

Artwork by Tom Crites

# The Writing on the Walls

**Susanne Van Cleave**  
 Editor, Friday Magazine

**T** here I was, sitting on the cool porcelain seat in the dim fluorescent light of my favorite bathroom stall, sifting through the day's paper. I glanced up at the door in front of me upon which was written in purple ink:

*"Why are you reading this? The real joke is in your hands..."*

The only thing in my hands was a copy of the *Daily Nexus*. Clever, though perhaps a bit crass. I suppose someone had a laugh scribbling it there. I paused a moment to absorb the messages that surrounded me:

*"Help End Apartheid - Boycott Coker"*  
*"Julie loves John for ever - '83"*  
*"Give Piss a Chance"*

What an array of sentiments. What an amusing way to leave your mark, vent frustration, or educate.

Graffiti - it's everywhere. From bathroom stalls to bike tunnel walls. From proclamations of love and loyalty to revolutionary credos. Though the writing on walls is meant to be read, it is rarely understood. Why do people do it? What does it mean? Does it serve a function in society?

Bathroom graffiti is probably the most familiar and accessible. Most of it is quite graphic, often obscene. A once over of the walls in the public toilet would be enough to let you know whether you were in the Men's or Women's room. Toilet graffiti content tends to differ between sexes in segregated public bathrooms. It may seem funny but the privacy available in a public restroom stall is second only to the privacy in your home. It is even protected by law. That makes it not only easy not to get caught but gives you the luxury of knowing the sex of all your readers. For some closet graffitiers, just knowing that no one of the opposite sex will read your message feels very safe. You might not want to make members of the other gender privy to your toilet thoughts. What the artist, poet, or vandal would not be likely to commit to spoken word is expressed safely and anonymously.

For youth gangs and inner-city adolescents, graffiti becomes a major means of establishing relationships and personal identity within a neighborhood. Two names enclosed by a heart are a typical example. Or *"Grace as Slick,"* reflexively expressing a relationship to both family (the given name - Grace) and peers (Slick - a nickname). Graffiti gang rosters are often followed by warnings and territorial claims.

*"Defenders Only - Junkies Keep Out"*

A gang may use graffiti to challenge a rival gang; graffiti will be used to communicate the rival's response. It is an

ongoing dialogue.

The inner-city walls and other flat surfaces are covered with assorted messages. In contrast, relatively little graffiti is found in the middle- and upper-class suburbs. What can explain this discrepancy? Money and property ownership account for much of it. In the barrios and ghettos the majority of the property is owned by absentee landlords, who are often at constant odds with their tenants. This, coupled with the other pressures of life, leads to a failing sense of respect for the status quo and anything that represents it. The legitimacy of such traditions as private ownership is questioned. Since you are more likely to "redecorate" or deface property that is owned by someone or something for whom you hold contempt, a good portion of graffiti may be motivated by defiance. It becomes a vehicle for the virtually voiceless masses of discontent to share their concerns that would otherwise go completely unnoticed. And make no mistake, this is not just an urban phenomenon. Just look around you if you're in doubt.

This need to find voice is a major motivation behind graffiti. The amount of graffiti often increases just prior to an outbreak of protests. If we took graffiti more seriously and took note of its context and messages we could learn a great deal. We could gain insight into not only the interpersonal dynamics of a community, but gain a sense of the political climate as well.

"The walls are used to communicate to people with little power, the forces not under control of the 'legitimate' authority," writes author and teacher Herbert Kohl in his photo essay on graffiti *Golden Boy As Anthony Cool*.

In the Fall of 1969, Kohl was invited to UCSB to participate as a consultant in a conference at the Department of Education that would discuss developing new programs. During the first meeting they recognized "that there were serious problems with students, blacks, Chicanos" all over the nation. They were comfortable, though, because "Santa Barbara was a calm, uninvolved place."

When he wasn't in the meetings, Kohl took up strolling around campus and the surrounding Isla Vista community. He saw pictures of Che and Mao and Huey Newton adorning dorm walls and there were peace signs all over. How could a community and campus that boasted such posters and symbols be a sleepy hollow in a world of unrest? His vision was incongruous with the faculty and administration perception.

"There was graffiti everywhere - the names of rock groups, revolutionary slogans, posters, signs. The calm town and uninvolved university which the experts and professors were talking about didn't exist except in their fantasies....I tried to explain to the group....The walls and dormitory rooms had messages for them. Santa Barbara was Berkeley

and Palo Alto and Ann Arbor and Cambridge. People didn't hear what I was saying just as they didn't see the environment they worked in....They didn't want to know. They never saw the signs of trouble in their own community."

What followed at UCSB in the next few months was a series of riots and demonstrations. The Bank of America was burned - twice - and the police violence escalated to dangerous proportions. Those few months did more to put Santa Barbara on the map than Ronald Reagan. The revolutionary graffiti that preceded it were clues for anyone willing to notice. Some did and they took to the streets.

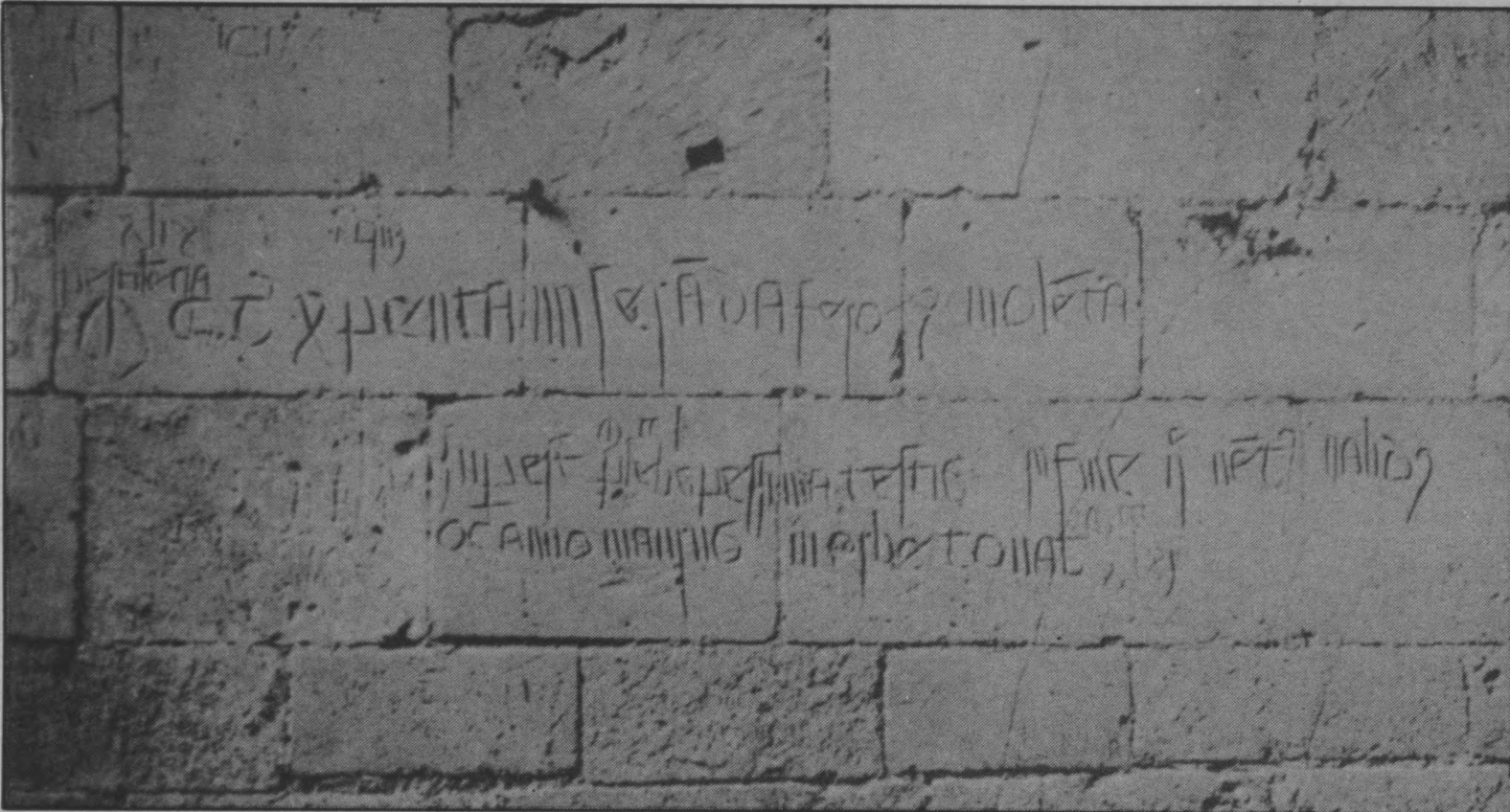
Revolutionary graffiti differs from other forms by the degree of its vision. The revolutionary credos you see around campus and community are often strategically placed. Anti-war graffiti can often be found on the ROTC building. "Stop The Lies" was painted in bold, black letters on the side of the *Santa Barbara News-Press* building. Political scrawlers want to strike as close to the heart as they can. More often than not, the side of a building housing the questioned, 'legitimate' authority, presents itself as the best bet. The scrawler with a social political conscience may believe it is their duty to make their sentiments public.

Some graffiti is more categorically art. Complex murals are graffiti at its most beautiful. While sides of buildings, some a block long, become the canvas of community projects. Artists, young and old, participate in the creation of the mural. Some tell stories, others depict the leaders of a particular group. These are called "Pride Walls" and contain images of people who provide positive role models and encourage pride by drawing from their historical accomplishments. Unlike the majority of graffiti, murals require more planning, time and precision. Since they are most often done with permission they do not require a paint and flee execution.

It is unfortunate that such a separation of art and life exists in western culture. From the time we are quite young we learn where we can and can't do art, where we can and can't express ourselves. ("It's not okay to write on the furniture or walls dear, use your paper instead.") Perhaps if we did not cherish property so much and placed more emphasis on expression, the quality of art would improve and the sense of frustration and alienation would dissipate. Certainly we would at least live a more integrated existence and feel we had some voice in our world rather than being at its mercy.

The next time you see a piece of graffiti - even if it angers you - try to understand the motivation behind it. Take note. Stop a moment and read the writing on the walls. It was put there for you to read and, chances are, there's probably a valuable message being communicated, whether its about the state of the world or the state of someone's love-life. You might even find yourself enriched in some way.





"1350 wretched, fierce, violent / 1350 / the dregs of the populace live to tell the tale..." proclaims part of this sample of medieval graffiti from Ashwell Church, Hertfordshire, England, during the Plague years.

## When In Rome ... Do As the Vandals

a survey of ancient graffiti

Douglas Andrew Yates

I watched them through my window, three of them, running toward the giant trashbin at the end of the driveway across the street. It was midnight, and dark, and difficult to see their faces. Still, I knew who they were. Local boys gone bad, skaterats, delinquents.

I could hear their voices, the snake-like rattle of the spray paint can, laughter, then the hissing of fresh graffiti.

I walked outside to get a closer look. They immediately recognized me and stopped what they were doing. I read the words they had written on the side of the bin;

### PIG CITY! OINK! OINK!

"Keith got busted last weekend," the short one with the faded army jacket explained, "and the pigs, they started hassling him and shit..."

He paused, and for a moment, seemed to doubt the need for any explanation. Then he became irritated, and said, "You got some problem with my graffiti?"

He grabbed the can of spray-paint from his friend's hand and started to illustrate a pig, with a pegged nose and corkscrew tail, dressed up in the uniform of an officer of the peace. They all snickered, and started to make pig-like snorts, then "Pig city! Oink! Oink!"

The event was unremarkable in itself. Despite the fact that I have seen that individual piece of graffiti time and time again since the night of its creation; the work is of relatively insignificant importance. Those three individuals were not the first to put their message on the wall, and will not be the last.

Where do the origins of graffiti lie?

The origins of graffiti trace back to the Ice Age, 35,000 years ago, when prehistoric homo sapiens painted depictions of animals and humans and abstract symbols on soft limestone cave walls. These cave paintings, also called pictographs, represent the original graffiti.

Like other forms of art, however, graffiti loses meaning outside of its cultural and historical context. When searching through pictographs, we must amend out modern perspectives to understand the symbolic value inherent in the art. Dr. Richard Leakey wrote, "...when confronted with prehistoric art, we must always remember that we see it through eyes schooled in twentieth-century preconceptions. What you and I see on those walls is not what the artists and their fellows saw, for art loses much of its meaning in the absence of social context."

The horses, bison, oxen and wooley mammoths were colorfully illustrated, vibrant and energetic. They have been discovered on over 200 caves around the world. Although they were clearly intended to depict specific animals, the Ice Age art was not "representational" per se. In other words, the purpose of painting a bison was not to have a nice picture of a bison, but instead was to serve as a medium for prehistoric symbolism and hunting magic. Pictographs from the Ice Age were located, for the most part, in highly inaccessible hideaways, leading the modern scholars to assert that the cave paintings were primarily used for religious ceremonies or other mystical rituals. Symbolism was the key to understanding. For example, human hands were traced on cave walls. These manual silhouettes symbolized not only a signature of the author, but also represented the instinctual search for immortality, the drive to say, "I was here."

As it lasted for more than 25,000 years, Ice Age art proved to be the single most durable genre of art. For the first time, symbolic thought was transferred to walls, and in this way, gave birth to not only graffiti, but painting and writing. With the advent of this prehistoric graffiti, the homo sapien neanderthals, developing symbolic thought, evolved into homo sapiens, modern humanity.

For many people, the word "graffiti" shouldn't be defined in such a way that it would include prehistoric pictographs. After all, if pictographs were considered graffiti, then ought not Egyptian hieroglyphs be included? Thus, for the more skeptical scholar, the excavations at Pompeii properly mark the earliest recorded graffiti.

On August 24th, AD 79, a group of small Roman towns, including Herculaneum and Pompeii, were obliterated and buried in pumice and ash by the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Although the tragic eruption killed most of Pompeii's citizenry, it remarkably preserved



"Scram! Do your quarreling outside!" proclaims this item of graffiti from Pompeii.

their daily existence. Bodies were frozen in screaming agony while pelting pumice and hot ash buried them alive. Meals were left on their original tables, uneaten, perfectly preserved for thousands of years.

As the literacy rate was high in Pompeii, (a city that boasted such notable personalities as Cicero, Pliny the Elder and Younger) it isn't remarkable that the walls of ancient Pompeii were covered with over 15,000 pieces of graffiti. What is remarkable is that these graffiti were preserved, giving us a rare glimpse into both Roman culture and the Roman vernacular.

### ITIS FORAS RIXATIS

This was scribbled on the wall of a *hospitium*, an "inn". It translates into "Scram! Do your quarreling outside!" and is written beside a fresco depiction of a landlord pushing two tenants out of his establishment. But apparently, the landlords were not the only citizens of Pompeii who chalked graffiti onto the walls. Customers contributed their own personal sentiments, such as this malediction;

TALIA TE FALLANT UTINAM MENDACIA COPO.  
TU VENDES AQUAM ET BIBES IPSE MEUM

"Curses on you, landlord! You sell water (for wine) and drink unmixed wine yourself!" A result of this was another official looking graffiti;

OTIOSIS LOCUS HIC NON EST. DISCEDE, MORATOR

"This is no place for idlers! Move on, loiterer!"

It seems ironic that the Mount Vesuvius eruption, while destroying the inhabitants of the region, became the means of their immortality. Had the citizens of Pompeii survived the disaster, their graffiti would have taken on a much more somber tone. The graffiti, despite numerous errors in spelling and grammar, give us the impression of a high degree of literacy among the lower classes of Pompeii. There are quotations from Vergil, Ovid and Lucretius. Evidently the citizens were familiar with the best of Roman literature. The interesting point, however, is that the individuals who scratched these literary quotations were not the aristocrats, like Pliny the Younger, whose elite works survived the

ravages of time, but instead were the common one Professor Mau explained:

"The cultivated men and women of the accustomed to scratch their names upon the reflections and experiences to the surface of the writers were...not representative of the best of times, in fact, they were the dregs.

Between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries graffiti was carved on "clunch" in a sixty-mile bridge, England. "Clunch" is a soft limestone, pentine cross-hatchings and elaborate calligraphic medieval artisans. The Dark Ages graffiti was scribble or doodle. In fact, a high level of crafts the work, and an air of solemnity permeates each Latin phrases, religious quotations and symbols. A few of the hundreds of recorded pieces in the area the Vulgate, an evolved style of Latin proper Catholic church. Some were written in Old French.

For example, a message was chiseled into the Tower at Ashwell Church, in Hertfordshire, England. It is a strikingly serious graffiti, with an air of the macabre.

### PRIMULA PESTIS IN M TER CCC FUL

"The beginning of the plague was in 1350 minutes in rough Anglo-Saxon script; Script as cryptic, the message itself. The anonymous author refers to a series of five plagues which swept across England population.

Like its Pompeian counterpart, (Mount Vesuvius) wreaked havoc on rich and poor alike. Vesuvius, (which in its violent destruction, presided over the culture in all its vivid glory), the "Black Death" refined amenities, thoughts and personages at a High art, classical knowledge, great literature from the ancient oral traditions: These were, for the crashing waves of pestilence that ravaged the world.

The message continues, and translated, laments the "Pestilence that is five/1350/wretched, fierce the populus live to tell the tale."

It is interesting to note that most of the major archaeological far has been the result of chance stumblings by accident. The Ice Age cave was discovered by Marie Sautuola a Spanish farmer. The site of Pompeii was first discovered by a farmer digging a well. Common people, the graffiti, have coincidentally been the most significant in the resurrection of this ancient art.

Two quotes from Pompeii still hold true.

"Everybody writes on walls except me."

"It is all right to copy, but not to envy."

Strangely enough, graffiti that strikes a popular chord tends to appear and reappear. A simple message on one wall, soon became reproduced all over a region. The famous "KILROY WAS HERE."

This famous graffiti has appeared all over the world. The familiar illustration of a nose and two eyes, fingers dangling over the front face of the brick wall. Where did KILROY come from?

Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable attributes the large-nosed character to the English cartoonist Chatterton (1938). Published as a comment on the virtues and shortcomings, the familiar illustration below it, "Wat, no char..." (word filled in to suit the example, "Wat, no char?" became popular during the war. "Char" is old slang for tea.) Chatterton named the character "Chad," after himself. But later, during WWII, the character became highly popular, and began to appear wherever Air Transport Command had been. According to an inspector named Kilroy began writing "KILROY WAS HERE" material he had inspected, accompanied by the rest of his history. Kilroy has been not only here, but everywhere.

"What were those kids up to?" my roommate asked me one day. "I saw you go across the street and look like they were vandalizing the trashcan."

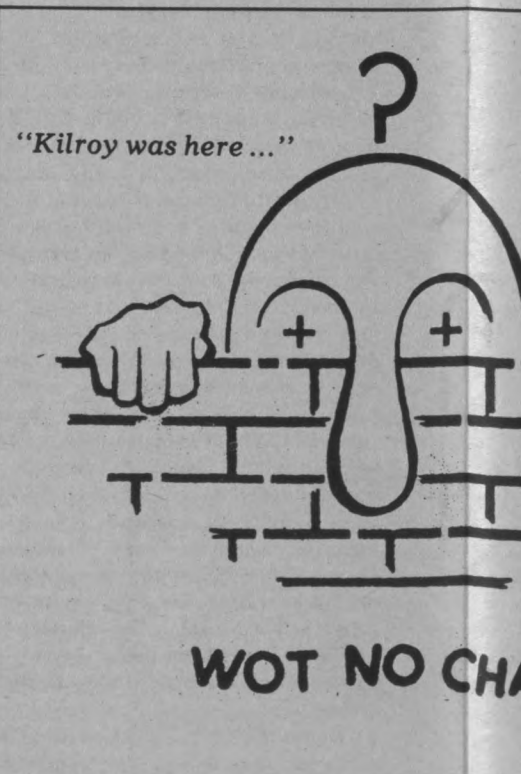
"It wasn't vandalism..." I protested, "It was graffiti."

"Same thing," he retorted, and never brought up the subject again.

As for me, I kept an eye on the piece, just to see what would happen. About a week later, a Santa Barbara County Sheriff's car pulled up next to the trashcan, stopped, and apparently the black and white squad car pulled away, it was gone. Although "PIG CITY! OINK! OINK!" changed its message, and in doing so, accomplished its purpose.

For the primary purpose of graffiti, like its Roman counterpart (meaning a "stylus"), is to be a pointed instrument of communication. And if that's vandalism, then — "What are the Vandals!"

— Douglas Yates is a...





the commoners of the city. As of the ancient city were not ac- n the stucco or to confide their ce of a wall; We can assume that the best element of society."

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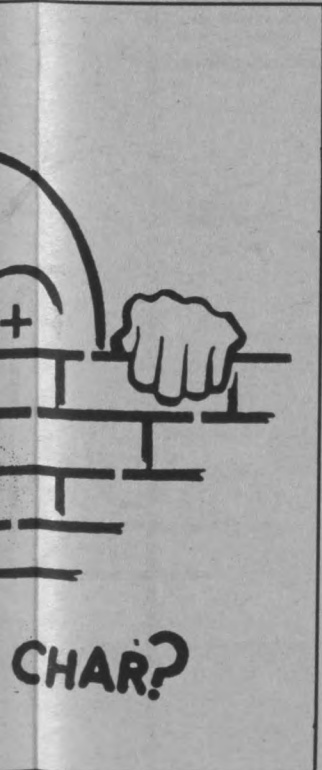
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like its Latin root of *graphi* ed instrument for written com- en — "When in Rome, do as the ates is A.S. President at UCSB.



Artwork by Tom Crites

It's 2 a.m. on a typical UCSB Sunday night. The streets are quiet. Most people have locked themselves away with their school books. A few late night revelers are wandering home. On a path near the ROTC building, three students stroll along, quietly chatting among themselves. Suddenly their mood changes. Two of them scurry off to strategic points to watch for campus police and CSO's while a third reaches under his jacket and produces a can of glossy black enamel spray paint. As his two sentries keep watch, the third hurriedly paints "STOP MILITARISM!" on the building front. Their duty done, they toss the can into the bushes and calmly walk away.

This is a composite of many such Sunday nights during which frustrated citizens anonymously voice their opinions. I am one of these frustrated citizens. Call me criminal, call me vandal, call me artist but don't call me by name.

Sometimes the feeling that you are powerless makes you want to take things into your own hands. Since I can't get near the White House or an MX missile, I arm myself with a spray-paint can and strike out at the closest representative target. The goal is to educate, make people stop, take notice and perhaps think about the atrocities committed in the name of their country and with their tax dollars. Graffiti may not be the most effective way to reach people but it is often the only option available.

When you pass out flyers, almost all of them wind up, unread, in the trashcan. People don't seem to want to learn, but no one can ignore a message painted in big, black letters on the face of a wall near a highly traveled path. It's the only way I know to reach people who would otherwise ignore what I have to share. Hopefully, it makes them realize, if nothing else, that all is not well in the world, something we tend to forget in

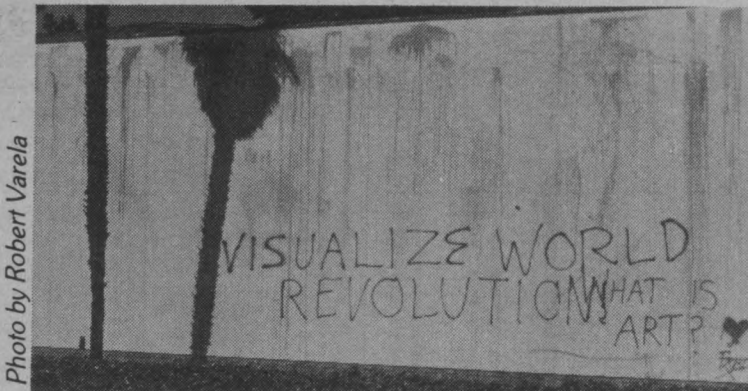


Photo by Robert Varela

our cozy, rich, white haven of UCSB.

I am not alone. People all over the world resort to graffiti to communicate their hopes, feelings and social criticisms. In countries like South Africa or El Salvador, political slogans cover the walls proclaiming their message to all who pass by. Even our beloved CIA has recognized the effectiveness of graffiti and frequently pays youths to plaster pro-American slogans throughout urban areas all over the world. (This is fact. If you doubt me read the book *Inside the Company* by Phillip Agee.)

There is a rhyme and reason to where graffiti is painted. The best targets are those which represent in some way, the evils that we are fighting. Ideally, you find slogans against weapons research on the Engineering and Physics Buildings, divestment messages on or near the administration building, and anti-war credos on the ROTC building. But in a sterile, homogenous atmosphere like our campus, any area would be appropriate. Other points to consider are where will it best be seen and where can I get away with it.

Some people consider what I do vandalism — and it is. But the places I paint are places where no one individual will have to pay. Since my protest is against the university and other status quo institutions, I figure that they could take the money out of what they spend to oppress people here and around the world. Besides, this campus is such a concrete wasteland, a little color perks the place up.

If you find yourself frustrated or depressed that no one seems to listen, go find yourself a wall and let them know how you feel. A few tips: go after 2 or 3 a.m., go with friends to watch for law enforcement, know the area where you're painting so you can get away if someone approaches, be cool and have fun. YIPPIE!

— name withheld upon request of the author for obvious reasons



Photo by Sean M. Haffey

## Someone's Got to Pay

Patrick Whalen

It has been called the pinnacle of human expression. It can come in a myriad of brilliant colors. It can be etched by a razor blade. It can be passionate. It can be protest. It can be crude. It can be found anywhere. It can carry a \$5000 fine.

"It", dear reader, is the dreaded scourge of humanity known as graffiti.

Police call it "malicious mischief". Administrators call it "vandalism". Students call it "humorous". Artisans call it "art". Whatever your prejudice, there's no denying the political, social, and even fiscal impact graffiti has upon our everyday existence.

Graffiti demands cash. The cost of eradicating graffiti from our walls, malls, bars, stools, dinettes, sidewalks, trash bins, doors and floors

is incredible. You don't normally see the average graffiti perpetrator busily scrubbing off his or her handiwork the morning after. It takes crews upon crews and hours upon hours of hardworking maintenance staff to wash or sandblast off any artwork done by a mad graffiti fiend in a short three minutes.

No wonder law enforcement officials and administrators get peeved over graffiti. Somebody's got to pay.

The penalties are quite severe for a budding young Rembrandt, who, in some weird twist of fate, manages to get caught vilifying and vandalizing your neighborhood beer mart or chancellor's residence.

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department deems graffiti a misdemeanor, punishable by a maximum fine of \$5000 and/or a year

in prison. Under that stipulation, a graffitier is a more heinous criminal than a peeping-tom.

Who pays for the creativity of an incensed spray paint artist who decides that UCSB is his or her canvas? Well, if the deed was performed in a public area, it's the jolly good California state taxpayers who foot the bill. And if the artwork was manifest in an on-campus dorm, the cleanup cost would be drawn from the \$384.00 each dorm resident pays per month.

It isn't that those in charge don't appreciate the aesthetic values that can be attained from graffiti per se, it's just that in their opinion, most graffiti would not be the thing to show grandmom and granddad on a Sunday visit to Cheadle Hall.

Yes, graffiti art can be a beautiful

thing. Cruise through any residence hall and observe the marvelous creations therein. Check out the mural/graffiti on the arts building. Sociologists point out that graffiti is of times the grand meter of modern pop culture. Youthful rebellion in the form of creative expression can be a tremendous release of pressure.

Steps are being taken to promote the co-existence of graffiti and property. At Long Beach State there are chalkboards in the restrooms for serious thinkers. Other college campuses have special "graffiti walls" where students can pine away the hours with a fresh spray paint can.

Ultimately, the "to graffiti or not to graffiti" question must be dealt with individually. Does someone else want to see my personal angst blistered across Storke Plaza? Is that important? Will I get caught? Do I care?

Regardless, graffiti can be a beautiful and thought-inspiring art form. It can also be a putrid blemish on the face of society that requires excessive time and money to wash away. So whenever you're behind the closed doors of a public toilet (lord knows we don't write those things at home), or find yourself all alone in a phone booth, consider the person who will be there after you. Then go ahead and state your mind.



Photo by Sean M. Haffey



# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

**HAPPY HOUR**  
From 4:30-7:30 pm  
Free Hors D'oeuvres  
Live Entertainment

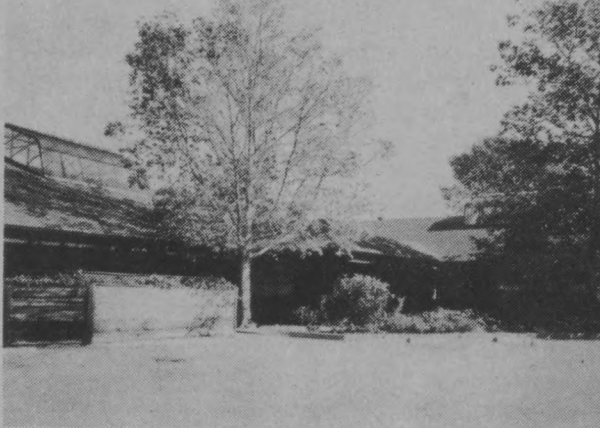
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PRIME RIB, STEAK  
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## Timber's Restaurant

Born from the wreckage of the only coastal bombing attack ever during World War II, the timbers formerly a part of Ellwood pier were relocated inland and used to construct Timber's Restaurant, a rustic and enticing dining establishment. Lovely trees beautify the restaurant both inside and out, and their large fireplace will take the chill out of any wintry night.

Entertainment is provided nightly, and country fans can swing to their hearts' content on the largest dance floor in Goleta. For the big eaters on a budget, Timber's has All-You-Can-Eat Barbeque Beef Ribs nightly for the amazingly low price of \$6.95. Ribs also come with soup or salad, potato or rice.

For the more adventurous, Timber's also has coconut fried shrimp — four giant succulent prawns complimented by their intriguing dip.

Beer drinkers will be pleased to discover Timber's Happy Hour, where from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday draft beers are only 50¢ each. Included during Happy Hour are free Hors d'oeuvres.

So make the trip north to Timber's Restaurant, off Winchester Canyon exit from 101. Timber's is open nightly from 4 to 9 p.m., telephone 968-2050.

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AUTHENTIC MANDARIN SZECHUAN HUNAN CUISINE

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Lunch Buffet 11 am-2 pm  
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valid student I.D.  
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SAKE

99¢ each



## China Castle

Looking for a place to sit down and enjoy a quiet meal in beautiful, exotic surroundings? China Castle serves authentic Chinese lunches and dinners at a pace that lets you savor the meal. Located just off Hollister and Storke in the K-Mart shopping plaza, China Castle's delicious Szechuan, Mandarin and Hunan cuisine will leave your mouth watering for more.

One delightful entree is their tea-smoked duck, a tantalizing combination of boneless sliced fried duck with prawn sauce. It's served in Chinese pan cakes and comes with rice. Other selections on the extensive menu include Shrimp in Flower Basket or a sizzling plate of pan-fired noodles.

But why limit your enjoyment of China Castle to just your table? Private banquet facilities are available to groups looking to plan a party or gathering. Dance floor rental is included free with the price of the meal. A full bar is also available to accent your meal.

Whether it's a friendly lunch, an intimate dinner for two, or an all-out bash, China Castle is waiting to serve you. Take-out is also available. Serving 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Sunday through Thursday; dinner hour is extended until 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Telephone Goleta 968-1308 or Santa Barbara 962-6602 and 965-9219.

## 3 WIDE SCREEN T.V.'S



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