ПРИКЛАДНІ СОЦІАЛЬНО-КОМУНІКАЦІЙНІ ТЕХНОЛОГІЇ

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UDK 007 : 304 : 004.9

GRAFFITI AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION OF SUBCULTURAL GROUPS

Modern age, an era of mass media empire that does not deal with the needs of contemporary man, but it entirely addresses mass consumers or voters, has contributed that the individual feels lost in the environment. Young generations, who are only yet to create the world that they will live in with their growing and developing, are especially sensitive categories. This is why they find alternative ways to show their attitudes, thoughts and feelings and thus show to the community that they are its crucial part on which its future depends. One of the ways is to form the so called subcultural groups, which have their own dynamics, symbolism, a special outlook on the world and communication. Graffiti has a special place within this communication.

In this paper we will try to find the share of graffiti in the communication of subcultural groups. For that purpose we will portray a part of the results of the extensive research on the so called Nis graffiti scene, within which 1514 recorded and filmed graffiti-writings were analyzed. Our intention is to determine graffiti as signs which achieve their full expressive effect in the context of the space they originate in. We have used multiple comparative methods in this paper, but primarily we used observation and the analysis of the gathered content.

The research has indicated that subcultural groups are eager to use graffiti as a means of communication, that its content indicates that it is an expression of the generation gap, but that in a broader context it surpasses the generation gap and becomes the expression of social conflict.

Key words: communication, culture, subcultural groups, graffiti, the young.

1.   Introduction

Life in society means the existence of culture as the most general term which encompasses almost all the activities of human act. Within this main, the so called official or mainstream culture, there are different forms of grouping people which originate from the need of certain parts of society to separate from official culture in some way. From this, terms subculture and its characteristic subcultural groups develop. Generally taken, subculture is, "a system of values, attitudes, ways of behavior and lifestyles of social groups, which is different compared to dominant culture of society"[1].

Subcultural communities are mostly characteristic of younger members of general population. During their own development, growing up and gradual involvement into the adult world, young people accept or reject the world that surrounds them in various ways. Compared to official culture that is, as a rule, the culture of adults, they, according to their interests, group into different youth groups, which have their own value system and the values of dominant culture that they either reject, partially accept or interpret in their own way. "Subculture emerges as a result of spreading and mobility of communication, which introduces groups with different cultural foundation into union of one and same society, which is followed by physical or social isolation or both, and that prevents full assimilation. "[2].

In this paper we assume that most of subcultural groups are eager to use graffiti as a means of communication with their environment, with those who think the same, as well as with other subcultural groups, ordinary citizens, and even official institutions. Graffiti is a suitable way to publicly state attitudes and values which someone wants to express. Given that the authors of graffiti are usually unknown, this means of communication is very popular, since it enables high level of freedom, authors' independence in expressing, and the chances of being censored are almost impossible.

We must not view graffiti as an object torn form its environment. Our goal is to determine it as signs which achieve their full expressive effect in the context of the place they originate in. Their authors create them with deep

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[1] Abercrombie, N. Hill, S. Turner, B. (1994): The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology, London: PENGUIN BOOKS, str.416.
[2] Milutinović, M. (1981): Kriminologija,Beograd: Savremena administracija, str.146.

meaningful and symbolical characteristics. Graffiti as visual signs depends on human perception to a great extent and to how much someone is visually literate to perceive and understand these artistic and typographic signs.

2. Subcultural groups

The coined term subcultural group refers to a great number of different movements, associations, organizations, youth communities, underground groups, clans, communes and other alternative means of group formation. All of them differ among one another based on numerous criteria, behaviour, style, fashion, language, signs, values, tastes... What they have in common is the need to segregate from official culture, as well as the aspiration to achieve influence, to encourage change, to attract the attention of new followers, as well as other members of society. The activities and devotion of certain groups are mutually different, some are more or less active, some of them even have a trace of aggression. In this paper we will point to the threads that connect them, and those are primarily identical ways of communication.

The term of subculture in social sciences, as well as in public discourse, has often changed its form and thus is controversial due to its ambiguity. The term itself was shaped after World War II[3], and it was extensively used in the context of delinquent subculture, as well in the seventies, when the authors of Birmingham school[4] use that term for signifying lifestyles and identity of mods, rockers, skinheads, punkers and others.

The historical review of the development of the term subculture must start with the works of authors from *Chicago school*[5] whose names were mostly mentioned in the context of urban sociology. Although the term was defined a couple of decades later, qualitative research of those authors paved the way for later shaping of the term. In the twenties and thirties of the 20th century a line of the authors of Chicago school (Anderson, Thrasher, Zorbaugha, Sutherland, Whyt, Park) started researching different marginal groups: ramblers, animation dancers, professional thieves. On the basis of the research, the existence of different parallel worlds and groups which built urban brain with their different value and work profiles was noted. The discussion on marginal groups later spread outside the framework of Chicago school so that during the reign of functional paradigm the term of delinquent subculture was created. One of the founders of the term of delinquent subculture, Albert Cohen, researched the way one turns into a delinquent through accepting delinquent practice. From this, it is apparent that for Cohen, the term of culture and subculture is anthropologically defined as a way of life.

In the sixties of the past century, in the time of interactionist 'skeptical revolution' the phenomenon of subculture was approached from another perspective. Interactionists give their attention to the subject and social processes through which that subject defines and construes reality and deviation itself. "The reason for radical progress towards the subject was due to the change of political situation and the influence of then social movements."[6] During the sixties it was noticed that those who were labelled deviants were no longer only the members of street corner gangs and similar marginal groups, but also students and professors. That is one of the reasons why scientists who dealt with the phenomenon of subculture during the sixties oriented themselves to the process of labeling, that is, the relationship of power of certain group to stigmatize and label other group deviant.

In the late sixties and seventies of the 20th century the authors from *Birmingham school* place in the center of interest subcultures of young people whose origin they relate to the attempt of symbolical solving of the contradiction of capitalism. One of the prominent members of that school, professor of cultural studies from east London Phil Cohen defines subculture as "the product of the youth from working class, who in that way solve contradictions that arise in parents' as well as in dominant culture". Cohen considered that every cultural style consists of four constitutive elements: music, clothing, slang and ritual. Those four elements are common for all the members of subcultural styles and they mutually differ according to them. The fifth element that Cohen introduces is territoriality. It differentiates a symbolical structure of subculture from the real life.

During the eighties the concept of subculture, as portrayed by the representatives of Birmingham school was exposed to criticism, and with the origin of *rave culture* in the nineties the whole concept of the subculture of Birmingham school was abandoned due to its insufficient explanatory value. The very term was pronounced dead, since

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[3]The term of subculture originally represented «…segments of population and socialization processes, which, regardless of the umbrella term of the particular (say «American ») society, sharply differ according to gender, age, class, vocation, regional, confessional and ethical belonging » (Perasović, 2001:22)
[4]Birmingham school gathers authors that were active in the late sixties and seventies in the Centre for contemporary cultural studies. The most famous representatives are Stuart Hall, Paul Willis and Dick Hebdige.
[5] The Chicago school's term was accepted among sociologists and represents a group of authors related to Chicago University who dealt with the subjects of urban sociology in the first decades of the 20th century. The most famous representatives are William Isaac Thomas, Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, Roderick McKenzie, Louis Wirth and Clifford Shaw.
[6] Perasović, B. (2001.), Urbana plemena, Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada.

at the time of overall individualization and the origin of fluid identities it became inappropriate for explaining then phenomena. "…postmodern fluid dynamics in which individualization is prominent, style mixing and the ability to be (listen to, dance and live) rockabilly in the morning, heavy metal in the afternoon, and techno or house at night, without belonging to any of the lifestyles that originate on the basis of cited common denominators" (Perasović, 2007). Aside from fluid style and identity, critics point unsustainable understanding about *class* and age determinism for belonging to subculture. Thereby, they emphasize that "subcultures"[7] are multigenerational phenomenon, where the older often constitute the very core of 'subculture'". They often have greater "subcultural capital"[8], that is, valuable information that enables them to have a better position in subculture. As opposed to Hebridge's understanding[9] about the negative influence of the media on the development of subculture, the authors in the nineties emphasize the role of media in its creation and sustaining.

Leaning on the attitudes of many theorists of subculture we have talked about, it is possible to make various divisions and classifications of subcultural groups as for example: existentialists, teddy boys, rockers, hippies, skinheads, punkers, yuppies... All of these groups only show us how varied and different world of subcultural groups is. They are in constant processes of change and it is noticeable that certain communities unify more and more culturally. Subcultural groups differ mutually according to style. It can serve to determine the degree of affiliation to certain subculture, so that attention is paid to specific clothes, hairstyle, manner of speaking, body movements, music, rituals, different types of slang that is only familiar to a narrow circle of people. Although all of these groups insist on emphasizing characteristic marks, this does not imply complete isolation from official culture. Their members can insist on being different, but they all strive for revolutionary changes.

Subcultural groups are especially appealing to younger people, since they might offer them solution to some problems, they can provide them with a feeling of security and understanding among people who are alike. "It is certain that the life of subculture unravels in the conditions of specific social circumstances, so that the destiny of every society in a certain way determines the destiny of subculture".[10]

In the past decades subcultures, using different communication channels, persistently spread themselves across national and cultural borders. This fact is proven by the origin of a large number of analogous, more or less similar local subcultures that can be identified in most societies.

3. Graffiti of subcultures

Although it sounds a bit peculiar, it is certain that city walls around the world can be credited for the development of many subcultures around the world as well as for the origin of the ever noticeable subculture – graffiti subculture. "When it comes to the relationship between subculture and graffiti as messages, it seems that it is mutual and immediate. The impression is that subculture originated by virtue of graffiti, but that graffiti owes its power to subculture. Together they make modification of alternative and global at the same time, and again, on the border of the cultural".[11]

The beginnings of subculture, from the historical perspective, can be found in prehistoric period, since the first graffiti was actually written by cave people, drawing on the walls their fellow hunters, aliens and ghosts that haunted them, however, with certainty it can be said that modern graffiti originated at the beginning of the 20th century in the forms of political graffiti in October revolution 1917 and later at the time of World War II in Germany, when the Nazi wrote insulting messages on Jews' houses." A contemporary version of graffiti reaches its peak with the building of the Berlin wall and a famous protest action of students in Paris in 1968".[12] Subculture found a fertile ground for its development in the mid-sixties in America or more precisely in New York. It is about a specific type of graffiti known as tagging.[13] The origin of contemporary graffiti is related to the development of hip hop culture.

Graffitists are usually young people who manifest their attitudes and convictions through the activity of writing graffiti. Even though there are numerous groups of graffitists around the world who differ considerably in their styles, so that one can talk about different subgroups of graffiti subculture, we will view graffiti as a unique means of communication, used by members of various subcultural groups. The most common case is that they are activists connected to subcultural communities whose main passion is music. However, it is not possible to pinpoint the marker and belonging of graffiti artists and regular graffitists to a group or movement.

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[7]We put the term under quotation marks, since it was abandoned in the nineties in scientific, as well as in public discourse .

[8] The term subcultural capital was introduced by Sarah Thornton, following Bourdieu's «cultural capital».

[9] More on that: Hebdidž, Dik (1980) Potkultura: značenje stila. Beograd: Rad.

[10] Božilović, N. (2009): Izvan glavnog toka:Sociologija muzičkih potkultura", Niš:Niški kulturni centar, str.17.

[11] Djordjević, R. (2001): Grad i društvene promene, Niš:Centar 018, str. 208.

[12] Đordjević. R.(1995): Rečnik grafita,Niš:Centar 018,str.37i 38.

[13]"This technique consits of writing the real name, nickname or pseudonym, that is, tag by which the graffiter represents himself to other ". (Ganz 2009:9).

Although graffiti seem to many as ordinary scrabbling of provocative content that tarnish the appearance of concrete facades, messages that the authors of graffiti send are much deeper and significant compared to the attention paid to them at this point. Graffiti writing is considered a felony or criminal act. Official society at best neglects it and does not notice it, and if in any way it negates the actual social order, then that same society sanctions it. Despite the fact that majority of graffiti is a pure expression of author's attitudes and ideas, there are those which become the expression that is closer to contemporary concept of art, with their conspicuousness and provocativeness, innovative textual and artistic creations. "Graffiti is not just a bearer of a text or pictures, it is also one of the means that the picture or text are presented to the world and the means that graffiti sends itself into communication space and circulation, representing specific, globally well recognizable type of public addressing".[14]

We have already suggested that subcultural groups use different signs which relate to objects of their interests. So, for example, metals use a special sign HM, that refers to heavy metal movement. These signs that members of subcultural graffiti took and use as their marks confirm our assumption that graffiti have a role of a sign which certain groups use in order to communicate with the environment. This relationship corresponds to Eko's 'communication chain' for which he says: "an open process of signifying since a signal is no longer a line of direct units which can be measured with a bit of information, but a form-mark that a man-receiver will have to fill out with certain meaning "[15]. This is how Eko accentuates the role of a receiver, who determines this sign's final meaning. With this we confirm that graffiti can be viewed as a Bart's sign, which he determines as Bart's "relation between two relate", where in our case, the author of graffiti and their recipient are those two relate.

Subcultural groups use graffiti as alternative media of communication, which are opposed to the media of mass communication. In this way, young people transfer their attitude and values they stand for. By writing and drawing on public surfaces, on one hand, young people get to know social environment with its own identity and values that are maybe opposite of the norms of the given environment, and on the other hand, writing graffiti helps them connect to those who think the same. In this way, graffiti speaks to the subcultural discourse of the town. The existence of graffiti "can be imagined as a secret society or a secret language of a town. We can view this as an exciting opportunity to be a part of a secret language and conversation between a city and the public, especially those people who have slightly different opinion in society".[16]

With its activity, graffiti achieve its vision of the freedom of speech and expression, it openly and immediately speaks to its environment. "In its expressive means that for it is also a message about itself, graffiti has a special place. It is its indistinguishable part and identification, holding to the unwritten rule that everything that repeats itself (in the sense of graffiti) has to bring an effect".[17] In this way, by writing graffiti, members of subcultural groups emphasize their belonging and faithfulness to a certain group, which indicates that members of subcultural groups are tightly connected to the group they belong to, and they prove that with graffiti. Certain groups can show their power with graffiti, emphasizing it visually. In this way they position themselves in relation to the rest of the groups, trying to emphasize their supremacy and in that way attract new followers.

4. Messages of Nis subcultural groups
In the continuation we will portray a part of the results that we obtained in the research 'Graffiti as a means of visual communication in Nis', that was carried out in April 2016, in the area of the Nis quay and in four Nis high schools: Bora Stanković, Stevan Sremac, 9.maj and Svetozar Marković, with the remark that two of these high school use the same building and share a schoolyard (Bora Stanković and Stevan Sremac). The results we cite are adjusted to our paper's subject.

One of the goals of the mentioned research was to determine the content and classify recorded graffiti according to categories. Aside from determining content categories, we have tried to determine the meaning of graffiti in the broader social context. The methods used in this research are: observation, photo documentation, and the analysis of the gathered content.

At the moment of our research we recorded 1514 graffiti-writings, 883 out of which were written at the quay, and 631 graffiti-writings in the area of Nis high schools. Such a large number of recorded graffiti point to the fact that the selected area is an ideal place for graffitists' activities, as well as that groups that do graffiti writing in Nis were very active. Since the Nis quay is a favourite place of meeting for young people and a very visited walking area, the

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[14] Iveson, K. (2007): Publics and the city, London: Blackwell Publishing, str.112.
[15] Eko, U.(1973): Kultura, informacija, komunikacija, Beograd: Nolit, str.21.
[16] Lewisohn, C. (2008): Street art, London: Tate Publishing, str.45.
[17] Djordjević, R. (2001): Grad i društvene promene, Niš:CENAR 018, str.215.

influence that this graffiti may have on its recipients is potentially large. The location of schools is also favourite among graffitists, which indicates that the public they want to attract is mostly very young.

In order to determine how transparent subcultural groups are in declaring their attitudes, the values they insist on and how openly they send messages to their environment, we divided recorded graffiti into two groups, the so called symbolical and artistic graffiti and textual graffiti This division is partly based on the classification given by Radomir Đorđević (2001) and Lalić, Leburić and Bulat (1991). In our research there were 537 symbolical and artistic graffiti-writings, and 937 textual.

Almost two thirds of textual graffiti lead us to conclusion that subcultural groups address the public directly and immediately, and that symbolical and sign expressions are used to a lesser degree, which are aimed at the inner circle of recipients. Graffitists are free in declaring their attitudes, and the numeracy of textual graffiti points to its provocative and rebellious nature, whose intention is to provoke and incite interest.

In table 1 we will show signs and symbols that we noticed as mostly used in the observed graffiti. At this point we will neglect its statistical data, because they do not have crucial value for our paper's subject. We will cite the meaning of noticed symbolical and sign expressions here.

These signs indicate that among subcultural groups which use graffiti as a means of communication, there are those who act contra-culturally. Signs are visible which express resistance and confrontation to dominant or leading culture and its values. Some of the graffiti express attitudes and behaviour of the so called deviant groups with the call for conflict and elements of criminal activity.

Finally, graffiti recorded in the area that we have researched, we divided into 14 categories (Diagram 1), according to the content of the message they were expressing: 1) Graffiti related to attitude towards life (136 writings, 9 percent), 2) musical graffiti (91 writings, 6 percent), 3) graffiti related to school (182 writing, 12 per cent), 4) graffiti related to alcohol and narcotic drugs (227 writings, 15 percent), 5) graffiti related to group and friendship (61 writings, 4 percent), 6) graffiti related to love and sex (obscene content) (242 writings, 16 percent), 7) graffiti related to violence (61 writings, 4 percent), 8) humorous graffiti (45 writings, 3 percent), 9) nationalistic graffiti (76 writings, 5 percent), 10) religious graffiti (61 writings, 4 percent), 11) political and ideological graffiti 76 writings, 5 percent), 12) sports fans graffiti (167 writings, 11 per cent), 13) territorial graffiti (45 writings, 3 per cent) and 14) the other graffiti (3 per cent).

Out of the observed categories, there is a majority of graffiti related to alcohol and narcotic drugs, as well as graffiti related to love and obscene content. These messages show that young people are prone to experimenting with alcohol and narcotic drugs and that they publicly express their affinities. Messages related to love and sex are typical subject that interest young people full of life and craving for new experiences, which is certainly a part of growing and maturing. Not such a negligible number of sports fans graffiti indicates the activity of subcultural group of sport fans, whose behaviour often turns into the forms of vandalism. The encouraging is the fact that the number of graffiti directly calling for violence is not large. Their share is only 4 per cent of the recorded graffiti.
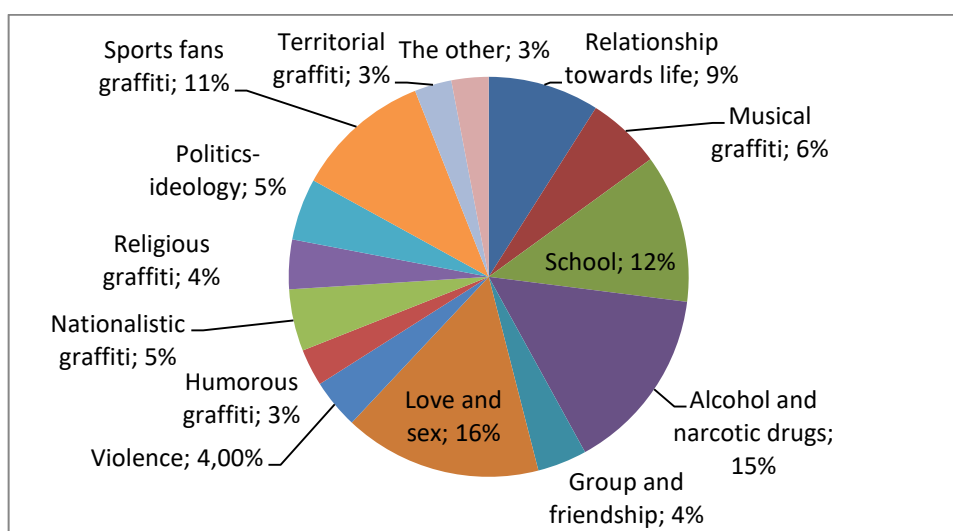

Diagram 1: *Graffiti according to content*

5. Concluding considerations

In this paper we have researched graffiti as a common thread of different subcultures, as well as independent subculture. A special chapter of this paper was dedicated to defining the term subculture, which is completely justifiable if we know that it is about a very controversial term, which is hard to define. We agreed with the claim that subcultures are a category that is hard to empirically verify and there is little evidence that there are those groups which are stable and coherent. However, it is certain that they exist, that they are ever active and they are to be counted on in the future. "They survived" and they still exist, groups of young people which are connected with a common style of clothing or music or common activity, such as drawing graffiti, whatever they are called – subculture or somewhat different.

Historically, the process of the origin of subcultures in the world is related to the period from the thirties to sixties of the last century, and that process was conditioned by social changes which unraveled marked by increased socialization of capitalistic society, scientific and technical revolution in the direction of strengthening a country of social wellbeing. Those changes concerned: the existence of mass communication, the entertainment industry and the increasing of consumer power which led to the creation of youth cultural identity within spare time; the increasing in the intergeneration gap at a family level (a family lost influence and friend and peer groups gained it; and the increasing gap between elite and folk culture which led to a search for cultural patterns of one's identification. By virtue of this type of change their ensued relative autonomy of young people, who were by that point mostly subordinated. This led to the origin of subcultural expression as a form of self-definition of uniqueness of the generation of young people who made a step forward from the leading patterns of the culture of adults.

The recognition of graffiti as a medium of communication and specific form of human expression came with the affirmation of new culture of young people, together with its products and values. Graffiti is a product of subcultural bunt, significant for the protest of a group of young people who share interests and become symbolical and communicational spaces of youth groups, which send a message that they exist and they search for their own identity. They, according to their meaning, link and even surpass subcultural trend. Graffiti is indeed work of young people, mostly high school teenagers, but if we do not reject it easily as delinquency and destroying of city walls, we can read from it a lot about the spirit of the time we live in. Besides, the wall as a given medium of communication, has always attracted our ancestors (they drew and wrote even before new era), so that graffiti cannot be treated as current novelty, even though it is more represented than ever.

Our starting thesis, according to which majority of subcultural groups willingly use graffiti as a means of communication with their environment, with those who think the same and with other subcultural groups, ordinary citizens, even official institutions, is multiply confirmed. Graffiti is a suitable way to publicly give attitudes and values that someone wants to express, and it is often in contradiction with the generally accepted cultural pattern.

Graffiti is also an expression of generation clash, but at the same time a symbolical expression of social conflict that surpass the generation gap. A large number of graffiti transfers private messages and it is dedicated to only one person. However, as a rule, it is about generalized messages that want to be imposed to the greatest number of recipients as possible, but their reception is infringed by the fact that there is not a unique code by which their content would be received by all generations of people. This is why graffiti are still mostly intergenerational communication of young people, who, in that way, speak to their 'significant others', declaring collective belonging to a particular subcultural group. Those a bit older, but not too old, can understand deeper and broader layers of psychological motivation and sociological meaning of the messages given by graffiti in their symbolism.

The empirical part of our paper gave the evidence on the existence of graffiti and its specificity in Nis. A global glance at the sample of 1514 recorded graffiti-writings, as well as their analysis showed that in Nis, and other towns in Serbia textual graffiti is very present, as much as two thirds, and symbolical and artistic less. What was surprising in our research is the fact that a small number of graffiti concerned social and economic crisis, as well as the loss of perspective for young people. Although the authors of graffiti are mostly young, unemployed people, their dissatisfaction with the status is yet to be implied.

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