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IMAGETEXT AND EKPHRASIS AS CHANCES OF REVIVAL IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

Abstract: Translation Studies has crossed a tumultuous interval of theorization. But has it passed the linguistic limits instituted by a semiotician like Umberto Eco? Wouldn't be the time to access more courageously the intersemiotic interregnum with its heterogeneous transfer of signs? As it happens in advertising, concrete poetry, tattoos, and stage or filmed version of famous texts? If we have gradually accepted that in the postcolonial and cross-cultural epoch what matters is not consensus, but negotiation and understanding, if we assimilated the postmodern lesson about *Grand Narratives* (J–F. Lyotard) and the subjectivity of recorded history, then we have to question ourselves about the role of translation and translators in a post-industrial society which blends globalized edutainment and corporatist efficiency, prejudice, reverse colonialism and anti-establishment movements. What type of equivalence are we supposed to choose in order to persuade today? The ekphrastic approach of translations may be better tuned to out gadgetized and image-informed epoch.

Key words: concrete poetry, ekphrasis, graffiti, intersemiosis, imagetext

As we know, the saga of intersemiotic translation, involving an almost infinite semiosis, began with Roman Jakobson's seminal essay from 1959, *On linguistic aspects of translation*. Intersemiotic translation is a way of by-passing the semiotic system of language. The Russian-American linguist defined this less common type of

translation as a translation of verbal signs into non-verbal signs. In the same paper he postulated that only interlingual translation is "translation proper" (in Hatim and Munday 2004: 5). In the meantime, Translation Studies has evolved dramatically including nowadays audio-visual translations with their sub-strata: sign language, intralingual subtitles, lip synchronization for dubbing and interlingual subtitles. There is no barrier left between linguistic signs and non-linguistic signs. Thus, the semiotic system of pure language becomes almost outdated. In today's global culture a system of semiosis with mixed registers of communication is becoming the dominant approach.

Translations include nowadays *pictorial* and *iconic-linguistic* registers. In 1994, W. J. T. Mitchell (*Picture Theory: Essays on Visual and Verbal Representation*) analysed terms like *iconicity* and *imagetext*. The accent fell on the participatory intermediality, able to open infinite possibilities for the condition of translatability, owing to the fluency of mirrored and intertwined iconicity. But the prejudiced views took advantage of the consecrated definitions of sign. So, what entities would qualify for the status of sign? Petrilli (2003: 31) considered a few distinctions:

> *[T]rans-, inter-, dia- are prepositions and prefixes that specify the modality of being of the sign, the sign process, semiosis [...] Semiosis is a transsign process, an intersign process. Something that is not capable of relating to something else that signifies it, utters it, translates it, interprets it, responds to it is not a sign.*

In order words, are pictures, paintings, gestures, and sounds signs? Can they be the subject matter of translation theorizing? Taking a further step onward, Peeter Torop (2004: 64) asserted the idea of a "partial overlap of signs and languages or sign systems of different arts". Transfer, transmission and exchange are understood now on a larger scale than ever and Roman Jakobson, in spite of subordinating intersemiotic translation to the "proper" translation between languages (interlanguage translation, implying texts) has an undisputable merit for having recognized the possibility of translating nonverbal messages: "Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (in Venuti 2004: 139). He also provided examples of

transmutation paradigms from verbal art to dance, cinema, music or painting. This overlapping equated to transmutation is the mark of incongruity and heterogeneity. So far, the transfer of signs has been admitted only between homogeneous systems. Once the linguistic stage of Translation Studies got dated, intersemiotic translation posited the challenge of translating not only verbal signs into non-verbal signs, but also categories of non-verbal signs into other categories of non-verbal signs. Already Algirdas Julien Greimas (1966: 12) perceived the emerging dynamics of intersemiotic translation: "every signifying totality [ensemble] which is by nature different [has a different character] than natural language can be translated, more or less accurately, in any given natural language". The problem of accuracy looms ominously in the background, but we have to embrace a permissive attitude towards a nascent modality of universal communication. Umberto Eco (2001: 67) also assented to such a tolerant approach when he considered translation a metaphor, a transference, or an adaptation.

Time for opening the textual gates

The enlargement of translation scope is the equivalent of a semiotic leap. Basically, translations imply strategies related to the reformulation of messages with the preservation (or, depending on the context, enhancement or diminution) of aesthetic, semiotic and contextual implications. As messages can be held and transmitted by not-yet-signs, all the advancements in Translation Studies can and should be retained and applied in intersemiotic translation. The recognition of sign quality is getting more and more comprehensive, so that we can speak of visual, audio, and tactile signs. But what matters more is the symbolic cargo of various sign systems. Intersemiotic translation transfers not only clear-cut messages, but also allusions, suggestions, and impressions. Impressionism is crucial in understanding and interpreting intersemiosis, which means that the personal approach will prevail more often than not.

If we accept André Lefevere's point (and how could we not?) that translation resides under the auspices of authority, legitimacy and, bluntly said, power (*Translation/History/Culture. A Sourcebook*, 2003), then we also should accept that this biased transfer comprises the world of signs too. And if all translation is indirect

speech, as it reformulates the initial message into the source language, it means that "bugs" have the possibility to penetrate the original fabric. That is why some researchers recommend accompanying the *gist* translation by an *exegetic* one, which means to explain and elaborate on the source message.

One step further would be to understand for good that translation is not only about transferring words, but also signs and signals. Within such an extended range we can check for the viruses spread inside our various systems of communication. Multiple sensory systems include vision, audition, and touch as polysemiotic multi-signs. Verbal utterances mix with typography and layout. Multimedia translation is built on interdisciplinarity and it better fits our less and less verbalised world (Gambier, Gottlieb 2011: XI-XII). We understood the importance of contrastive text analysis and contrastive stylistics; now it is the end line for a new start: contrastive sign-system analysis.

In 2007 it was remarked that Translation Studies is informed by a "Babel of theories" (Kuhiwczak, Littau 2007: 4). Two years before, Susan Bassnett had stressed the importance of *a posteriori* ideological and cultural factors that affect translation and translators. Consequently, if we do not consider the whole interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary context of translation, we are bound to be infested by power-related subliminal messages.

Norman Shapiro's illusion of transparency in translation involved the complete invisibility of translator. It's like a superhuman, insusceptible machine translation would have been invented. Lawrence Venuti spotted only the prejudice of fluent discourse and readability, but he also contended this aim at transparency. He discussed the characteristics of bleak transposition resulting in "translatese", "translationese" or "translatorese", but he chose to ignore the text-minded theorists' narrow approach. If experienced translators are able to avoid jargonisation, slanginess, pidginess (a flood of foreign words, doughy or blotted syntax), and dull thuds (some sense of closure) by domestication, they will not be able, however, to decode and re-encode the completeness of a message unless they are open and alert to intersemiotic translation.

Translation Studies was able to emancipate itself from literary theory and linguistics during the "cultural turn" of the 1980s - as Mary Snell-Hornby highlighted

- and now the time has come to open its rigid boundaries for intersemiotic translation. Different types of intertextuality have been recognised for quite a while now; so we can move forward to intersign and intersystemic transfers.

Translation is a "dynamic mediation between social worlds expressed in language" (Ricci, Van 2011: 104), as long as through *language* we understand a coherent and cohesive structure of signs. Only by enlarging the notion of language we can aim at re-establishing the innocence of attitude-infused translation (105).

Limited knowledge, as we know, is dangerous knowledge. Long time ago, Roman Jakobson wrote the paper "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959) in which he indicated three types of translation:

1. intralingual translation

2. interlingual translation

3. intersemiotic translation (verbal signs being translated into non-verbal signs).

Meanwhile, the disciplinary field has been enriched with *audio-visual* translations, which include sign language, intralingual subtitles, lip synchronization for dubbing, interlingual subtitles, and music-image-dance transfers (Hatim, Munday 2004: 6). Obviously, many people could retort that this is the equivalent of a communicative translation and, in Irène Kristeva's vision, the communicative translator is the perpetrator of a double treason, as s/he "trahit à la fois l'original qu'il déforme et le public auquel il présente une œuvre déformée" (in Lungu-Badea, "L'ethos du traducteur", 2010: 145). The paradox of such an approach is that the faster one gets access to a larger public, the more one diminishes the expressiveness of the original message. But of course the regime of intersemiotic translations is parallel to that of intrasemiotic ones: there are complex and primitive achievements, depending on the quality of the public the translator targets. Or, what Izabella Badiu described as «haute editions» and «basse editions» (in Lungu-Badea, "Traductions sur le marché. Ethiques multiples", 139). There may be multiple ethics in translations, but the message should not be distorted, if abridged or simplified in terms of language.

As we can see, there are opinions in favour of the transparency of the translator and others which back up the creative side of the translational activity.

Georgiana Lungu-Badea maintains an intermediary position: "tout traducteur est un Janus *bifrons aestheticus*: auteur de second degré" (38). Other theorists, in exchange, come dramatically in the defence of translators: "La traduction d'un texte littéraire implique la répétition de l'acte créatif". (Mitura, "De l'esthétique dans la traduction", "69-80, in Lungu-Badea, Georgiana, 70). Such an interventionist enterprise is justified by others only in the case of a full-fledged culture: "Le traducteur doit honorer son statut d'intellectuel, au sens moderne de cette équivalence, ce qui l'oblige à s'impliquer, quelque modeste que ce soit, selon les possibilités et la vocation, dans les batailles de l'actualité littéraire" (Malița, "Pertinence de Mme de Staël pour l'esprit des traductions du XXIe siècle" 99-110, in Lungu-Badea, Georgiana 100).

Maybe intersemiotic translation resides more in discourse than in verbal translation, the latter being fond of language and speech. As we know, discourses are intimately linked to a certain context and belong to the realm of pragmatics. The passage from words to images/gestures and sounds, is not always smooth; sometimes we need a transitory limbo: "en travaillant sur le texte original, en le transformant, en le remodelant, le traducteur obtient une sorte d'intertexte" (Pageaux 1994: 60)

A transdisciplinary world

In a world more and more dedicated to third-level simulacra, wherein there is no connection between an original reality and its virtual correlative – as Baudrillard anticipated –, the word "context" has accumulated unexpected meanings. In 1989, Ali Darwish, in *The Translation Process: A view of the Mind*, signalled that the meaning of a sentence is determined by its semantic relation with other sentences in that text. Expanding this textual consideration towards the inter- and trans-disciplinarity of our world, we grasp new developments of semantic relations: texts cannot be fully decoded and interpreted without reference to images, sounds and haptics. This transconnectivity is imperious in the case of *culturemes*, or phenomena which are impossible to relocate into another culture without altering their parameters (Gambier 2004: 5).

Jean-René Ladmiral mourned the loss resulted from transfers: "en passant d'une langue-culture à une autre, la forme est irrémediablement et totalement perdue: il faut en faire son deuil" ["Esthetiques de la traduction" (9-21), in Lungu-Badea 2010:16]. The theorist identified many aesthetics of translation, not only one, together with deploring the losses of substance inherent to the process. This is where the inter-systemic approach intervenes and recuperates allusions, hints and cultural concepts that otherwise would be lost in translation.

Georgiana Lungu-Badea also dwelled upon "Le role du traducteur dans l'esthetique de la réception. Sauvetage de l'étrangeté et/ou consentement à la perte" (23-40). As we can infer, she accepted inevitable losses and placed Translation Studies "dans les zones des gris" (25). The non-white-non-black interregnum is a blessing for a world in which people tend to categorize obsessively every form of knowledge. The process of translation is responsible with reopening/relaunching meanings more than with dropping details on the way. New researches simply revive the dispute between biblical (syntactical literalness) and non-biblical (pragmatic translation, adequate to the expectancies of the target public).

Fonts and transcreation after mainstream theories

In non-academic fields, the understanding of translation proves to be, surprisingly, larger sometimes. For instance, in *advertising* slogans are built using the tactics of repeating a verbal message in combination with different semiotic systems. Font variation is an intrinsic part of this process. A comparison between Times New Roman and upper-case VERDANA reveals that the former has its origin in Old Style fonts and was designed for newspaper use as early as 1930s; the latter is a humanist sans-serif typeface designed by Matthew Carter in the mid-1990s for increasing the legibility of texts on screens. In terms of qualitative understatement, the former invokes prestige and seriousness, whereas the latter stresses the clarity and simplification useful in web design.

In the same vein, the term *transcreation* is more and more used in the context of video games to describe a type of translation that rewrites the soundtrack in order to create target-culture congruent effects of humour. This *transcreative*

anthropophagic use of the original to foster new productions in the target language contests the notion of fidelity to the original and is a proof of the efficiency of intersemiotic transfer.

There are several stages in the recent history of Translation Studies:

1. The *linguistic* (or pre-linguistics) stage, up to 1950, with an emphasis on literary texts. The hot debate was upon the opposition between word-for-word and sense-for-sense translation.

2. The *communicative* stage (mainly between 1950 and 1970). Literary and non-literary texts are considered with the purpose of categorising text registers and including a larger range of readership (less-educated to specialist). For the first time linguistics was applied to Translation Studies.

3. The *functionalist* stage (mainly between 1970 and 2000). Non-literary texts from the "real world" emerged in the limelight. The intention of a text and its essential message (the phatic function) prevail over the study of the language of the source text. This translational approach resembles a commercial operation. The author is perceived like a vendor, the text and the translation as tenders and the readership impersonates the consumer.

The representative theory for this interval is the "skopos theory" (Greek: "purpose", "goal") – a false-friend for the English "scope", which was formulated in Germany in the 1980s by Hans Vermeer. This theory focused on interactional dynamics and pragmatic purpose and sustained that the target text is bound to be shaped up by the "function" or "skopos" of the translation. The socio-economic context was the prevalent one.

4. The ethical/aesthetic stage (from around 2000 until now). The contexts in which a translation will be used together with the "personality" of the target language become serious concerns.

All these stages were described in textual terms, but they can be easily reformulated so that they may include intersemiotic translations.

During the functionalist stage emerged the epistemological scenario of *métissage* or interweaving. It was Claude Lévi-Strauss who in his essay "Structural Analysis in Linguistics and Anthropology" (1945) exposed the principles and aims of *interdisciplinarity*: neighbouring disciplines that should inspire each other and
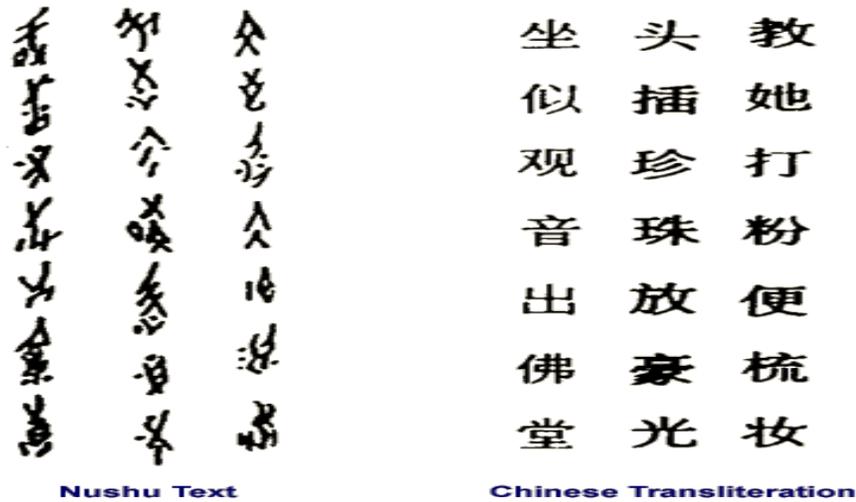
stimulate collaboration. However, Hillis Miller highlighted that such an approach still presupposes the separate integrity of disciplines. Not even Roland Barthes could foresee the true nature of interdisciplinarity when he envisioned the disruption of the solidarity between the old disciplines in order to engender a "new object and a new language". The cross-fertilization of disciplines would end up as a mega-discipline in his view. It was only with the advent of cultural studies of translation that the *polysystems theory* laid emphasis on enlarged cultural transfers.

Understandably, intersemiotic translation or "transculturation", as interpretation of verbal signs with the help of non-verbal signs – as in the ekphrasis process – is a recent date gain. More than ten years ago, it was admitted that intersemiotic translation achieved the status of a semiotic operation process (semiosis). But, as semiosis is described as a multi-layered process, and as Charles Pierce defined semiosis as a triadic relation among a Sign, an Object and its Interpretant, it is mandatory to enlarge the meaning of the word "Sign" and to give the translation accolade to intersemiotic transfers too.

Special semiotic systems

a. Nushu

Nushu is a system of writing that can be described as "Woman's Writing" in Chinese. This is a system exclusively used by women and it was developed in secrecy over hundreds of years as an alternative way of education in the Jianyong County of Hunan province. Its style is more cursive than written Chinese and only some characters are borrowed from Chinese, whereas the others seem invented. Like Chinese, Nushu is written from top to bottom in columns which, in their turn, are written from right to left. A distinctive element can be spotted in the delicacy of characters, which are thinner than Chinese ones and not so square-shaped. This type of writing testifies to women's resilience in restrictive, man-favouring environments.

教	头	坐
她	插	似
打	珍	观
粉	珠	音
便	放	出
梳	豪	佛
妆	光	堂

Nushu Text   **Chinese Transliteration**

(http://www.ancientscripts.com/nushu.html)

Various researchers commented differently on their findings regarding the topic. Zhon Shuoyi declared that 500 to 600 kinds of Nushu characters could be collected. Zhao Liming considered that 80% to 90% of Nushu characters had been derived from Chinese characters, which would be indicative of the fact that this mysterious language was made up of different styles of simplified Chinese characters.

But Nushu has an emotional mark which is intertwined with calligraphic mastery. In this language, women of old times expressed their sorrows, worries, autobiographies, traditional songs and local histories, marriage events and so on. In more recent epochs, Nushu was able to absorb political turmoil too, proving thus its complexity. In relation to the Japanese invasion of China, in 1944, there are anti-Japanese songs varying from village to village. Many of these contain sheer slogans as "Folks, get up!". The interest of these manifestations resides in the fact that anti-war protests are disposed in the traditional form of old songs, like making one line from seven words. The differences from other Chinese anti-Japanese songs are identifiable in the complaining tone of Nushu songs/texts even since the beginnings of this language. The other songs simply aired their anger, whereas Nushu texts have a tradition in underlining sorrow and hardship.

Nushu represents a case in point of re-coding a previous code, which is pretty much a double encoding. It resorted massively to calligraphic suggestiveness and

took the Chinese ideograms closer to the Japanese ideogram patterns. Simplification in this case coincided with feminizing the design of Chinese characters in accordance with a more sensitive content.

b. Ekphrasis and graffiti

Graffiti are salient examples of transmitting messages along non-institutional channels of communication. They constitute a form of art that contains drawings or inscriptions, or both, and their name is derived from the plural form of an Italian noun: *graffiti*. We should normally use the singular – *graffito* -, but this would be viewed as a pedantic attempt. The supporters of aesthetic autonomy contest the artistic status of graffiti as these would include social messages.

I am not inclined here to discuss the artistic value of graffiti, mainly because most of them are obviously a form of thrashing the cityscape. In many cases, graffiti are preoccupied no so much with social claims, but with promoting brands, personal frustrations or desires. What interests me here is the absorption of graffiti into the larger realm of ekphrastic writing.

I should start by saying that *ekphrasis* is an ancient vivid description created by the Greeks. The reader of such a message is supposed to envisage the object described as if it were physically present. It is quite possible that the original thing never existed, which only proves the imaginative cogency mastered by ekphrasis. Many readers of Greek and Latin texts didn't pay attention to the historical veracity of the events as such; in exchange, they focused on shaping habits of thinking and writing by studying the imaginative skills of various writers.

The ekphrastic tradition opens with Homer's description of Achilles' shield in Book 18 of the *Iliad*. This passage draws a comparison between visual and verbal means of description and underlies movement and sound elements that cannot normally be represented on a shield. What did this shield figure out? It was hammered into five sections representing images of the elements, two cities, a wedding celebration, a murder trial, a marching army, a war, some beasts, ploughmen, a vineyard, a meadow, and youngsters dancing. So the 18th chapter of *The Iliad* contains this vivid description of almost the whole universe which

stimulated imitators like Hesiod (Heracles's shield), Vergil (Aeneas's shield), and Nonnus (Dionysus's shield). Obviously, this piece of military equipment is ennobled by being used as canvas for painting.

But such optimistic ekphrasis was twisted in modern times. W. H. Auden redesigned Homer's vision in the poem "The Shield of Achilles" wherein he populated the shield with apocalyptic representations: barbed wire, rape and murder, bureaucrats, and sentries. Stepping in Francisco Goya's gloomy footsteps, modern ekphrastic poems concentrated solely on works of art. A new translation of stories in images was undertaken: instead of the windy descriptions so appreciated in Antiquity, the translator-artist strove to interpret, confront and negotiate with his subjects.

For instance, both Auden and William Carlos Williams adressed in their poems Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" (16th century). In the painting what matters is the toil of a farmer ploughing his field and only in the bottom-right corner Icarus's capsized legs are visible while he plummets into the sea. The accent falls on the commonsensical, matter-of-fact approach to life. Williams grasped this hint and used it in his poem. Auden also translated correctly in his poem "Musée des Beaux Arts" the vision on the tragedy frozen in the painting.

Ekphrastic descriptions as written texts about pieces of art that never existed were realized by many illustrious writers. John Keats wrote in 1819 "Ode on a Grecian Urn", wherein he blended images of things normally met on ancient Greek vases with others imagined. Unlike Homer, Keats shifted the emphasis by bringing forth his experience of visualizing the vase and this approach triggered a transformation in the genre of ekphrasis.

In the second half of the 18th century art tourism soared and art critics like John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and William Hazlitt published set-pieces about art across time. John Ruskin also described in an ekphrastic manner J. M. W. Turner's painting "Throwing Overboard Dead and Dying – Typhoon Coming on", better known as "The Slave Ship" (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). He included this presentation in *Modern Painters*, 1843, where he resorted to such mixtures of visual details to movement and sound. In order to be persuasive, Ruskin used plenty of adjectives and a rich, but unfamiliar vocabulary. Such a luxurious style showed the influence of the King James

translation of the Bible and Shakespeare. Nowadays it is hardly possible for readers to get an image of this painting in their minds only by reading Ruskin's text. However, the ekphrastic passage is in tune with the flamboyant style of the painting. In the Victorian epoch, in spite of its cultural affectation, this description didn't allow readers' imagination to wander off the vision Ruskin was sharing.

b1. Is it profitable to translate graffiti?

There is a binary perception related to the status of graffiti: some people acknowledge their artistic status, others don't. If we accept the first opinion, automatically we have to consider graffiti as an art form which necessitates translation. Every genuine form of art is polysemic, so more or less specialized art consumers are supposed to decipher, partially, of course, the complexity of the artistic representation. Graffiti is an art form which is anti-ekphrastic, or ekphrastic *à rebours*, as letters are projected as images, and not the other way round, as it would be normal.

There are markings which stay for nothing deeper, so they risk to be seen as mere scribbled vandalism. But most of these letterings contain hidden messages and overt aesthetic qualities. Graffiti art appeared in the late 1960's and can be connected to prehistoric cave drawings and representations.

(http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-graffiti-definition-history-types.html)

From the moment sprays with paint started being used by street artists, graffiti art was known as *spraycan art*. Later on, when the originators of graffiti became

more aware of the artistic implications of their hobby, they craved for a larger audience for their depictions. What other better "canvas" could they find than subway trains and, later on, trains themselves? Consequently, graffiti acquired side-names like *subway art, train art*, or *freight art*. These denominations originated in the phenomenon of graffitists painting their "messages" on railroad, freight cars and so on. Although works by various graffiti artists were accepted into galleries and museums, the most effective galleries in terms of audience numbers were these means of transport.

(http://www.theartofstorytellingarchives.com/page-ig/)

Historically speaking, there are specialists who contend that old forms of graffiti are preserved on walls of Egyptian monuments or in Pompeii. This claim is plausible if we take into account the meaning of the Italian word *grafficar,* meaning "to scratch, to scribble, to write".

From a typological perspective, there are many patterns of graffiti. They may appear as individual markings such as slurs, slogans, or political claims. These types are usually handwritten and are imprinted on bathrooms, corridors or exterior surfaces. One simple form is the *tag*, which represents a fancy, scribble-like writing of the name or nick-name of the "writer". The tag is more an issue of identification and territoriality than an aesthetic achievement.

(https://i.ytimg.com/vi/Tva3Ti-88jw/maxresdefault.jpg)

Whatever aesthetic quality tagging may possess, it resides in the style of writing. But I will enlarge upon this aspect a little bit later. Now I want to insist on tags as gangs' markings of territory and messaging that imply "news" from the neighbourhood.

In terms of aesthetic subtlety, there must be practised the distinction between *graffiti* and *murals*. The latter comprise a wider range of representations, so their figurativity is enhanced beyond lettering. There are many styles: round or bubble letters, the intricate wild style, in an almost undecipherable type of calligraphy, computer and gothic lettering, or 3-D lettering with fading and blending colour effects. The mastery of artistic procedures is what tells the tagger from the graffiti artist; and the talent, of course. One technique of quickly creating a complex "piece" is the use of *stencils* which are subsequently filled with spray paint. The stencil of the artwork is created by the artist, so its artistic quality cannot be disputed. In a comparable way, the stencil can be drawn on an adhesive paper and stuck in public places.

(http://abduzeedo.com/beauty-stencil-art)

As a rule, murals beautify urban-scape and are commissioned. They resort substantially to colouring and different manners of painting. In their case, translating the message and interpreting the aesthetic refinement is crucial.

Coming back to graffiti as communicative ritual, I have to add that whatever aesthetic qualities they may possess they are concentrated in the aspect of the *tag*. Such a tag can be monochromatic and in a common writing style. They can also be imprinted using the *throw-up* technique, which makes use of two colours, or using a *bubble-like* lettering. There is then the *stamp style* with straight letters creating a 3-D effect, or the *piece*, actually the shortened form of a masterpiece, which is achieved with many colours and gets, thus, closer to the condition of a mural. Additionally, some cartoon characters can be added to the graffiti artist's name, as this one is the core of the whole drawing.

In order to get the status of "King" or "Queen" in this art, one has to create a spectacular tag and, in addition, to make it visible for a large number of people. For instance, when an artist manages to create *burners*, that is vivid colouring, vibrancy, and crisp, without drips outlines, s/he has the chance to reign over a subway line, which assumes thus the status of an art gallery.

(http://streetartnyc.org/blog/2012/11/26/rockin-their-styles-in-bushwick-yes1-demote-owns-sege-one-and-logek/)

Another promotional channel for graffiti has been the hip-hop phenomenon, which has come together with rap music. It would be simplistic to interpret graffiti as a hobby or a protest associated with poor, urban kids. More than half of graffitists come from Caucasian middle-class families and their age fluctuates between 12 and 30.

The complexity of graffiti is proved by the collaborative creativity of these artists. This strategy was used even by Renaissance maestros who many times drew only the outline of a painting and then commissioned their apprentices to finish it off. In graffiti art, many crews can collaborate and every crew is headed by a *king* or a *queen*, who is the most accomplished artist among the components of the crew.

As in multimedia art, the surface covered with graffiti is considered an integral part of that piece or art. By spraying their representations on walls or trains, graffitists also protest against unjust political and economic orders. Consequently, graffiti can be labelled as revolutionary art contesting private property and some capitalist values. This is an example of social graffiti which, of course, necessitates an ideology-debunked translation:


(http://tophdimg.com/social-graffiti.html)

But most often than not graffitists merely enjoy their hobby and behave like genuine artists. They maintain "schools" wherein novices learn how to access various

painting styles, how to adjust nozzles and how to fit and employ different types of aerosol caps onto spray caps for spectacular artistic effects.

Authorities tend to regard graffiti as non-commissioned art and blame on it huge funds spent on cleaning urbanscapes. Graffitists defend their work by referring to other representations imposed onto citizens: billboards, campaign ads, flyers, statues and so on and so forth. In this respect, there are examples of gallerists or curators who "translated" graffiti as an art form. Claudio Bruni, owner of Galleria *Madusa* in Rome, hosted the works on canvas of Lee Quinones, one of the few graffitists who *bombed*, i.e. painted, an entire train, all the length and height of it. Pop artist, director and writer Andy Warhol had collaborations with graffitist Jean Paul Basquiat. All these accolades donned on graffiti art hugely contributed to its legitimization as an artistic activity which needs authorities' support - by offering surfaces to be spraycanned – to develop towards constant aesthetically-accomplished representations.

In order to justify this system of transforming letters into images by "de-lettering" them, some specialists contend that graffiti representations are older than 10,000 years and that they can be spotted among the cave paintings of Palaeolithic Age. These letterings are not the support of non-understandable, behind-the-door messages in their decoding stage, but we could not deny the necessity to interpret them. So, at least half of the standard procedures used in a translation enterprise are useful in this case. Among the early examples of proto-graffiti are a brothel advertisement in Ephesus and a depiction of Jesus on the side of a school (circa the 3rd century A.D.). This is only a supposition, as the head of the crucified man looks like a horse head.
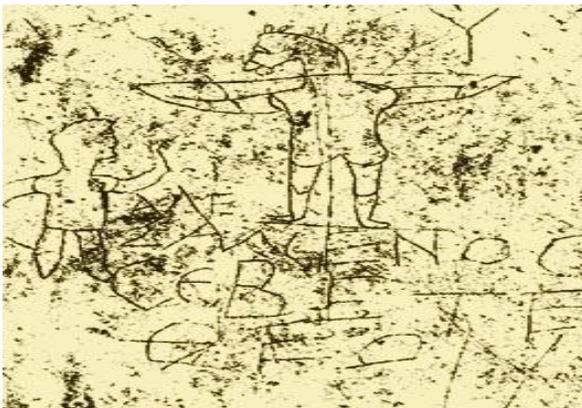
(https://scottnevinssuicide.wordpress.com/2015/04/page/11/)

In Pompeii, historians uncovered some etchings related to sexual boasting or to documenting different events in the city.

From early times, graffiti took side with those who opposed the mainstream society and this is why some people nicknamed them "urbane guerrillas". Once globalization proved successful, some brands "tamed" graffiti by absorbing their techniques and public displays. Nowadays, it's quite common to see on city walls pseudo-graffiti figuring brand names and logos (Nike, Puma, Lacoste etc.).

The belittled political agenda can be noticed in the graffiti aiming at the position of high art. In this case, aesthetics prevails over radical politics and subcultural fetishisms. There are contenders who sustain that using graffiti to make statements generates only illegal "eyesores". It is true that many cities have spent considerable amounts for cleaning repulsive graffiti. What is interesting is the disparity in terms of critical appraise found on various internet sites. Administrative and official sites disregard graffiti, whereas personal blogs or unconventional artistic sites incline the balance in favour of street art. The former party invokes an infringement of law – as if laws were some divinely revealed articles -, whereas the latter do their best to legitimize graffiti as an aesthetic activity, even though this could mean taming graffiti. Watching graffiti in museums is an act of apprehending history, but graffiti exposed in art galleries, among "regular" paintings, could trigger an uncomfortable sensation. It is like transferring part of a wall or metal hunks snatched from the body of trains into smart-looking halls. Graffiti is automatically thought of as persisting in urban, non-"trimmed" areas. That is why Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt buying graffiti painted by Bansky in an art gallery is a glamorous event completely in contradiction with street art's traditional manifestations. The question is: graffiti exposed and profitably sold in art exhibitions can still be accredited as graffiti?

The answer is rather obvious if we remember that graffiti started from tagging one's name then moved to parodying different statements. Another issue is about serial on-the-go pieces like stencils and stickers which have a diminished artistic status.

Although we cannot speak about graffiti as random vandalism, we are bound to evoke clean-up costs that can be shocking. For instance, in 2006 Chicago budgeted $ 6.5 million with this purpose solely.

Unexpectedly, a favourable reception of this phenomenon came some forty years ago from writer Norman Mailer, who brandished the graffiti of the New York subway as "The Great Art of the 70's". Also Eric Felisbert, author and graffiti artist in his youth, spoke about graffiti culture as a product of civil rights movement: "It was never political, but many people were brought up with that, and to express yourself by breaking the law became a natural process for them".

But we should not forget that many encoded messages of graffiti were actually threats, even death threats, addressed to rival spraycan "artists". That is why, for a correct de-coding of graffiti, we should gather information about some key-terms. Here it is a minimal glossary:

Bomb = to write prolifically;

Crew = organized group of writers;

Floaters = graffiti on trains at window level;

King/Queen = the best writer in every possible category;

Motioning = writing on a subway car while it is circulated;

Tag = a writer's name and signature;

Throw-up = a piece rapidly executed and many times consisting of only an outline;

Wallpaper = the repetition of a tag until it becomes a pattern;

In spite of Mailer's celebration of graffiti, some city mayors took harsh measures against street artists. Trains were protected with armed guards and dogs, carriages were put behind razor wire at night and in some places the sale of spray cans to minors was banned. Citizen initiative against this type of vandalism was encouraged and graffiti-related arrests dropped, consequently, from 2,400 in 1984 to 300 in 1987.

A less chemical, but more aggressive imprint of tags is *scratchiti*. These consist of etching letters on carriage windows using all sorts of sharp objects.

(https://www.flickr.com/photos/scratchies/galleries/72157626847514071/)

Arifa Akbar and Paul Vallely wrote in a 2015 issue of the "Independent" in favour of lawful production of graffiti in places like *Tate Modern*, where almost all types of artistic experimentation are sheltered. Defacing walls and trains is considered an economic crime.

Street art is, thus, a polarising phenomenon, being differently regarded in various countries and on different continents. For instance, in Canada a court ruled that a 28-year-old graffiti painter could go out into town only accompanied by his mother. Some others were even sent to prison for more than a year for the guilt of having vandalised public property. The US sociologists who survey this phenomenon stated that 85 per cent of graffiti is mere tag, whereas 10 per cent is gang communication. If we take this de-coding for granted, it would ensue that a crushing 85 per cent of graffiti is only dirt. But if we add to the rough statistics the work of graffiti artist Ben Eine, who spray-painted the word "nightmare" along a 33 metre wall exhibition in east London, with the intention of propounding an alternative vision of Christmas, we realize the complexity of graffiti. Many graffiti can be ugly, but their messages stay for social protests. Graffiti may not be genuine art, but it still pays the effort of translated them.

Graffiti supporters keep drawing reparatory parallels to advertising, which, in their opinion, privatises the public space. They sustain that ads are strategically distributed across cities with the purpose of coercing and manipulating. Graffiti would represent an activity of reciprocation, as consumers have no real possibilities to communicate with the agents of advertising, namely companies.

Advertising can be decoded as a psychological, subliminally charged vandalism. Graffiti and advertising resemble if we watch them into a mirror, but their connotations are dramatically antagonistic. In graffitists' opinion, genuine art is defined by its combative appetite. The aesthetic side is only an adjacent ingredient of graffiti; what matters is truth, whereas beauty comes in a second position.

"Aerosol art" stands up for communities and this involvement lends a certain degree of duality to its translation: vandalism in the eyes of (upper)-middle class, art in the eyes of lower classes. Postmodernism firmly stated the ideologised side of art and science. If graffiti can be given the accolade of art, then such an art has to admit to a therapeutic involvement.

(http://www.collater.al/en/orecchiette-spray-revolution-2011/)

To sum it up, there are plenty of arguments against graffiti as being an ego trip meant simply to deface property. Whether we accept this interpretation or not, nobody could deny the communicative core of graffiti and in judging it we have to interpret and translate their codes, messages and contexts.

Conclusion

We are still facing a painful crossing from words to images. "Painful" because this abrupt process is somehow damaging for the human mind. Both denying approaches – that of text-oriented translation and that of image-oriented one – are in the wrong. In the end, the process of translation implies transferring thoughts and ideas from a source medium to a target medium. It is only about signs and contexts. The red-hot disputes about the nature and dignity of signs should be the domain of the past. Climbing to an absolute level, there is no qualitative distinction between interlingual translation and intersemiotic translation. The same message can be transferred to various sign-environments with the help of a large range of translational techniques and equivalences.

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