



Online Session 1

Graffiti

- How should we understand and think about graffiti?
- What can it tell us about text and images?



"What is it?"

Is it

An image

A piece of text

Or both

Or neither



How can we understand graffiti?

Methods of analysis



- Historical analysis
 - Look at its origins
 - Connect it to things that happened in the past
- Societal analysis
 - Look at what was going on culturally and politically when it happened
 - Connect it to other events happening at the time
- Visual analysis
 - Think about how something looks and what that communicates
- Textual analysis
 - Consider how its appearance

Defining our terms

What is an image?

What is text?

What is graffiti?

<https://www.menti.com/blhri3uffk4k>





History of Graffiti: Human history

- Mark-making is older than humanity
- Our bodies making marks in space
- Art and writing share an origin



Origins of Writing

- Cuneiform was developed as an administrative tool
- Language versus writing system
- Writing as a material technology



	a	e	i	o	u	v [ã]
D a	R e	T i	ḍ o	Ḍ u	i v	
Ṣ ga Ḍ ka	F ge	Y gi	A go	J gu	E gv	
ḥ ha	P he	Ḍ hi	F ho	Ḥ hu	Ḍ hv	
W la	ḍ le	P li	G lo	M lu	ḍ lv	
ṣ ma	Ḍ me	H mi	ṣ mo	Ḍ mu		
Ḑ na ṭ hna Ḡ nah	Ḍ ne	ḥ ni	Z no	ḍ nu	Ḑ nv	
Ṭ qua	Ḍ que	Ḑ qui	Ṡ quo	Ḍ quu	Ḑ quv	
ḍ s Ḑ sa	Ḍ se	Ḑ si	Ṡ so	Ḑ su	R sv	
Ḍ da W ta	S de Ṭ te	Ḍ di Ḍ ti	V do	S du	Ḑ dv	
Ḍ dla Ḍ tla	L tle	C tli	Ḑ tlo	Ḑ tlu	P tlv	
G tsa	V tse	Ḥ tsi	K tso	Ḍ tsu	C tsv	
G wa	Ḍ we	Ḑ wi	Ḑ wo	Ḑ wu	Ḑ wv	
Ḑ ya	Ḑ ye	Ḑ yi	Ḑ yo	G yu	B yv	

syllabary



logographic

क	ख	ग	घ	ङ	च	छ	ज	झ	ञ
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa	ca	cha	ja	jha	ña
[ka]	[kʰa]	[ga]	[gʱa]	[ŋa]	[tʃa]	[tʃʰa]	[dʒa]	[dʒʰa]	[ɲa]
ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण	त	थ	द	ध	न
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa	ta	tha	da	dha	na
[ṭa]	[ṭʰa]	[ḍa]	[ḍʱa]	[ṇa]	[ta]	[tʰa]	[da]	[dʱa]	[na]
प	फ	ब	भ	म	य	र	ल	व	
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	ya	ra	la	va	
[pa]	[pʰa]	[ba]	[bʱa]	[ma]	[ja]	[ra]	[la]	[va]	
श	ष	स	ह						
śa	ṣa	sa	ha						
[śa]	[ṣa]	[sa]	[ha]						

Additional consonants

क़	ख़	ग़	ज़	फ़	ड़	ढ़
qa	ḫa	ḡa	za	fa	ṛa	ṛha
[qa]	[xʌ]	[ɣʌ]	[za]	[fa]	[ra]	[rʰa]

Common conjunct consonants

क्ष	ज्ञ	त्क	द्व	द्य	द्व	त्त	ड्ड	झ्न
kṣa	jña	ttka	dva	dya	dda	tta	ḍḍha	ḍbha
[kṣa]	[jña]	[ttka]	[dva]	[dya]	[dda]	[tta]	[ḍḍha]	[ḍbha]

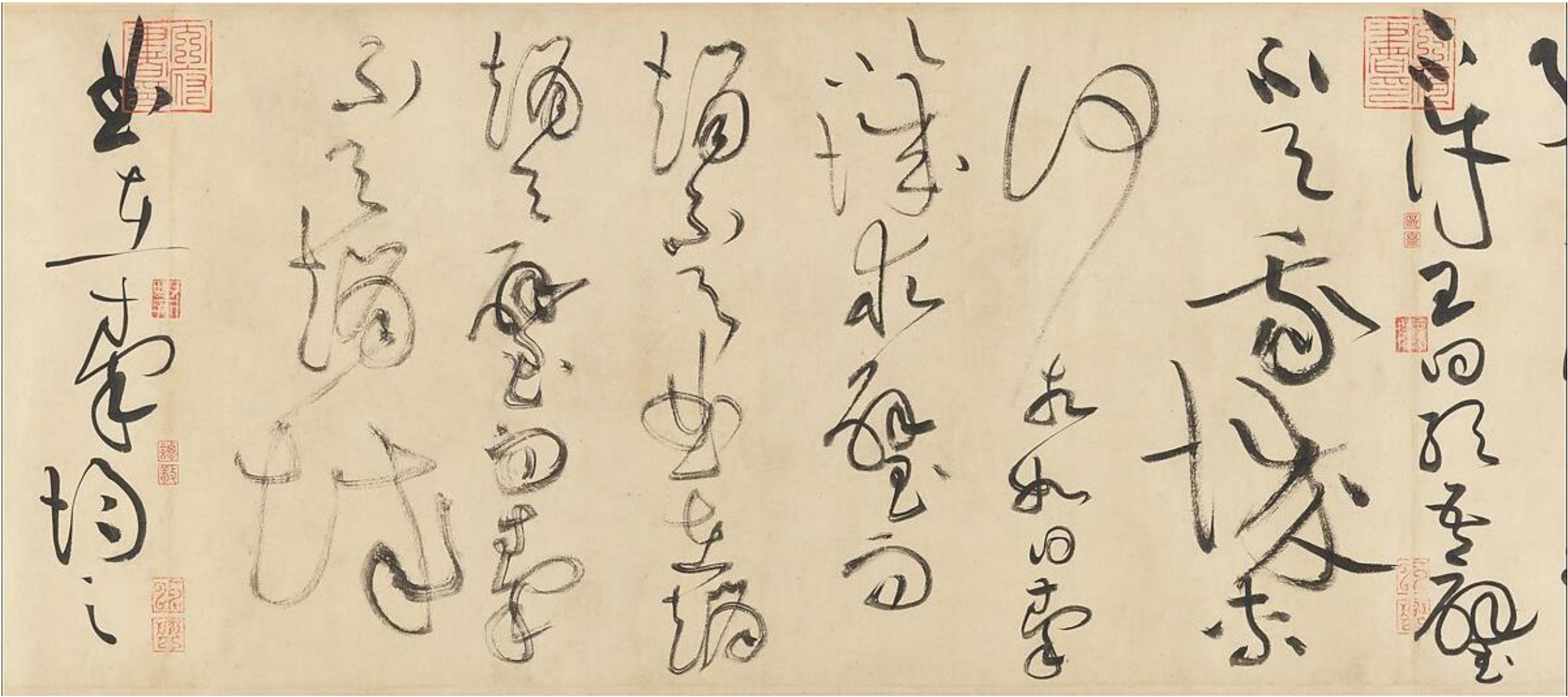
alphabetic

Writing Systems

Calligraphy

- Why make text beautiful?
- How does the appearance of a text impact its meaning?



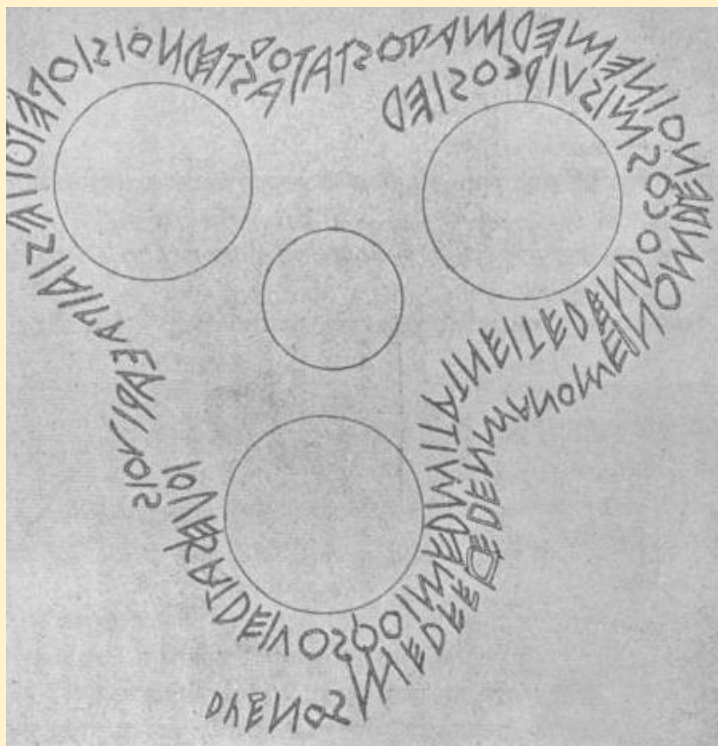


What does this look like? What does it do?

Historiated Initials

- Seeing the shape of a letter
- Inserting a picture inside text

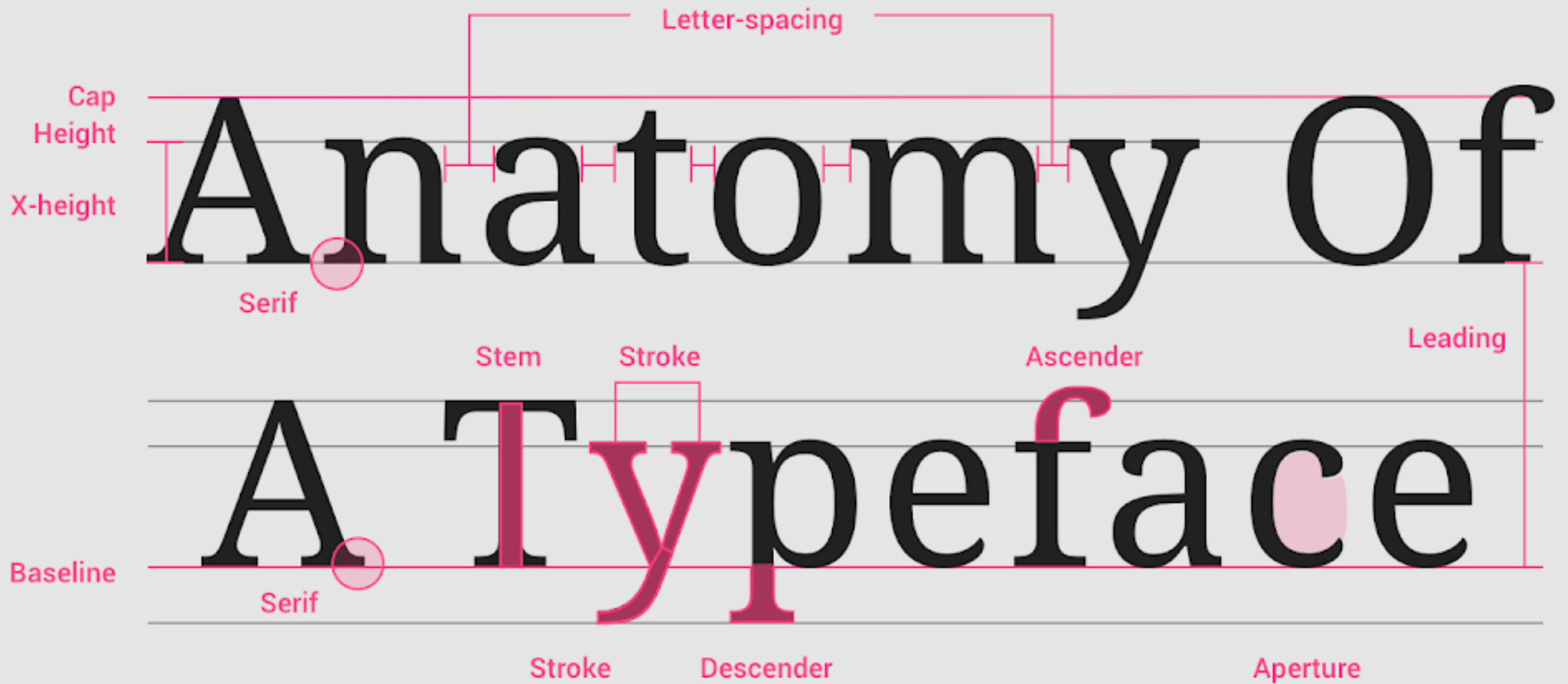




A B C D E F G H
I K L M N O P Q
R S T V X Y Z

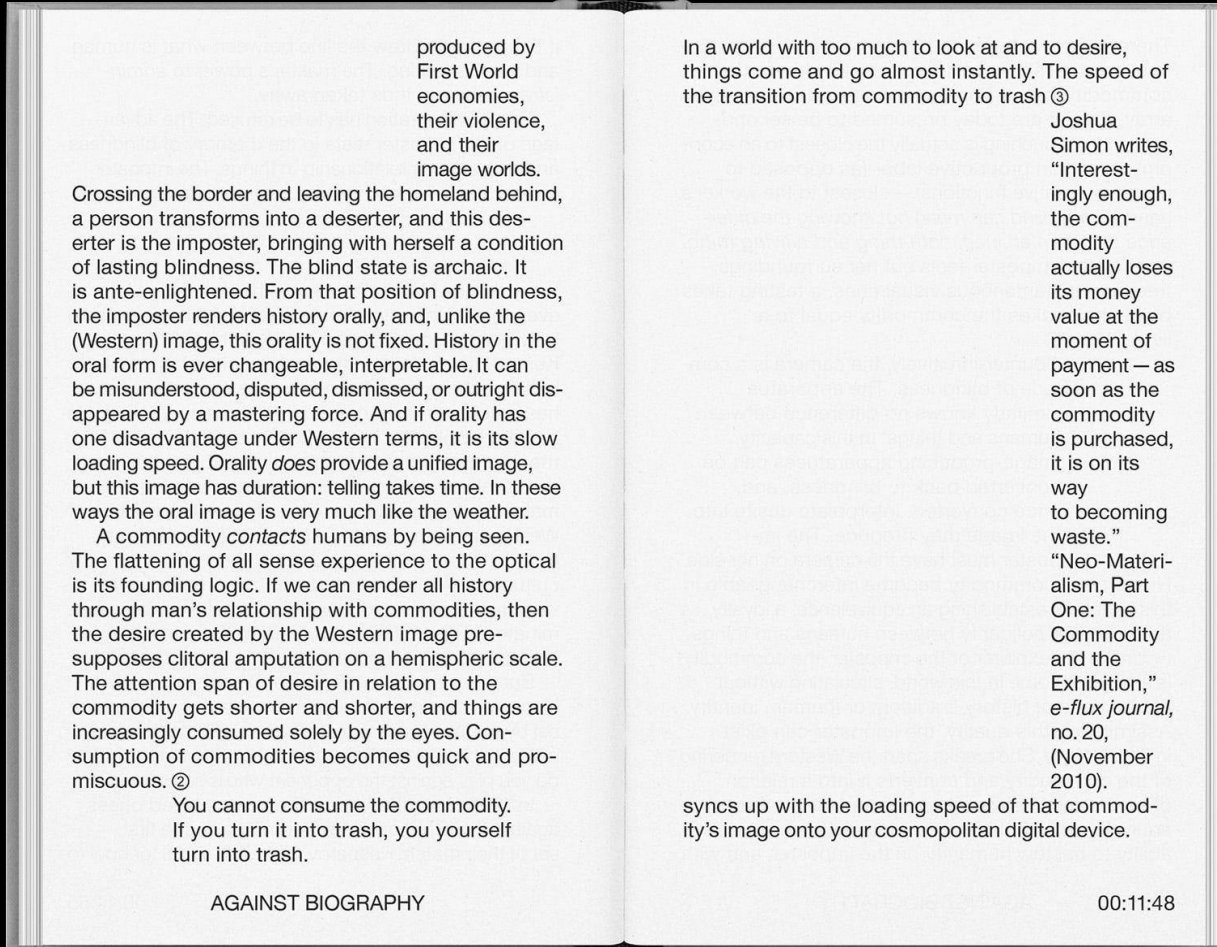
The Latin Alphabet

- Dating back to at 600 BCE
- First used by the Romans to write Latin



Looking at letters: Typography

But also composition and layout





And format... and placement...

<https://www.menti.com/blpkk4g58jk8>

History of Graffiti



'Taki 183' Spawns Pen Pals

Taki is a Manhattan teenager who writes his name and his street number everywhere he goes. He says it is something he just has to do.

His TAKI 183 appears in subway stations and inside subway cars all over the city, on walls along Broadway, at Kennedy International Airport, in New Jersey, Connecticut, upstate New York and other places.

He has spawned hundreds of imitators, including Joe 136, BARBARA 62, EEL 159, YANK 135 and LEO 136.

To remove such words, plus the obscenities and other graffiti in subway stations, it cost 80,000 man-hours, or about \$300,000, in the last year, the Transit Authority estimates.

"I work, I pay taxes too and it doesn't harm anybody," Taki said in an interview, when told of the cost of removing the graffiti.

And he asked: "Why do they go after the little guy? Why not the campaign organizations that put stickers all over the subways at election time?"

Withholds Last Name

The 17-year-old recent high school graduate lives on 183d Street between Audubon and Amsterdam Avenues. He asked that his last name not be disclosed. Taki, he said, is a traditional Greek diminutive for Demetrius, his real first name.

"I don't feel like a celebrity normally," he said. "But the guys make me feel like one when they introduce me to someone. 'This is him,' they say. The guys knows who the first one was."

Taki said that when he began sneaking his name and street number onto ice cream trucks in the neighborhood early last summer, nobody else was writing similar graffiti.

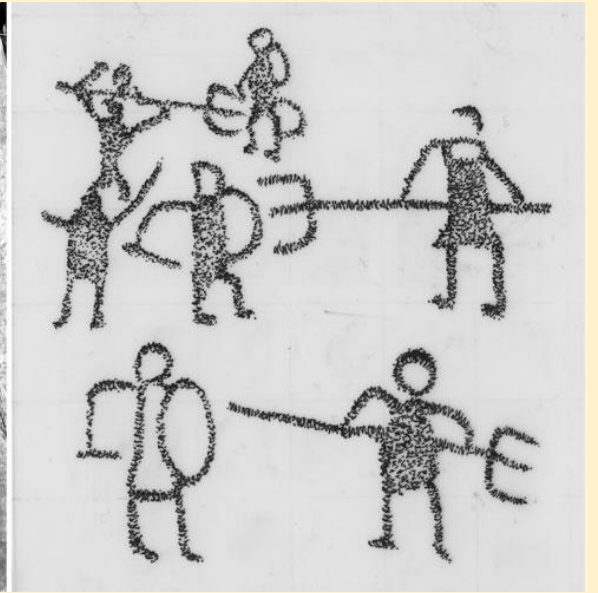


The New York Times/Don Hosan Charles

Taki, who began sneaking his name onto ice cream trucks last summer, has widened his field and won imitators. These marks are on doors on 183d Street, where he lives.



A visual *and* technological development



Ancient Graffiti

Graffiti as Subculture

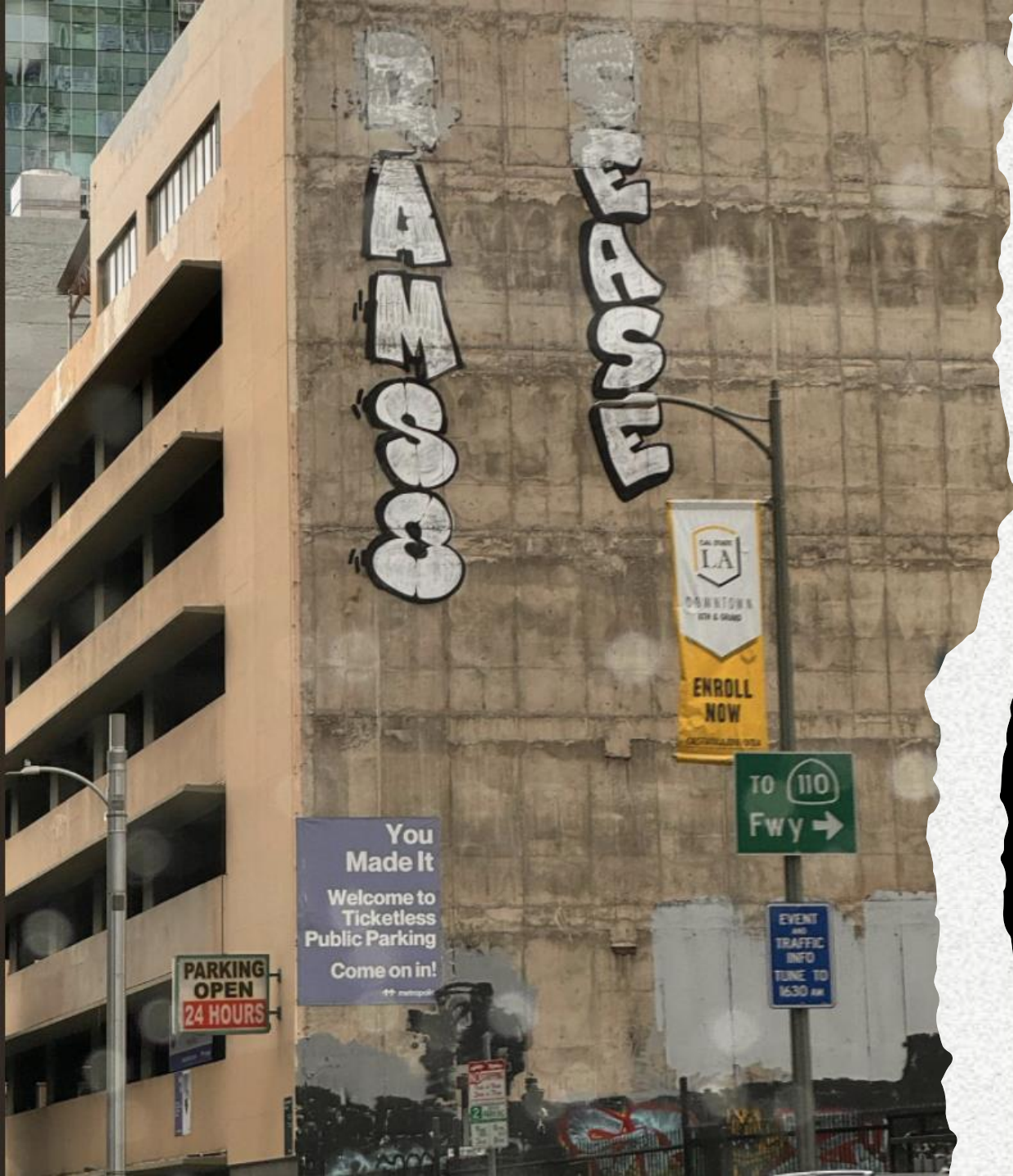
- Part of hiphop cultural practices:
 - MCing, breakdancing, DJing, and writing
- A Black and Latino cultural product from New York City that will ultimately go global



Reading Tags

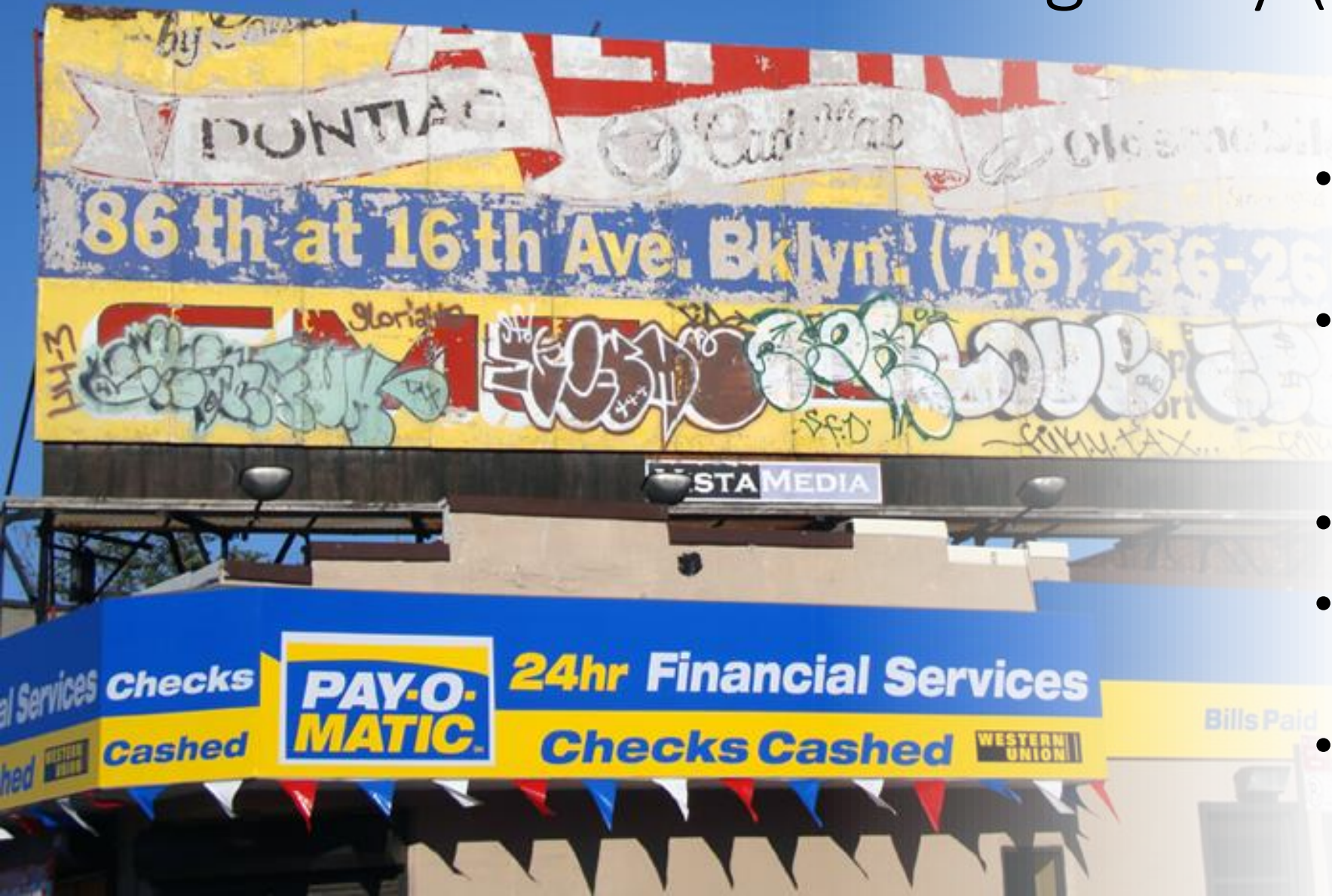
- Anonymous
- Formulaic
- Trace of the body
- And of trespass





Getting Up

Legibility (Reading Graffiti)



- A lot of graffiti is unreadable
- Even if we can read it, we don't know what it means
- Does it mean?
- Graffiti as an act of writing or a symbol
- Between image and text

Graffiti vs. Public Writing

What is the relationship between graffiti and other types of public writing?

“The city is like a newspaper anyway, so it’s natural to see writing all over the place.”

-Claes Oldenburg



Graffiti by Aneko, 2022



PS+C ★

SLV+ ★

2022
ICBM

V.J.P.O.G



Graffiti artist Lady Pink in the New York City subway in the 1970s

Graffiti by Wombat
in Manhattan,
2010s



Criminalization, Public Response



"[I]t's frightening... I can't separate it from fear, from someone pulling a knife on you and robbing you in a public place. You have to have an immunity to violence [in its]... presence... graffiti increases the sense of lawlessness and danger."



Why is Graffiti Illegal?

“We didn't call ourselves graffiti-writers... we called ourselves 'bombers'—we were in the military—military ain't got nothing to do with what anybody says.” -Rammellzee

Graffiti attacked "the very form of the media themselves, that is, their mode of production and distribution... [by virtue of the fact that] graffiti has no content and no message: this emptiness gives it its strength... This comes from a sort of revolutionary intuition, namely that deep ideology no longer functions at the level of political signifieds, but at the level of the signifier, and that this is where the system is vulnerable and must be dismantled." -Jean Baudrillard



Is Graffiti Still Radical?

Next steps

Before our next session...



What's coming up?

Drop-in sessions are run on the following evenings from 6pm – 7pm.

Monday 26th February

Monday 4th March

Monday 11th March

Monday 18th March

Monday 25th March

Your next subject session will be on Wednesday 28th February from 6pm – 7:30pm.

Any questions?

If you need any support, or have any further questions, please don't hesitate to send the UCL Expand Team an email at wp.post16@ucl.ac.uk or drop us a text on **07857630033**.