



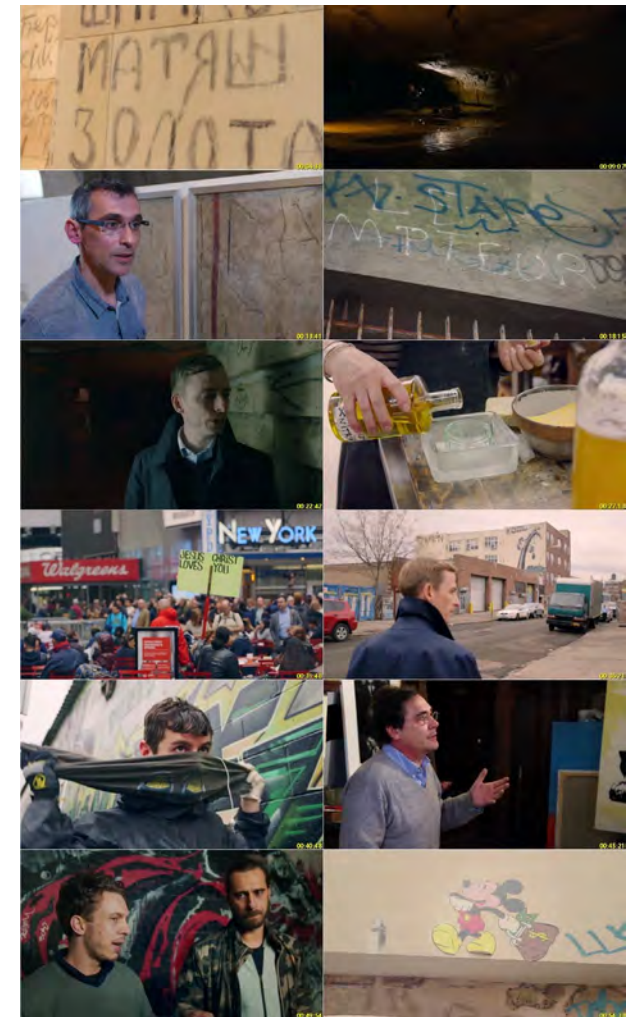
137 ST-BROADWAY

A Brief History of Graffiti

Richard Clay

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STATEMENT

The research tests Clay's ideas through the filmmaking process. Interviews with artists, cultural sector professionals and academics provide a lens to examine, analyze and discuss a wide array of illicit marks – iteratively shaping the research.

Conceived, written and presented by Clay, *A Brief History of Graffiti* (first broadcast BBC4 26.8.2015) examines the similarities and differences between illicit mark-making practices across a wide range of cultures and periods. From scratchings on Ancient Roman walls in Lyon, to revolutionary and commercial lithographic posters on the streets of nineteenth-century Paris, to words and images left in the Catacombs beneath that city, to Soviet soldiers' writings on the walls of the Reichstag in 1945, to the emergence of modern graffiti styles in late twentieth-century Philadelphia and New York, their global spread and their relationships with illicit stencil art and the 'art world'.

Clay investigated the role of illicit mark-making in:

- i) mediating social, cultural and political struggles;
- ii) the shifting status of such mark-making in terms of the law, the 'art world', commercial bodies and differing publics;
- iii) how mark-makers' attempts to counter the ephemerality of their efforts can be understood as responses to human mortality;
- iv) the affordances offered by shifting technologies to illicit mark-makers' creative practices;
- v) how cheap mass production of legal images has allowed them to fill public spaces, creating challenges for illicit mark-makers seeking viewers' attention (but also allowing work to be seen beyond original sites of display).

The film had extensive media coverage and has been licensed internationally. It elicited interest from NATO and academia, becoming the basis for Clay, R. and Verrall, N. (2016) 'Life Imitating Art, and Art Influencing Life: The use of Graffiti Information Activities and Influence Operations', *The RUSI Journal*, 161(2), 64 -73.

OUTPUTS

1. A Brief History of Graffiti

60-minute TV documentary

Written and presented by Richard Clay

Release Date: 26 August 2015

Commissioning Editor: Cassian Harrison

Producer–Director: Nick Clarke Powell

Production Company: (Kaboom for BBC4)

Distributors: BBC Four (UK) (TV), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (UK)

For subsequent distribution history see page 10

View full documentary online: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3ybi29>



OUTPUTS

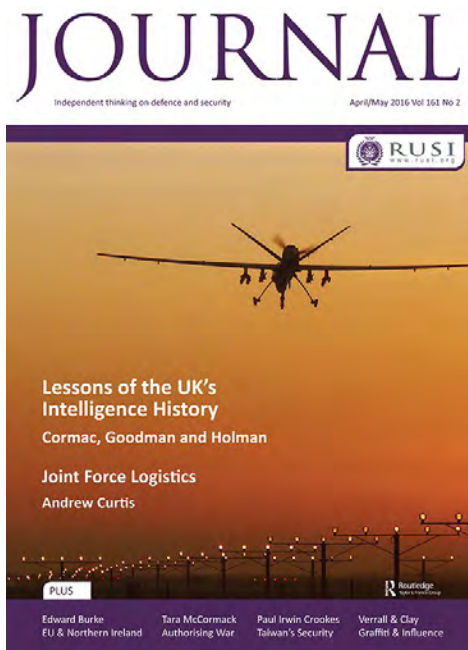
2. Article

Neil Verrall & Richard Clay (2016) 'Life Imitating Art, and Art Influencing Life: The Use of Graffiti for Information Activities and Influence Operations', The RUSI Journal, 161(2), 64-73.

View pdf of paper: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2016.1174484>

In response to the broadcast of *A Brief History of Graffiti*, Dr Capt Neil Verrall (Principal Psychologist, Defence Science and Technology Laboratory) invited Clay to co-author an article for the Royal United Services Institute's RUSI Journal. The article, 'Life imitating art, and art imitating life: the use of graffiti for information activities and influence operations' was published in April 2016.

The paper draws on Clay's work to outline the historic uses of graffiti and their implications, before drawing attention to the use of graffiti in more contemporary conflicts, especially those with Islamic State. The authors highlight the relative absence of graffiti from contemporary military doctrine and argue, based on the preceding examples, that graffiti offers a potential tool in military information activities that is distinct from other forms of visual media and could be helpful in countering Islamic extremism.



Clay first wrote about graffiti in the mid-1990s for a national magazine, *Raise*, where as music editor and features writer, he interviewed contemporary graffiti writers (Morn, Kilo, Dref and Eine). In the following decades, Clay synthesized that early work with his postdoctoral research on French Revolutionary iconoclasm and his ongoing research on graffiti, which informs his art historical teaching. This research connected with Clay's interest in how changing technologies allowed art to reach wider audiences. For example, nineteenth-century lithographic prints (some inspired by, and/or inspiring, graffiti), which were posted in public spaces; photography; and in 1970s New York, when spray can graffiti hit the streets and subways before being assimilated by the 'art world'. Drawing on the writings of sociologists about modern graffiti sub-cultures (Macdonald, 2003), and the work of historians (Keegan, 2014), anthropologists (Schacter, 2013 & 2014), artists (Brassai, 1961) and art historians (Duncan, 2010), as well as popular histories (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987) and public policy publications, Clay formulated the hypotheses that were tested in the production of this film.



A Brief History of Graffiti was commissioned as a film to be 'auteured' by Clay. Beyond conceiving, writing and presenting the film, Clay worked with a range of teams across and throughout the production to realise his particular vision and to bring his body of academic research to a popular audience. In doing so, Clay explicitly chose to work with director, Nick Powell and independent production company, Kaboom.

Clay worked with the producer, Marcella Gasche, to identify interviewees and locations that would allow ideas to be rigorously tested. Before filming at locations across the world, Clay walked surrounding areas to identify material to discuss in pieces to camera. This yielded positive opportunities – for example, in New York, a masked graffiti writer (Rusk), working on a painting, agreed to be interviewed. Interviews were held with people who can be regarded as living primary sources for the study of graffiti and street art: Lee Quiñones, one of the seminal 1970s New York graffiti crew 'The Fabulous 5'; the gallerist Jeffrey Deitch (an early 'art world' champion of 1970s New York graffiti writers, including Basquiat); Blek le Rat (a Parisian street artist whose work since the 1970s has been a major influence on Banksy and

many others); and Lek and Sowat, Parisian graffiti artists who were granted Medici Fellowships (established in 1666) by the French Interior Minister, just prior to the film's broadcast.

Interlocutors also included leading Parisian lithographer, Stephane Gribaux; curator and expert on Roman graffiti in Lyon's collections, Georges Cardocean; and Prof. Pascal Arnaud, an expert on Roman graffiti, from Université de Lyon.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the interviewees' workspaces (studio, gallery, museum, workshop or university) and with artists, while observing them producing work. The interviewees' responses opened up new perspectives on the topic, which were reviewed by Clay and the production team during filmmaking. Clay responded dynamically to these new perspectives, introducing relevant new ideas into subsequent interviews.

The interviews were further reviewed and synthesised during the editing process, drawing out new findings and interpretations of the topic.

Prior to first broadcast, Clay's essay about graffiti through the ages as evidence of human creative thinking and practice was published for *BBC History Extra*. The piece explored examples drawn from research conducted before and during filming that could not be included in the film (e.g., Viking, 18th-century French and elements of contemporary graffiti).

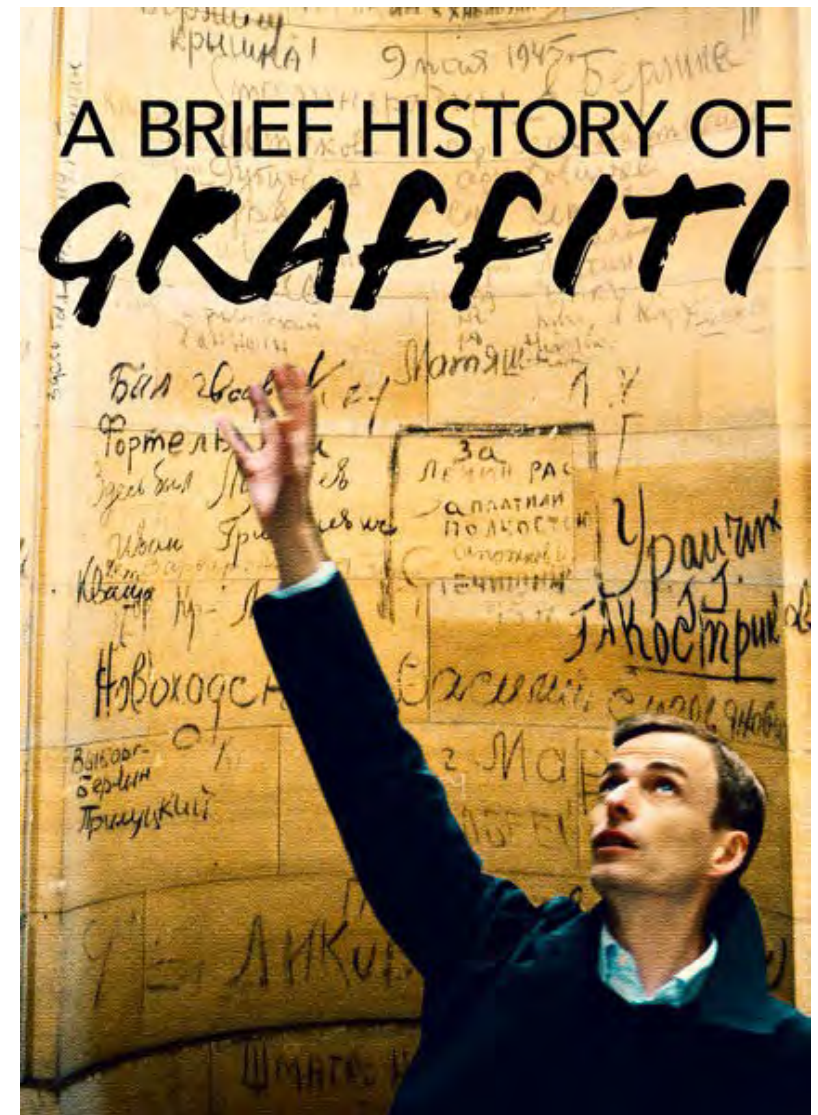
Clay conducted in-depth interviews with *PETRIe* magazine and with *Shortlist* magazine, exploring some of the issues raised by the film. Again, these drew on Clay's research to which the film did not refer (including graffiti from the Middle Ages). In addition, Clay wrote a piece for the *Times* (1 August 2015) that discussed 'six of the best' pieces of graffiti from the past and present.

Following the broadcast of *A Brief History of Graffiti*, Clay was invited to be interviewed about graffiti by the BBC World Service, the BBC News website, BBC 1 Breakfast (see right image), BBC Radio 4's Today programme, BBC1 South East Today, as well as a host of regional radio stations.



Immediately after broadcast, *A Brief History of Graffiti* was made available on the World Wide Web, (and pirated onto YouTube, Dailymotion & Vimeo) where it continues to be viewed. The existence & popularity of pirated copies indicates a wider, on-going audience for this research.

In 2018, Netflix made the film legally available in a wide range of territories beyond the UK – including: USA, Canada, India, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, and Holland – among others. In October 2018, it was broadcast several times in France on the *Histoire* channel.



The article by Verrall & Clay led to an invitation to give a lecture and sit on a panel at an event on 'Conflict and the Information Environment: Future Strategic Communications', held at RUSI (Whitehall) in September 2016.

Co-panelists were Lieutenant Colonel Simon West (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, Riga) and Dr Capt Neil Verrall (Principal Psychologist, UK Defence Science and Technology Lab). Attendees included senior officers from the UK Armed Forces, senior civil servants, the Atlantic Council, and staff from M&C Saatchi and Albany. Drawing on the arguments made within the film and the article, Clay spoke about the influence of graffiti in times of armed struggle.

Clay was also invited to speak at NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence annual 'StratCom Dialogues' event in Vilnius (July 2017) and to chair its closing session – 'The art of making art'. That event had an audience of 500+ drawn from the world's armed forces, governments (including two EU Presidents), civil servants, and commercial organisations.



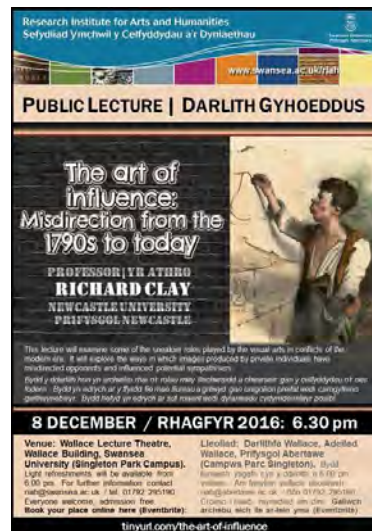
Above: A US and an Iraqi soldier spray paint over graffiti containing anti-coalition forces messages in Tikrit, Iraq, April 2006. Image courtesy of US Army/Teddy Wade. From Verrall & Clay (2016, 69).

Following the broadcast, Clay was invited to show the film and give a keynote lecture at the Urban Creativity annual international conference at Lisbon University (1); a public lecture on the long history of graffiti at Swansea University (2); lecture and join a panel at UCL's Bloomsbury Festival (3); and to serve as a referee for *Defence Strategic Communications* – the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence’s journal (4). The film has been cited in scholarly journals in the UK, USA and Latin America , and in theses by postgraduate research students in the UK and beyond .

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TV CHOICE
A Brief History of Graffiti
 BBC4, 9pm

Procrastinate: art historian Richard Clay (above) is our guide on a journey from line drawings in the 30,000 year-old Caves d'Arcy in central France to the triumphant graffiti of Russian troops who captured

the Reichstag in 1945, and on to the throw-ups and tags which adorn the streets of present-day New York. As well as pondering mankind's urge to leave a mark that says "You need to know that I was here", Clay meets the artists of today: "voices clamouring for attention who want to challenge the dominance of commercial culture in a public space". A heartfelt analysis and a captivating history of art lessons. Recommended. **Mike Bradley**

AN OLD PROBLEM
A BRIEF HISTORY OF GRAFFITI
 WEDNESDAY, BBC4, 9PM
Vandalism, or art?

We tend to think of graffiti as a fairly recent urban phenomenon, but messages supporting local gladiators have been found scrawled on the walls of Pompeii. In this new documentary, Richard Clay looks back at graffiti's long history, and argues that the need to make marks is a primal urge, particularly among the dispossessed. He also talks to Jeffrey Deitch, the man who discovered great pop art on the walls of Manhattan's subways.

A Brief History Of Graffiti
 9PM, BBC4 ★★★★★
 Continuing the pop art season, art historian Richard Clay celebrates a much-maligned art form, graffiti. Provocative and divisive, it is intrinsically linked to human civilisation – from 30,000-year-old cave drawings in France to the triumphant scrawl of Russian troops in Berlin, 1945.



Pick of the day

A Brief History Of Graffiti
 9pm, BBC4
 Looming lankily like the bassist from an ascetic Manc art-pop band, Dr Richard Clay presents an overview of illicit daubs and scratches. Exhibit A is the wall of the Reichstag, scrawled on in charcoal by Russian soldiers; from there Clay loops back to cave paintings and Roman gladiator fan-art, through the lithographs of the Communards and on to the streets of New York. He keeps striving for killer phrasing without always finding it; when he does, during a whirling summary in a Paris alley, he's compelling. JS

PICK OF THE DAY

A Brief History Of Graffiti
 (BBC4, 9pm)

"If somebody decides to tag the side of my house, I'm going to want to break their legs," says Richard Clay – fighting talk coming from an art historian. Clay, however, isn't as hostile to the idea of graffiti as that threat suggests: in this enlightening documentary, the academic sets out to show how writing and drawing on walls is the result of a fundamental human impulse to leave behind a lasting mark. From the 30,000-year-old handprints and buffalo in the caves at Arcy-sur-Care, Burgundy, to the messages left behind on the walls of the Reichstag by the Red Army, Clay explores the diverse incarnations this primal urge for self-expression can take, investigating its political applications and arguing that at its best – the work of New Yorker Lee Quinones, for example – it is art that doesn't need to be qualified by the word "street". Just don't let him catch you near his house with a spray can.

Victoria Segal



A Brief History of Graffiti

DOCUMENTARY 9.00pm, BBC4
NEW For as long as humans have been around, we've been making marks on walls. Art historian Dr Richard Clay is intrigued by our compulsion to leave a visual record of our existence – scratches, paintings or writings that say 'I was here'. In this film, he explores graffiti's evolution from 30,000-year-old

cave paintings in France to the 1970s New York subway murals which caught the eye of – and influenced – the 'real' art world. It's a fascinating story which proves there's far more to graffiti than meets the eye. "The best graffiti is art," Dr Clay declares passionately. "Challenging art." On this evidence, he's right. ★★★★★



Pop Art" – teases the filmmaker Eric Haynes as to whether he can get through his profile without mentioning *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Haynes can't (and shouldn't) of course, as he follows the 82-year-old painter during his latest commission – to re-design a Mersey ferry.

Drama Witnesses
A Brief History of Graffiti
 9PM & 2.55AM BBC4
 The conclusion of this Gallic thriller as Sandra Paul and Sandra finally discover who has been arranging corpses in show homes.

street art?" muses Richard Clay (above) in his celebration of this "mark of our brief existence". His story takes Clay from the Caves d'Arcy in Burgundy with its prehistoric daubs to Eighties New York, by way of Rome catacombs.

A Brief History of Graffiti
 9.00pm BBC4
ARTS Graffiti: the human equivalent of cocking your leg against a tree; a primal urge to leave a mark saying, "I was here". Or as Professor Richard Clay of Birmingham University would have it, the visualisation of voices screaming, clamouring for attention in public spaces. Clay is the perfect presenter for this fascinating survey

of graffiti – from 30,000-year-old cave drawings to "street art" fetching six figures at auction – as he embodies the dichotomy of an art form that is vandalism. While he intellectualises the impulses behind writing on walls, he does so with a swagger that owes much to the graffiti-marked streets where he's pontificating. Before drawing on walls, there's painting a ship, as Sir Peter Blake creates a pop art design for a Mersey ferry in *What Do Artists Do All Day?* (8.30pm) **DAVID CRAWFORD**

The film received significant critical attention. For example, it was selected as a 'pick of the week' or 'of the day' in: (1) *The TV Times* (22 August 2015); (2) *The Sunday Times* (23 August 2015); (3) *The Irish*

Independent (22 August 2015); (4) *The Radio Times* (18 August 2015); (5) *The Observer* (23 August 2015); (6) *The Independent* (26 August 2015); (7) *The Guardian* (26 August 2015) and (8) *The Daily Mail* (26 August 2015).