



Manifestations of Ideology in Graffiti: a Semiotic Study in Structure and Meaning

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Abstract ;

This article aims to highlight the ideological dimension of graphic art as a visual communication discourse that carries expressive connotations and meanings capable of transporting the audience to multiple worlds that reflect human existence and express one's self and being. This art serves as a beautiful expression that carries ideas, beliefs, and intellectual visions reflecting real-world issues, manifesting cultural, social, and political dimensions.

Graphic art is a free expression of a subject embodied by the artist in a creative and aesthetic style. It is a means of resistance that touches the human self and carries a message promoting values of liberation and highlighting the identity of peoples, similar to other arts and modern visual expression methods. Through this study, we aim to pay more attention to this type of art as it carries different expressive and symbolic messages.

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1. *Introduction*

Ideology has been closely tied to social practice and thus forms an important element of cultural identity. It encompasses the ideas, opinions, and beliefs specific to a particular social group or society. The various theoretical perspectives that have attempted to provide a comprehensive view of ideology are fundamentally subject to the differences in scientific and philosophical foundations from which each one originates, especially when expressed in different forms of expression like graphic art. This visual discourse carries deep meanings and connotations and, through the messages it conveys, has been able to create a form of expression capable of summarizing the political, media, social, and even religious scene in a single image. How has this art reflected the human scene through its ideology, rich in meanings and connotations? What are the ideological dimensions expressed through it?

Within this general framework, we focus on four main topics: the first will be about the concept of ideology and its dimensions. The second will discuss the transformation of graphic art from aesthetics to a media message. The third will explore the ideology of artistic materials with a media dimension, and finally, the fourth topic will be dedicated

to examining the semantic employment of ideology in graphic art.

2. *Tideology and the Thresholds of the Concept*

The term "**ideology**" is considered one of the prevalent and widely used concepts in contemporary intellectual and cultural writings. Despite its broad usage, it has become one of the ambiguous terms due to the multiplicity of definitions associated with it. Talking about ideology itself has become ideologized, as **Clifford Geertz** (one of the prominent American anthropologists) suggests. Without a clear theoretical and epistemological foundation, the term remains obscure and confused. This ambiguity is evident from the diverse and different definitions and the massive transformations and uses it has undergone. The term, as is known, was coined during the French Revolution to describe an old project, first used by **Tracy de Destutt**, and referred to the science of ideas (Abdul Rahman Hajjo, 2022, p. 432).

Discussing ideology necessarily leads us to the need for epistemological grounding of the concept, especially when attempting to connect it with cultural aspects. It is observed that ideology tends to be associated with identity, as suggested by **Fairchild**, who defines ideology as a **collection of ideas and beliefs that endow a group with a distinctive and unique character, whether this group is**

a nation, a social class, or an ideology (Omar Zahwani, 2020, p. 172). It is also defined as the discourse presented by a particular class about itself, its practices, and its goals, thus becoming the dominant discourse in society through its dissemination.

Some semioticians describe ideology in a neutral manner as any global cultural or social system, while others describe ideology critically as a hidden system of meaning in public messages that requires critical analysis. **Bakhtin** and **Medvedev** define it as **almost synonymous with the term culture, encompassing all products of ideological creativity, including scientific works, artistic works, religious symbols, rituals, etc., considering these as material objects that are part of the actual reality surrounding humans**. In contrast, **Voloshinov** presents a comprehensive view of ideology, stating that everything ideological is based on meaning: it represents, depicts, or symbolizes something outside itself. In other words, it is a sign without signs; there is no ideology without signs (Bobker Fadil, 2022, p. 88).

Based on this diversity and the differences in intellectual orientations and scientific foundations across various fields of knowledge, which establish multiple concepts and perceptions of the term ideology, it can be defined as a set of ideas and beliefs expressed by a particular group

using a set of signs within a specific cultural system.

3. Graphic Art: From Aesthetics to Media Message

3.1 Graphic Art: The term "graphic art" linguistically derives from the word "graph," which means a diagram or chart, while the term "graphic" refers to something visual, drawn, or printed. However, it is defined as "visual communication and an organizational activity through signs, symbols, and icons instead of spoken words, aimed at achieving communication and exchange with the contemporary world."

It is also defined as the art and skill of defining and organizing visual elements such as letters, images, symbols, and colors to convey a message to the audience. Others define it as the application of a set of principles and the working with various elements to create a visual communicative artwork that relies on static images and takes the form of a printed or displayed piece on a two-dimensional surface. Both Kagan and Moss have defined cognitive styles as a term referring to a consistent approach preferred by individuals in organizing perception and conceptual classification of their external environment (Abeer Youssef, 2018, p. 5).

In modern art, the image works with materials and adapts them in such a way that they become expressive in

themselves, appearing as if they have rid themselves of impurities, excesses, and any form of commercial, promotional, or media exploitation. Art emphasizes the materiality of the image in terms of its size, volume, and space, while enhancing its expressive power. The artistic image focuses on the composition between elements, so that each element matters only within a composed framework that gives it a stronger expressive significance than it has in reality. All modern artistic trends have employed composition in renewing visual rules and conventions (Abdelali Maazouz, 2014, p. 171).

Technological advancements in communication have led to a period of rapid growth in communication tools and design methods, transforming the aesthetics of participation into the aesthetics of interaction. This shift has resulted in the adoption of many modern techniques in artistic fields, design, printing, and publishing. Visual art in general, and graphic art in particular, is governed by fixed laws such as concepts, contents, and objectives, and variable ones such as methods and techniques. The artistic process is ultimately akin to a continuous search for beauty and depth, evolving step by step until reaching artistic maturity, achieving functional goals, and captivating the audience (Abeer Youssef, 2018, p. 6).

3.2 Semiotics and Graphic Art:

Enter To examine various discourses, sign systems, and meaning production mechanisms, researchers must be scientifically familiar with the methodological aspects related to a method that addresses various issues and explores different aspects of the subject. Different methodologies stipulate following steps and concepts for studying a subject, which allows for a deep and organized understanding of its various facets. Thus, it can be said that semiotic analysis is the method that highlights the mechanisms through which meanings and signs are produced in different media and communication contents. Therefore, it enables the uncovering of internal relationships between elements of the system and then reshapes the sign system in a way that provides a better understanding of the function of signs within this communication system. “Roland Barthes” is considered the first to apply semiotic analysis to images and noted that meanings exist in two systems: the first represents the denotative level of the sign, which is the literal and surface reading that does not go beyond the obvious meaning. The second represents the connotative level, which refers to the underlying concept or meaning that the first level points to, but is not immediately apparent. Hence, “Barthes” is regarded as the founder of the semiotic analysis method (Jamila Salem Atiya, 2014, p. 11).

Semiotics is the science that studies the system of signs within social life, whether

these signs are linguistic or non-linguistic. As linguist Ferdinand de Saussure notes, the general theory of language and semiotic analysis are among the various forms of research and in-depth investigation into the different levels of visual and linguistic discourses, encompassing various cultural, social, and even psychological aspects.

According to American semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics is considered the general science of signs. It primarily focuses on the production of meaning and signification. It encompasses the visual, the seen, and the iconic, including examples such as drawings, graphics, signage, photographic images, cinema, and theater. An image is a sign composed of the signifier, the signified, and the relationship between them, which forms its own specific semiotic system.

Discussing the image as a concept necessarily leads to discussions about art and creativity. Gaston Bachelard views the image not merely as a mere imitation of reality or a pale representation of natural subjects, but rather as a new image that renews and reimagines natural subjects and intensifies the inner spirit inherent within those subjects. It thus encapsulates the world and imparts meaning to it in a scene that aligns with life (Sharit Badra, 2023, p. 29). Aesthetic theories are critical approaches that seek to explore the dialectical relationship between form and content and to achieve true aesthetic

harmony. Words, like images, are essentially aesthetic forms experienced and appreciated by individual consciousness.

Graphic art remains an expressive medium that carries deep symbolic meanings and is rich in diverse dimensions. It is a language that conveys meaning and significance, and understanding the process of signification depends on the dynamics of interaction within cultural contexts and intellectual frameworks. The mind's ability to comprehend involves navigating between two mediums—reality and symbols—by interpreting those symbols, by finding its tools and means to uncover the inferred meanings in alternative actions (Dina Mohamed Anad, 2022, p. 112).

4. The Ideology of Artistic Materials with Media Dimensions:

Media messages involve a blend of text and images, both static and moving, and are an integral part of media content. They significantly contribute to the process of persuading and influencing the audience, addressing various segments and groups within society. Media images can convey ideological connotations, whether explicit or implicit, to the public's consciousness more easily and effectively than written texts.

The connotations of the image have expanded to include mental activities such as cognitive and intellectual imagery,

psychological activity, imagination, perception, and linguistic activity. This encompasses auditory images and artistic domains like sculpture and painting. These activities reflect the civilization of images, manifesting in both tangible and abstract spatial dimensions. They create a world that aligns with reality, such as in photographic imagery, or an alternative world that is either more truthful or more enchanting, as seen in visual art (Lamia Talla, 2022, p. 195).

Both governments and political parties, as well as media institutions, have expanded their focus on the ideology of media images, recognizing their immense ability to blend reality with imaginative creation within a single context. States and governments use static or dynamic images to display their achievements and the services they have provided to their people, thereby documenting the details of the mental image that embeds itself in the public's local or global imagination.

The significant importance of an image in carrying ideology through media messages lies in the ideas, meanings, and contents it aims to convey to the audience. Such images embed themselves in public opinion and influence various attitudes and behaviors due to their global dimension. This is reflected in their dissemination by different global media outlets, such as the image of the Palestinian child Muhammad al-Durrah, who was killed by Israeli army fire. No

matter the medium or technique used to convey a media image, its content does not replicate the impact it could have if it were infused with ideology, through which the effect, meaning, and significance become apparent.

5. The Semantic Employment of Ideology in Graphic Art:

One of the roles of a graphic artist is their significant contribution to integrating art into intellectual, political, and social aspects. This is achieved by merging personal identity with the collective identity of people, thus transforming individuality into a social force and breaking away from isolation. The artist has managed to reach the public's consciousness, influence their path, and motivate them to struggle for their freedom. Graphic art has established itself as a media art form that reaches all locations and gatherings, clarifying truths and political issues, and guiding and addressing social problems (Iman Abdel-Baqi, 2023, p. 25).

This is evident in its characteristics and the way it handles various subjects, as well as in the psychological effects that express human energy. Graphic art has the power to address minds and souls on different levels and contributes to stimulating and developing political and intellectual awareness in the audience. Thus, the expressive aspect is closer to having a direct impact on the recipient, as it speaks to the intellect and requires

complex interpretative effort, unless it is presented iconically or with cultural symbols (Dina Mohamed Anad, 2019, p. 708).

The social role of graphic art is also significant, as artists express the concerns and struggles of people, seeking their freedom and development. The artist's focus is not limited to political aspects; they take on the responsibility of addressing these issues, which become the primary source of inspiration for their work. This allows them to express their emotions and reflect everything happening in their inner world without any subjugation to external forces. The artist's ideology ensures that artists define themselves as such and recognize that their work aligns with the essence of their profession. They must forget the current effects of their situation on their profession and themselves and interpret their work and ideas. Nevertheless, the experience is not merely an illusion, and the knowledge gained, even if incomplete or not entirely aligned with reality, remains valuable.

The process of building a design and cultural identity must be based on a set of historical and civilizational values through a strong ideological discourse derived from aesthetic reflections. In addition to sociology and perception, along with psychoanalytic studies, the designer relies on creating a psychological environment using historical, cultural, and

environmental data as sources to guide ideas, emotions, and symbols. This approach ensures that the design resonates with the audience in a tangible way, aligning with their visual representations and the environmental context to create a distinctive semantic identity for the designs and cement them in memory (Dina Mohamed Anad, 2016, p. 235).

The artist strives to translate these issues into their artworks, continuously drawing from these concerns in their artistic creations, which represent the culmination of various cosmic and cultural phenomena within their society. The artist is influenced by the moral ideas of the community, the level of culture, and religious beliefs, incorporating these elements into their work with their own personal connotations from his own point of view. While each work is unique and distinct from others, there are common characteristics shared among artworks within the same environment (Iman Abdel-Baqi, 2023, p. 23).

Graphic art serves as a substitute for a range of cultural and intellectual values, transforming it into a visual meaning with various concentrated expressive connotations through its elements and artistic symbols. It contains a guiding reservoir of practical functions relevant to the audience as frequent users. Additionally, it is a crucial component of popular imagery inherited from cultural memory. Colors, in particular, have been

an essential complement to the character of graphic design, providing many additional meanings and connotations (Dina Mohamed Anan, 2017, p. 11).

6. CONCLUSION:

After these theoretical insights into ideology in graphic art, we summarize the following conclusions:

- Graphic art forms a visual communication language that conveys ideas, beliefs, and messages across various fields. This reflects the desire of artists and designers to deliver these to the audience through visual means, making them easily accessible to all segments of society.
- Graphic art reflects the cultural, social, and historical diversity of society through its deep-rooted connotations and content that resonate profoundly within the community.
- Intellectual and ideological trends in graphic art are diverse, highlighting issues of liberation such as the Palestinian cause and the relationship between humans, land, religion, and history.
- The symbolism of expressive elements representing Islam, martyrdom, struggle, and various causes is prominent in graphic art. These works are portrayed through colors and expressive forms that derive their meanings from the individual's social reality, reflecting the artists' deep immersion in cultural and religious richness, especially.
- Graphic art promotes openness to others through various artistic creations, serving as a tool for societal communication. As a language that enhances interaction between peoples, it acts as a cultural carrier, rich in symbols that reflect an individual's life, beliefs, and identity.

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