Feminist Soapboxes: Reading Women's Graffiti as the Production of Political Signs

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Studies of graffiti tend to focus around two poles: those which identify graffiti as vandalism and analyze it within a legal discourse of discipline and punish, and those which see graffiti as uninhibited communication motivated by unconscious impulses and analyze it within a psychoanalytic discourse of neurosis and repression. I adopt a third approach, a semiotic approach to graffiti analyzing them within a system of communication with cultural codes and communicative conventions.

Graffiti are frequently said to present a vivid and unflattering insight into the hidden side of our society. But women's experience is a yet more occluded part of society, because women are thought not to produce graffiti. An analysis of the graffiti in the women's washrooms at York
University, Toronto, 1987-88, reveals that not only do women write graffiti, but that it is different from men's washroom graffiti. Soapboxes is an appropriate label for women's graffiti, linking both context and manifestory function.

The Privy is political, to parody a feminist slogan of the 70s. One of the dominant codes of contemporary feminist discourse is that the political is most present in the private, in those signifying practices and institutions of daily life with their discourses and representations through which individuals are interpellated as subjects into hegemonic formations and/or positions of struggle with respect to power. Sexuality is implicated along with subjectivity in the politics of everyday life. As representation and self-representation, graffiti participate in the process of the construction of gender as a technology of gender, a signifying practice in/by which a subject is positioned within the discourse of sexuality as a gendered subject.

I suggest a semantic and syntactic analysis of the women's washroom graffiti, undertaken within a framework of socio-semiotics that includes in its analysis of meaning-making the interrelated systems of the production and reception of the utterance, contextual as well as contextual systems. Political signs of a number of different genres may be discerned, including discourses on sexual relations, on the gendered body; debates within feminist discourses such as radical and liberal feminism, heterosexual and lesbian orientations; interventions on "conventional" political issues such as the peace movement, racism, colonialism; a self-reflexive discourse on graffiti writing and the institution, on graffiti writing and the silencing of women's speech. Site specific discourse, this graffiti proliferated in the washrooms located in the library and the central academic building near the women's centre at sites of knowledge production, not in washrooms near eating places on campus, breaking thus the conventional linkage with absorption/defecation. The ultimate "taboo," it would seem, is women's political speech—oppressed in the very place of its production and analysis.
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1. Have regular check-ups with your doctor. It's important to make sure you're healthy and taking care of your body.

2. Avoid eating too much junk food. Stick to a healthy diet and avoid sugary snacks.

3. Drink plenty of water throughout the day. This will help you stay hydrated and healthy.

4. Get enough sleep every night. Lack of sleep can affect your overall health and well-being.

5. Exercise regularly to stay fit and healthy. Find something you enjoy and make it a part of your routine.

6. Take breaks throughout the day to avoid burnout. It's important to take care of yourself and not overwork yourself.

7. Practice self-care. Make time for yourself and do things that make you happy.

8. Stay connected with friends and family. Social support is important for mental health.

9. Learn to say no. It's okay to prioritize yourself and set boundaries.

10. Find ways to reduce stress. Whether it's through meditation, yoga, or other activities, find what works for you.