dream’ (‘Россия 2018 Самара воплощает мечту’, Figure 67). Graffiti from Figures 67-69 appeared on the part of the embankment, which was officially intended for graffiti but with a preliminary agreement with city administration. It is necessary to mention that at first this wall was used as a site for graffiti contest, and mostly the pieces did not have any clear political message.

Notably, other examples of subcultural graffiti dedicated to football and made by football fans have a radically different appearance in this area: these are mostly short inscriptions or logos. Being very big (especially in comparison to other graffiti which appear in the city), they function as figures for a given territory. Similarly to the previous example, slogans are used; both of the inscriptions attached to football graffiti are glorifiers with good communicative properties.

The work ‘Booze’ (‘Синька’, Figure 72) lists social and medical consequences of consuming alcohol; the amount of words totals approximately eighty three; therefore, the whole list is provided in the Attachment 1. It is considerably big in comparison to most of the graffiti which this work deals with; in that sense it can be compared to the football pieces described above. The work can serve as a figure in the neighbourhood due to its size and visual representation stylistics. The name of the work, ‘Синька’, tends to be one of the most

noticeable details, while the relations between the words cannot be easily grasped by a passer-by, although the didactic charge of it can be easily perceived. The communicative properties of it are rather high, although the choice of place, and, therefore, situationality of the text, might seem questionable.

A less communicative example is the graffiti 'Enough drinking' ('Хорош бухать', Figure 94). This picture looks more like a typical example of political graffiti considered above although it contains a more aggressive attempt to influence the audience. It has certain slogan features, but cannot share them entirely, since it does not appear anywhere else. Thus, one way or another, alcohol becomes a new subject in the political agenda.

There are several direct 'calls to action' in the city space, which address the citizens with imperatives; they are mostly neutral and related to self-perfection and personal life. However, this category of inscriptions intrudes privacy much more than all the previous examples with didactic inscriptions; these graffiti vary from advices related to art¹⁵, personal life¹⁶, world view¹⁷ to more aggressive imperatives¹⁸, which convey certain combative attitude. Some could be possibly done by one author (e.g. Figures 73, 75-76, 78), which presumes the tendency to dominate in a particular field with a certain perceptual code. Slogan technique was employed

¹⁵ 'Listen to classics' ('слушай классику', Figures 73, 76); 'Haydn (Гайдн) the best' (Figures 73-74, 76), 'Read books' ('Читайте книги', Figure 75); 'I. Strauss is a joy and fun' ('Штраус это радость и веселье', Figure 78),

¹⁶ 'Be alive' ('будь живым') with an 'emoticon' (Figure 77); 'Good zone - bad zone' (Figure 79); 'Present mom with flowers' ('подари маме цветы', Figure 80), 'Move life' ('Двигай жизнь', Figure 81),

¹⁷ 'Miracle for miracle' ('чудо для чуда', Figure 82), 'Peace to the World' ('Мир — миру', Figure 83).

¹⁸ 'Create mess' ('Твори бардак', Figure 84); 'Eat people' ('ешь людей', Figure 85), 'Steal kill' ('воруй убивай', Figures 86-87); 'Find and destroy' (Figure 88), 'Find' ('найди', Figure 89), 'Беги' ('Run', Figures 90-91).

to create these inscriptions. These are mostly highly communicative appeals; one graffiti even uses a transformed Soviet slogan 'Peace to the World' ('Мир — миру', Figure 83).

Two big pieces depicting ships are located in front of the river terminal, facing the wharfs (Figures 92-93) and might be categorized as promoting city infrastructure, and, therefore, work of the administration at least partially, so that it might be considered semi-official. The communicative properties of it are low, since there is no explanatory inscription or title, so that might be considered a non-linguistic praise or might be appreciated as an artistic work. From a different perspective, the place (a place where new graffiti often appears and the background (concrete wall) are well-chosen.

The spatial arrangement of motivational graffiti is shown on Map 2. Motivational graffiti are spread irregularly within the city centre. There are certain congestions or logical lines in the arrangement, and only Figures 70, 87 and 91 are located rather independently. Two big groups of graffiti are situated close the embankment: this is a group mostly dedicated to football (see above, Figures: 67-69, 81) and motivators related to personal life (Figures 71-75, 76, 78-80, 82, 83, 89). There are also two conspicuous 'chains' of graffiti: Figures 84, 90, 92,93 and Figures 77, 85-87; the latter group is composed of mostly aggressive appeals. In general, motivational graffiti gravitates towards the borders of the city centre and small quiet streets. However, in some cases these spatially marginal zones are popular among the citizens, for instance, the embankment and the joint area, where official graffiti zones are located.

2.3 Subcultural Attitude to Politics

Subcultural groups also have a particular interest in politics and represent powerful political forces, so that graffiti gives becomes a good representation of the subcultural attitude to politics in the analysed territory. Their claims tend to be more abstract in comparison with the graffiti related to actual politics; they rather express attitudes or certain political philosophy

than touching upon concrete political figures or commenting on a particular phenomena.

The most significant non-marginal political force represented in graffiti is communist movement. Inscriptions related to communism appear quite often in the city, especially concerning communist symbolism. One of the walls in the city centre presents a number of pictures supposedly made in chain in the same courtyard (Figures 108-110).

These graffiti are located quite close to each other: 'Red skins' with hammer and sickle, 'Death to bourgeois' ('Смерть буржуям') with double hammer and sickle figure, and 'No to Nazism' ('Нет нацизму') with a crossed swastika, which was probably made earlier. By means of repetition the author managed to set his control over this space. The traces of battle between three powerful political forces can be witnessed due to the crossed swastika, evidence of aggressive attitude to nazi and bourgeois and the figure of the hammer and sickle. They might try to manifest a new group, because 'skins' might be confused with nazi.

Two out of three inscriptions in this example are built as slogans; the proper use of emblems reinforces the effect of the work. Communicative and recognizable symbols are used. Hammer and sickle in general appear to be quite a popular symbol, and it can be seen in the city centre at least five times (Figures 108-111). Symbols deprived of their context do not seem to be very communicate, however, hammer and sickle in a post soviet area have so many connotations that they become easily perceivable and interpretable. Notably, there is only one anti-communist inscription, 'Rock against communism' ('рок против коммунизма') with the covered face Che Guevara, which was made earlier (Figure 112). Despite the aggressive attitude, it still communicates the same notions. Low communicative properties and coherence since the reasons of being against might be unclear.

Most of the patriotic manifestations, nationalist and nazi discourse seem to be rather close; thus non-aggressive patriotism and less combative nationalist discourse become a minority.

Several inscriptions demonstrate local patriotism, showing the names of the cities, city districts or significant geographical names for the region (Figures 97-101)¹⁹. ‘Intrastate’ patriotism is mainly related to inscribing the names of the cities (Figures 102-105)²⁰. Both of these cases can be considered ‘assume it in an imaginary linguistic extension’ in terms of Armando Silva (Silva 1990: 51). These inscriptions are mostly neutral, not highly communicative and hard to notice; they mostly demonstrate the tendency to ‘mark territory’. However, even local patriotism sometimes intersects with aggressive subcultural movements; consider, for example, Figure 101 where patriotic graffiti is accompanied with a swastika written by the same author. According to Silva, to name a territory is to, while marking it means giving it a physical identity associated with the denominative act, from social or psychological interiors of my territory to the rest of the world (Silva 1990: 51).

Patriotism is often expressed in praising the achievements of the Soviet times, e.g. consider a piece depicting a cosmonaut with inscriptions: ‘12 April’ and ‘Yu. Gagarin’ (Figure 106); another example is ‘Thanks to Grandpa for victory’ (‘Спасибо деду за победу’, Figure 107). This case is very similar to graffiti discussed in the second section; they might be also made with the intention to cultivate patriotism. Similarly to the case from Figure 70, it is well-done and well thought out; the author aimed to produce a certain impression and be understood properly. Figure 107 represents a popular contemporary slogan widely used in official discourse concerning Great Patriotic War. Both of these topics can be communicative since they are widely-known and appreciated.

¹⁹ ‘Volgar you and me’ (‘Волгарь ты и я’, where ‘Volgar’ stands for a man living on the Volga river; Figure 97), ‘116 km one one six ‘stoshka’ we are here’ (‘116 км один один шесть стошка мы здесь’, which is about one of the city districts; Figure 98), ‘the Samara crew’ (Figure 99), ‘Чапайка city’ (‘Чапайка city’, which stands for Чапаевск, Figure 100), ‘Volga region’ (Приволжье) (Figure 101)

²⁰ ‘E-burg’ (‘Е-бург’, which stands for Ekaterinburg) (Figure 102), ‘Moscow Samara’ (Figure 103), ‘Surgut’ (‘Сургут’, Figure 104), ‘Voskresensk’ (‘Воскресенск’, Figure 105)

Nationalist discourse is quite often expressed in graffiti fighting against alcoholism, and, therefore, introducing it as new object of social agenda in the form of poetry (Figure 95)²¹: Notably, it is different from the graffiti from Figure 72; healthy lifestyle in nationalist discourse is closely connected to patriotism and political struggle (Figure 95). There is also another example of the same stencil covered with paint; however, the frame and content of it is still readable (Figure 96). This example is communicative, although it might not be coherent to an ordinary citizen, since e.g. it is not clear how healthy life is connected to ‘fight for Russia’. Although, nationalistic discourse is quite popular and graffiti might be well-understood and attract a lot of attention. Similarly to graffiti ‘Booze’, it is didactic; in addition to that, it is very small, and the graffiti from Figure 96 might not even be noticed.

National politics is a problematic issue for contemporary Russia and it is reflected in graffiti by a huge amount of neo-nazist inscriptions and national issues raised on the city walls. Neo-nazi symbols or key notions can be seen quite often inscribed on the city walls: these are swastikas, often covered, but still visible (Figures 25, 113-114, 101), or, similarly, ‘1488’ (Figures 115-117). Runes also appear several times openly or covered (Figures 118-119), or it also can be an important word for the discourse, e.g. ‘Rus’ (‘Русь’, Figure 120). These symbols are not very communicative, at least to the observer without special background knowledge. However, swastika might have a very strong impact, especially due to the tendency to praise Great Patriotic War.

The star of David appears several times in the central part of the city (Figures 121- 124) but it might be related both to manifestation of the national and neo-fascism. Its communicative properties are close to that of swastikas and hammer and sickle figures, since the observers

²¹ The original verse says: пора борьбы за / Русь настала: / бросай курить! / бросай бухать! / Родится русским / слишком мало, / им надо быть, / им надо стать.

It can be roughly translated to English as follows: It's time to fight for / Russia: / Quit smoking / And drinking / It is not enough to be born Russian / One needs to be him, one needs to become him.

might easily notice them due to a great amount of connotations related to it. Some of the inscriptions can be directly connected to antisemitism, e.g. the combination of star of David, inscriptions like ‘die, goys’, ‘zogTV’ and a picture of a TV-set (Figure 124). These graffiti are communicative and combative and use slogan structures.

Caucasus-related inscriptions establish one of the biggest groups. Consider for example ‘Congratulations hachi²²’ (‘С праздником хачи’) with a swastika sign (Figure 125). It is clearly seen that this inscription is done on the site of the previously made graffiti, which has been covered, so that it gives the impression of a ‘battle’. Some graffiti are even more aggressive: ‘Руби чурок’ or ‘Руби хачей’ (roughly speaking, close to ‘Kill people from Caucasus’, Figures 126-127). These examples are very aggressive appeals with properly attached symbols. This topic is touched upon in many places throughout the city without repeating particular formula, which reinforces that discourse and makes the graffiti more likely to be noticed and read. The content of such inscriptions might seem shocking, and that strengthens the impression. Similarly to the cases with swastikas or stars of David, it is communicative and highly coherent.

One of these graffiti deserves special attention. ‘Чурки пидоры’ (‘People from Caucasus are fagets’, Figure 128) with a later addition, which gives this inscription certain ironic connotations: ‘from Mars’ (‘с марса’). The opposition of the two authors has a defamiliarizing effect. The offensive original inscription with the attitude of dominance, being accompanied by a postscriptum, is transformed into absurd, with overemphasized attitude of ‘otherness’ that the first inscription possesses. Thus, the emphasis is drawn away from combat and dominance to the new structure made with creative language use.

²² commonly of any person native to the Caucasus region; the difference between ‘хачи’ and ‘чурки’ remains unclear

Some of the inscriptions are indirectly related to neo-nazism, but they still are able to draw the attention to it or can be disguised as nazism. ‘Don’t wear paranja, don’t root for Anzhi’²³ (‘Не носи паранджи не болей за Анжи’, Figure 129), which has several mistakes in Russian spelling and is accompanied by portrait of a woman. Another example is ‘Hi I’ve fucked your mother’ (‘Привет я ебал ваш мама’, Figure 130), with a mistake in Russian spelling as well. Notably, the last letter in the word ‘mother’ can be interpreted as a swastika sign and the font can lead to the thought that it was written by a non-native speaker (the letter ‘ш’ is very similar to Latin ‘w’). The same applies to the pictures that could have been done either by neo-nazis or the representatives of Caucasian minority (but still, they keep drawing the attention to the problem of the co-existence of different nations and the tense relationships between them): ‘Caucasus rules’ (Figure 131), ‘Caucasus’ (‘Кавказ’ or ‘Kavkaz’, Figures 132- 135), Russia for Azeris (‘Россия для азеров’, Figure 136); Azer! rules (‘Азер! рулит’, Figure 137).

A number of inscriptions might be interpreted as antifascist, such as typical ‘Antifa’ or crossed out swastikas (Figure 114); interestingly, some of them can be interpreted both as anti- or pro-fascist, e.g. ‘Follow the leader’ with a swastika’ (Figure 138). This stencil is quite typical, so it might be possible to recognize the original plot (see Figures 139-140), which says: ‘Nazi, fascists follow the leader’ (‘Нацисты, фашисты, следуйте за лидером!’). Again, it hard to read and covered by paper ads, and possible to decode only with certain background knowledge. It represents a well-chosen slogan, but it is non-communicative since it is not well-visible.

Ecological inscriptions are poorly represented in the city. However, there are two stencils found: ‘They also wanted to live’ (‘Они тоже хотели жить’, Figure 141) and ‘I’m dead - you’re full’ (‘Я мертв - ты сыт’, Figure 142). They are relatively small, although other stencils are also relatively small and hard to notice, sometimes even more blurred (e.g. Figures

²³ Russian football club based in Makhachkala, capital of the Republic of Dagestan

23, 138, 144); in addition to that, one of them is partly covered by the paper ads, so that the words on the stencil are very hard to read. In contrast, the stencil from Figure 142 is much more communicative, easily readable and combative. This graffiti defamiliarizes the process of eating meat, providing the spectator with a different perspective on it; it aims to make the spectator feel uncomfortable with a well applied slogan.

Spatial arrangement of subcultural graffiti can be seen on Map 3, where different colours are used to signify graffiti belonging to different subcultures²⁴. Nazi graffiti is evenly spread throughout the city with only one major congestion in the marginal area (Figures 131, 133 - 135). Patriotic inscriptions tend to gravitate towards the borders; however, they are also rather evenly spread around the area. Communist, nationalist and ecological graffiti are represented poorly and are concentrated mostly on the borders.

2.4. Stochastic Political Protest

The task to categorize graffiti without any further sociological investigations might seem challenging since the authors' background and intentions remain unclear. Thus, several inscriptions are left uncategorized; although they might contain strong protest, consider Soprotivlenie ('resistance') movement (Figure 143), having a portrait of a boy holding Molotov cocktail; the picture is accompanied by a link to the web page of the movement. 'Empire' stencil (Figure 144) has a clear reference to 'The Apotheosis of War' by Vasily Vereshchagin (Figure 145), although the size of the stencil and the inscription is relatively small, and the whole work is blurred. The inscription 'Mass media lies about everything' ('Сми все врёт', Figure 146) due to the bad choice of either paint colour or surface is very hard to read or even notice. The triple graffiti with inscriptions 'NATO' (crossed), 'Volya'

²⁴ yellow colour stands for communist graffiti, green for nazi, red for nationalist, blue for patriotic and pink for ecological

(‘Воля’, which means ‘freedom’ and is a name of a political party) and ‘Save Russia’ (‘Споси Россию’, with a mistake) is made on one wall, leading to the courtyard. This place is somehow ‘hidden’, although the graffiti clearly seen from the street (see Figure 147, 148). The second element ‘Volya’ automatically connects the other theses to the political party of the same name. ‘I will return Russian gas’ (‘Верну русский газ’, Figure 149); the word ‘gas’ gives it certain political connotations, although it is hard to understand it deprived of the context. Some inscriptions have quite a vague meaning are hard to analyse; consider ‘Against prejudice’ (‘против предрассудков’, Figure 150); ‘Fuck your pig society’ (‘на хуй ваше общество свиней’, Figure 151). ‘Money is evil’ (‘деньги зло’, Figure 152) is the work done by the same author, who signs his pieces. One of the highly communicative examples is ‘Work and save for a coffin’ (‘Работай и копи на гроб’, Figure 153). Notably, all of these works have high communicative properties; many of them remind slogans, are clearly seen and easily readable.

Copied graffiti, as well as drawing popular symbols (such as an anarchy sign or swastika) are close to imitative behaviour; it can also be mistaken for a trace left by a certain subculture or political movement, but even if it does not belong to it, it still represents the idea of the group with which it is associated. In addition to that, such graffiti might just represent a wish to be identified with a gang (even if no gang yet exists), and therefore the message gets more power and produces more impression than an ‘individual’ work (Bushnell 1990: 41).

Several inscriptions are represented by popular symbols, slogans, or copied works. This group comprises, for instance, peace signs which were seen at least eight times throughout the city (Figures 154 - 161); anarchy signs, seen at least ten times (Figure 162 - 169); swastikas, seen four times, sometimes as covered (see above). Several times there appear a stencil depicting a TV-set (witnessed at least three times); one of them is covered with paint therefore having its political significance emphasized (Figures 171 - 173).

One of the works by Banksy has been copied, with a mistake in spelling though: ‘if graffiti changed anything - it would be illegal’ (see Figure 174 and Figure 175 for its appearance before being covered). Even after being covered, this graffiti is still readable (Figure 176). This graffiti is very noticeable, since it is reinforced by a place, a newly renovated museum.

A number of tags might be read as comprising political meaning: ‘jew’ (‘Еврей’, Figure 177), ‘СНГ’²⁵ (Figure 178), ‘Bush’ (‘БУШ’, Figure 179), ‘FSB’²⁶ (Figure 180); ‘KGB’²⁷ (‘КГБ’, Figure 181). There is one case when a well-known tag: ‘ЧЖНСССР’²⁸ (Figure 182). Look like tags. Defamiliarization helps to attract more attention, thus political notions are combative enough and are thus used to attract attention. Interestingly enough, mostly Soviet and Post-Soviet notions are employed.

The spatial arrangement of stochastic protest graffiti is displayed on Map 4, which is dominated by the traces of ‘imitative behavior’. There are three major zones where this kind of graffiti is concentrated:

- the zone in the south-west, which is still a historical centre, but normally is less crowded. Figures 147-148, 156-158, 162-163, 167
- zone near to the river, which normally has considerably bigger amounts of people; central but gravitates towards small streets; Figures 149, 155, 159-161, 171-174, 177-178,

²⁵ might refer to the Commonwealth of Independent States (Содружество Независимых Государств)

²⁶ can refer to the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB)

²⁷ KGB stands for Committee for State Security (Комитет государственной безопасности, КГБ)

²⁸ ‘ЧЖНС’ is tag used by a group of local street artists; transformed to have a political meaning, adding ‘ССР’ so that the ending becomes ‘СССР’ (USSR)

- zone in the north-east, where graffiti is more dispersed, but still gravitates towards the borders of the city centre and small streets. Figures 144, 146, 150-154, 164-166, 169, 180-182

3. The Outcomes of the Analysis. Further Analytical Perspectives.

3.1. Revealing Political Power Lines.

Samara, being one of the major Russian cities, serves as an example to study the political views of Russian province. Judging by graffiti, it can be claimed that the main political concerns for the citizens split into three major lines, according to which politics is the critics of the current state of affairs, propaganda and the complex of subcultural attitudes.

On the basis of the critics of the current political situation, it can be claimed that the major political power is ascribed to Vladimir Putin and a number of major political organizations, among which 'United Russia' party, communist forces and the police can be listed. However, there was no praise to these forces detected; moreover, the critics was rude, aggressive or sarcastic. These graffiti are often not well visible, and it might happen so that the citizens would not notice it. Most of the examples possess rather low communicative properties: they are either created ineffective, small, not well-visible or covered with ads, dirt or paint or require specific background knowledge, which makes the whole idea non-political.

From the first sight, the local political situation is much more actively discussed on the city walls. Consider the main actors of local politics: these are the current and the two former mayors and several people trying to get the power at the moment when these graffiti appeared. This type of graffiti has a form of support related either to beginning or choice ('Go, X!', 'X, win', 'For X', 'X forever', 'X, people are for you'), an attempt to assure in future merits ('X is a reliable candidate', 'X is our mayor'²⁹) or end (consider 'Let's finish fucking X', 'X get out of Samara').

²⁹ In that case X has never been a mayor before

Other graffiti in this category tend to blame local politicians ('dog killer', 'phony (rabbit/thief)', 'coward', 'jerk', 'bankrupt'). Notably, only one characteristic ('dog killer') can be used to describe a politician on duty. In addition to that, some names tend to concentrate in the specific area (consider graffiti related to Shustov on Map 1). Some names tend to repeat a lot, up to 7 - 10 times.

These assumptions might suggest that the inscriptions appeared shortly before the elections, and thus the unusual amounts of them can be explained. Therefore, the interest in local politics could have been exaggerated; it can be also suggested that some of these inscriptions were made to order, so that subculture is used by the dominant culture

Only one graffiti triptych represents the concerns of ordinary citizens; to be more precise, only one issue related to fire victims is raised. In contrast to most of the clearly seen graffiti concerning politicians, these graffiti are opposed by business, political opponents and subcultural forces.

Motivational type of graffiti mostly appears to be either didactic (giving advice on personal life), promoting official projects or aggressively appealing, which is very similar to tag-writing. Didactic advices deserve special attention since they seem to be done by a party disinterested in actual power relations. The primary problem they highlight is alcohol consuming (although such graffiti were witnessed only four times). In addition to that, there are some appeals related to personal life, namely, attitude to art (which does not have to be taken into account since it is likely to be done by one person) and everyday behaviour, introducing slogans to private life ('Be alive', 'miracle for miracle').

Official projects of the city administration can be detected either by an interpretive remark on the graffiti, by the place where it is situated or by the topic and style. City administration thus

tries to introduce the topics of FIFA hosting and the improvement of public space into the social agenda.

Subcultures involved into politics might turn out to be a meaningful political force. The detectable subcultures are represented by the dominant right-wing forces (patriotic, nationalist, neo-fascist) and left-wing (communists, ecological initiative). Considering the manifestations of that forces in Samara one might notice that right-wing forces are dominant, especially it concerns neo-fascist and nationalist discourse. Neo-fascists and nationalists make the greatest amount of graffiti, and, interestingly enough, it is spread evenly within the city. One of the possible reasons for that might be intensive appearance of new graffiti, its constant renewal.

Although, their symbolics is rarely interacting aggressively with other graffiti (e.g. crossing out or covering inscriptions). Their aggression is mainly directed against the Caucasian minority; notably, even inscriptions which look like Caucasian might be done by an opposing force as well with an aim to provoke the public.

Another important direction in right-wing graffiti is the praise to Soviet achievements; slightly transformed soviet slogans are used. Notably, many tag-looking inscriptions employ notions from Soviet or Post-Soviet realia; thus it can be assumed that Soviet experience is still important to the community; in that case they are used to enhance the 'combativeness', to produce impression at least using the form which might cause some associations. Notably, these notions are related to nationalities or countries ('CHГ', 'еврей', 'ЧЖНСССР') or state security ('ФСБ', 'КГБ').

The general map shows that on the whole graffiti do not tend to gravitate towards the borders. The spatial arrangement of the graffiti can be seen on Map 5, where graffiti on local and state politics are marked with a red pointer, motivators - with blue, subcultures - green and stochastic - yellow. Notably, these three groups are represented by the approximately equal

number of graffiti. They are rather evenly spread, although there is a tendency for graffiti to be concentrated in the certain areas.

For instance, in the left part of the map two major straight ‘chains’ of graffiti can be witnessed; firstly, the ‘chain’ from Figure 90 to Figure 149, situated nearly in the border of the old city where mostly motivational and subcultural graffiti is represented. Surprisingly, motivational graffiti is poorly represented in the other groups. Secondly, the chain ‘Figure 167 - Figure 159’, where graffiti are spread evenly.

There are also some shorter ‘chains’: ‘Figure 131-Figure 133’ with predominant subcultural graffiti, ‘Figure 32- Figure 12’ (entirely concerning politics), ‘Figure 32 - Figure 120’ (with predominant politics), ‘Figure 91-Figure 111’ and ‘Figure 122 - Figure 130’ with evenly spread graffiti of different kind. In the right side of the map there is a large complex of graffiti equally spread within the area in the form of a circle, mostly related to current politics. It also appears that huge territories are left unmarked. Surprisingly, these a whole streets and they also tend to form straight lines clean from graffiti. It can be thought of as a subcultural periphery, however, it could happen so that only certain streets are cleaned up.

3.2. Further Analytical Perspectives

Thus, this work shows that the analysis of the communicative properties of graffiti could be useful to uncover the most memorable and influential examples of it and, therefore, give some insights to analyse the political climate. However, the theoretical basis of the work represents only general theoretical assumptions to analyse political graffiti; however, it would be impossible to use them as a whole to analyse any kind of graffiti.

Since the material for this work is inhomogeneous, it is nearly impossible to create a universal framework of analysis. Thus, each inscription or group of inscription should be analysed

individually.

The methodological basis of the work can be conditionally divided into two parts, where one part of the methodology will contain the features which are applicable to any kind of graffiti; another part will incorporate the instruments which can be applied only with certain limitations. The first group of instruments comprises defamiliarization features, revealing slogan structure and obscenity, recognition of non-texts, negative epithets and praise use, use of language (e.g. English or Russian), revealing common or unique perceptual features, spatialization features, repetitions. A set of 'limited' instruments includes features which make graffiti 'stand out', estimating it as a communicative unit and applying the principles of textuality to it, revealing figure/ground relationship.

The implication of features from the second group presumes deeper sociological inquiries; otherwise, it can be restricted to simple suppositions. Therefore, further sociological research might help to uncover the new details important graffiti analysis.

Conclusion

Political graffiti is primarily oriented to the public, and studying it is important to uncover the current features of the social agenda. The aim of political graffiti is to get the public attention and manipulate it by the categories which affect the whole community, using various techniques to control it. However, the impact it produces is often dependent on how noticeable it is and which methods does it employ to attract the attention. These categories are also important to distinguish how influential the graffiti is and how can it characterize the current political situation.

The work claims that the evidence to reveal the potential influence of political graffiti splits into two categories, which identify its textual and perceptual features. Being an application of textuality to the environment, graffiti can be studied as a communicative unit, and, therefore, can be evaluated on the principles of textuality applied either to an individual inscription or to a group of them. However, the attention of the perceiver is also dependent on the visual representation of the work, as well as its spatial arrangement.

This paper shows that the analysis of the communicative properties of graffiti might facilitate to reveal the most memorable and influential examples of it and thus give some insights to analyse the current political environment in a given area. Nevertheless, the methodological aspects outlined in the first chapter represent general theoretical assumptions to analyse political graffiti; however, it would be impossible to use them as a whole to analyse any kind of political graffiti. It would rather be more useful to analyse each graffiti individually applying methodology partially due to the diverse and heterogeneous nature of the source under consideration.

However, without a further sociological inquiry some of the conclusions based on the current theoretical assumptions can be only presupposed since they have to deal with perception.

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Attachment 1

The work 'Booze' ('Синька') (see Figure 72) lists social and medical consequences of consuming alcohol, which are: disability ('нетрудоспособность'), idleness ('безделье'), ulcer ('язва'), blood clot ('тромб'), intoxication ('токсикация' and 'отравление'), apathy ('вялость'), talkativeness ('болтливость'), impotence ('импотенция'), infertility ('бесплодие'), cirrhosis ('цирроз'), death ('гибель'), anxiety ('тревога' and 'волнение'), schizophrenia ('шизофрения'), vomiting ('рвота'), negligence ('халатность'), dizziness ('головокружение'), phobia ('фобия'), blindness ('слепота'), nausea ('тошнота'), amnesia ('амнезия'), retulance ('раздражительность'), cruelty ('жестокость'), dehydration ('обезвоживание'), RTA ('ДТП'), divorce ('развод'), unemployment ('безработица'), thirst (used two times, as 'жажда' and as a slang word 'сушняк'), insult ('обида'), poison ('яд'), delirium ('бред'), pessimism ('пессимизм'), self-destruction ('саморазрушение'), break up ('расставание'), paranoia ('паранойя'), syndrome ('синдром'), drinking bout ('запой'), hangover ('похмелье'), negativity ('негатив'), loss ('потеря'), stupidity ('тупость'), degradation ('деградация'), fatigue ('усталость'), poisoning ('отравление'), risk ('риск'), diagnosis ('диагноз'), fear ('страх'), suicide ('суицид'), autism ('аутизм'), psychosis ('психоз'), chaos ('беспредел'), exhaustion ('истощение'), lack of balance ('неуравновешенность'), grief ('горе'), dependence ('зависимость'), sadness ('грусть' and 'печаль'), sclerosis ('склероз'), gastritis ('гастрит'), stroke ('инсульт'), robbery ('разбой'), damage ('ущерб'), insomnia ('бессонница'), lethargy ('заторможенность'), arrhythmia ('аритмия'), jealousy ('ревность'), callousness ('бездушие'), epilepsy ('эпилепсия'), convulsions ('судороги'), fever ('горячка'), dyspnea ('одышка'), hunger ('голод'), despondency ('уныние'), mistake ('ошибка'), sin ('грех'), shame ('стыд'), nightmare ('кошмар'), fornication ('блуд'), laziness ('лень'), cancer ('рак').

Poliitilise graffiti semiootika poole: Samara näide

Poliitiline graffiti on peamiselt suunatud avalikkusele, ja selle uurimine on oluline, avastamaks päevakohaseid jooni sotsiaalses agendas. Poliitilise graffiti eesmärk on saavutada avalikkuse tähelepanu ning manipuleerida sellega, kasutades kategooriaid ja erinevaid tehnikaid, mis puudutavad tervet kogukonda ning võimaldavad viimast kontrollida.

Siiski on poliitilise graffiti mõju sageli sõltuvuses sellest, kuivõrd märgatav see on ja milliseid meetodeid see tähelepanu äratamiseks kasutab. Need kategooriad on olulised ka eristamiseks, kuivõrd mõjukas graffiti tegelikult on, ning kuidas see olukorralist poliitilukorda iseloomustab. Samara, mis on Venemaa üks peamisi linnu, on hea näitelava ehk näidetelava, kus uurida Venemaa provintside poliitilisi vaateid just graffiti põhjal.

Käesolev töö väidab, et tõendusmaterjal, mis poliitilise graffiti poliitilist mõjukust paljastab, eristub kahte kategooriasse, mille määratlevad poliitilise graffiti tekstuaalsed ja tajulised iseloomujooned. Olles tekstuaalsuse rakendus keskkonnale, saab graffitit uurida suhtlusüksusena ning seega hinnata seda hinnata just tekstuaalsuse põhimõtetega, mida rakendada kas individuaalsetele kirjetele või ka viimaste gruppidele. Ikkagi: kogeja tähelepanu sõltub ka teose visuaalsest representatsioonist, nagu ka selle ruumilisest korrastusest.

Kooskõlas nende väidetega koosneb käesolev magistr töö sissejuhatuses, analüüsis osast, kokkuvõttest, viidetest ning visuaalsetest ja tekstuaalsetest lisadest. Esimene peatükk selgitab töö metodoloogilisi aluseid, teine püüab rakendada neid Samara linnas leitud poliitilise graffiti näidetele, püüdes välja tuua ka kaasatud alas toimivaid ja toimuvaid poliitilisi võimusuhteid. Kolmandas peatükis, mis on mõistagi lühim, võtan analüüsi kokku ning pakun välja edasisi uurimisperspektiive, mida poliitilise graffiti puhul näha ning kuidas graffiti-uurimine võib olla kasulik teatud kultuuriareaali 'keskus-perifeeria' jälgimisele.

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