



Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

**Author/s:**

Dovey, K;Wollan, S;Woodcock, I

**Title:**

Placing Graffiti: Creating and Contesting Character in Inner-city Melbourne

**Date:**

2012-02-01

**Citation:**

Dovey, K., Wollan, S. & Woodcock, I. (2012). Placing Graffiti: Creating and Contesting Character in Inner-city Melbourne. *Journal of Urban Design*, 17 (1), pp.21-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2011.646248>.

**Persistent Link:**

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/230654>

**PLACING GRAFFITI: Creating and contesting character in inner-city Melbourne**  
**Kim Dovey, Simon Wollan and Ian Woodcock**

**ABSTRACT:**

Debates over definitions of urban graffiti as either 'street art' or 'vandalism' tend to focus on either contributions to the field of artistic practice or violations of a legal code. This paper explores the place of graffiti as an urban spatial practice - why is graffiti where it is and what is its role in the constructions and experiences of place? Through interviews and mapping in inner-city Melbourne we explore the ways that potential for different types of graffiti is mediated by the micro-morphology of the city and becomes embodied into the urban habitus and field of symbolic capital. From a framework of Deleuzian assemblage theory graffiti negotiates ambiguous territories between public/private, visible/invisible, street/laneway and art/advertising. Graffiti is produced from intersecting and often conflicting desires to create or protect urban character and place identity. We conclude that desires to write and to erase graffiti are productive urban forces, while desires to promote or protect it are problematic.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Lonely Planet travel guide lists the graffiti covered laneways of Melbourne's inner city as one of the city's premier tourist attractions. Yet when images of these laneways were used by the state tourist authority for international place marketing, a political dispute erupted. The Minister for Tourism was forced to rebuke his own department, saying: "graffiti is not the way we want Melbourne to be promoted to a global audience" (Mitchell, 2008). Meanwhile, an image in one of these lanes by the famed British graffiti artist Banksy was covered with perspex (by the building owner) to protect it from overwriting. Graffiti has both positive and negative symbolic capital, it adds and diminishes streetscape value. The boundaries between vandalism and street art or between art and advertising are far from clear, but neatly resolving such distinctions is not our aim in this paper. These contradictions suggest that we look beyond the content of graffiti to the ways it is framed as an urban spatial practice. Why is graffiti where it is and what is its role in the construction and experience of place? How does graffiti add character to built form, and where?

There is an extensive and growing field of literature devoted to graffiti and street art, from the popular to the academic, and from fine arts to criminology. While much of this work is limited to recent decades, graffiti has a history as long as Western urbanism (Stahl 2009). Ellis (1975) published some of the earliest photos of Australian graffiti over thirty years ago, including many from inner-city Melbourne. The content consisted primarily of political slogans, anti-billboard campaigns and some gang tagging. A major transformation came with the advent of punk, metal and hip-hop movements in the 1980s fuelled by MTV and other new media. This led to a rapid global spread of primarily railway graffiti from the New York subways (Castleman 1984). The new Melbourne graffiti of the 1980s was mainly along railway lines and on railway carriages (Cubrilo et al 2009). In 1993 the railways were privatized bringing new regimes of control and many urban artists moved into the streets. Melbourne's graffiti scene has often featured since in books produced for a global arts audience (Dew, 2007; Smallman & Nyman, 2005; Lunn, 2006; Manco, 2004; Ganz, 2004) and in the academic literature (Halsey & Young 2006, Young 2010; McGaw 2008).

In the debates over graffiti's status as vandalism-versus-art, it is worth noting that vandalism and art are commonly defined as opposites (destruction versus creation), yet both can also be seen as different forms of transgression. While vandalism transgresses the law, art frames a range of

discursive transgressions. With authorized public art often serving instrumental roles such as place branding, stimulating consumption or celebrating history, graffiti is often the most transgressive of public arts. The criminal status of graffiti in Melbourne is unambiguous; anyone can be criminally charged for mere possession of spray cans.<sup>1</sup> The criminality of graffiti is based on a perception of violated property rights and of damage to neighbourhood image or place identity. Yet neither the ownership of blank urban walls nor questions of place identity are stable concepts. The question of vandalism-versus-art calls for an interrogation of conceptions and experiences of place.

The majority of sociological, ethnological, criminological and anthropological accounts of graffiti engage with the question of who writes graffiti, and why. Graffiti is widely linked to youthful rebellion (Sanders, 2005; Austin, 2001) and the construction of subcultural identities (Macdonald, 2001; Iveson, 2007; Castleman, 1984; Rahn, 2001). The urban context of graffiti featured in an early study of the territoriality of urban youth gangs, where graffiti functions as communication between gangs and gang members (Ley & Cybriwsky 1974).<sup>2</sup> There are studies that focus on the site specificity of graffiti (Chmielewska 2007) yet the research focus remains on how graffiti benefits from, rather than contributes to, the place. Where territory is considered in the literature, graffiti is commonly compared to animals marking their territory through urination. Graffiti is linked to dirt and bodily waste, and in turn to the seminal work by Douglas (1966: 35), who famously defined dirt as “matter out of place”. The term ‘place’ in this famous phrase is a social ideal wherein anything foreign represents danger. For Douglas the ways we categorize material things and spaces is primarily based in social categories; in eliminating dirt we are “not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea” (Douglas, 1966: 2). Cresswell (1992) used this theme to argue that the spatial context of graffiti is vital in understanding how it will be received and defined. Graffiti not only transgresses the purity of a place but often also the authorised symbolic meanings and practices of power (Cresswell 1992: 342; Young 2005). Graffiti quite literally ‘takes place’ in the sense that it appropriates the street; it is ‘uncalled for’ (Stahl 2009: 74) yet demonstrates the claim of a ‘right’ to the blank surfaces of the city. Unlike the artwork of the gallery or salon, graffiti has a captive audience – a condition it shares with architecture and advertising, while it differs from them in its informality, illegality and transgression of codes.

The literature of environmental criminology tends to link graffiti to other forms of criminal behaviour that cluster in derelict urban locations (Eck & Weisburd, 1995; Brantingham & Brantingham 1993; Reynald & Elffers 2009). Graffiti is often uncritically seen as a negative factor needing control, linked to the ideas of defensible space and crime prevention through environmental design (Newman, 1972; Coleman, 1985). Such literature is linked to the ‘broken windows’ theory of crime that suggests a single broken window (by implication a single tag) signifies a place of dereliction and initiates an escalation of vandalism and crime (Wilson & Kelling 1982). Such a view generally leads to zero tolerance policies to stop the escalation.

There is also a great deal of support in the academic literature for graffiti as both an art form and an expression of the right to the city. For Austin (2010: 44): ‘Graffiti art performs the theatrical right to the city, to the streets, to the shared public spaces of urban modernity. It enhances city life.’ Halsey and Young (2006), within a framework of Deleuzian social theory, suggest graffiti has less to do with vandalism than with the embodied ‘desires’, ‘pleasures’ and ‘capacities’ of the writers. They suggest that graffiti writers experience blank urban walls as unfinished spaces of potential (Halsey & Young 2006: 289). Our approach in what follows, while also informed by a Deleuzian perspective, investigates two questions that have scarcely been researched. First, how do these desires map onto particular urban morphologies? Second, how is graffiti understood by residents in everyday urban life and how is it seen to damage or contribute to the character of particular urban places?

## **TYPOLGY & MORPHOLOGY**

In order to examine the relationships between graffiti and urban character we undertook a detailed survey of graffiti in two inner-city Melbourne suburbs, Fitzroy and Brunswick. These sites were chosen as part of a much larger study of intensification and changes in urban character (Dovey et al, 2010).<sup>3</sup> We choose to explore them here because they are examples where graffiti

was seen by residents to be an integral part of the character, both positive and negative, in contrast to other parts of Melbourne where graffiti was largely regarded as unambiguously negative. Both Fitzroy and Brunswick have a rich mix of residential, retail, entertainment and light-industrial uses, well serviced by public transport. Both are fine-grained neighbourhoods with a diverse array of building stock, but they are undergoing a change in land-use and resident demographics through gentrification, with consequent strains on residents' perceived sense of character. Residents commonly describe both Fitzroy and Brunswick as edgy, funky and diverse, terms that refer to both the social and physical character of the areas (Dovey et al, 2009; Woodcock et al, 2009).<sup>4</sup>

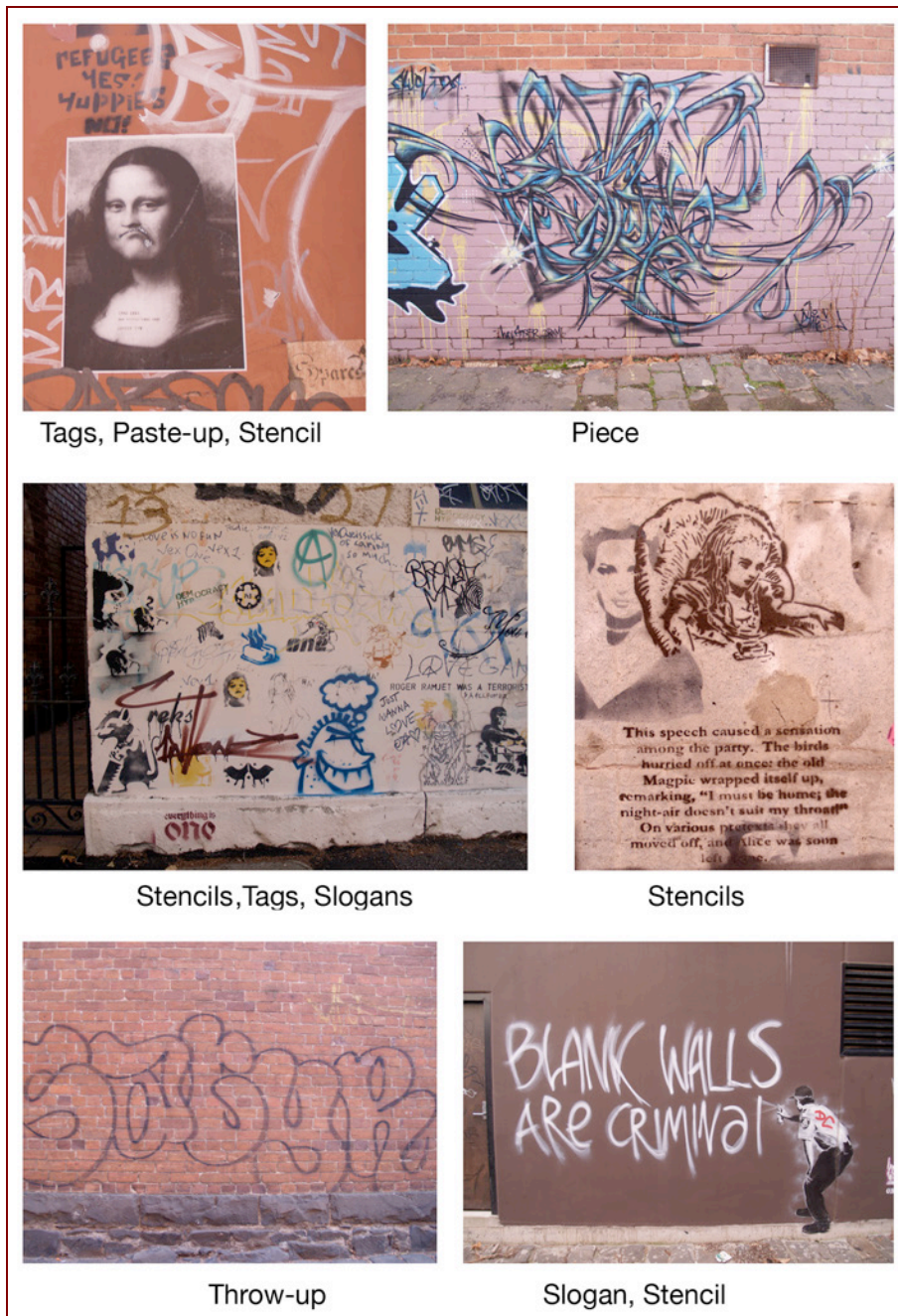


Figure 1: Graffiti typology

The graffiti we have mapped in our study areas conforms loosely to a broadly consistent lexicon that has emerged globally to describe categories of graffiti (Dew, 2007; Halsey & Young, 2002;

Kasino, 1997). The most commonly recognised types are 'tags', 'throw-ups', 'stencils', 'paste-ups', 'slogans' and 'pieces' (Figure 1). 'Tags' are a graphic signature written as a very fast and simple way to get a name onto a surface with a primary content of 'I was here'. 'Throw-ups' are enlarged versions of a tag, generally take longer to complete but are performed rather than finished images. 'Stencils' and 'paste-ups' are sprayed and stuck on respectively. Like the tags and throw-ups they can be reproduced very quickly but the designs are more complex (often poetic or obscure) and they seek a broader audience. The production of the artwork primarily happens in private and the application to the wall is relatively unskilled. 'Slogans' are textural rather than graphic and are highly legible - content is generally political or poetic and they address a broad public. In all of these types safety from prosecution is achieved through speed of application. The 'piece' is a larger scale, complex and time-consuming work often involving multiple colours and complex graphic design. The design of a piece is often the name of the writer but stylized until it is almost illegible to non-writers.

The distinctions between these categories are blurred - tags slide into throw-ups which slide into pieces; stencils, paste-ups and pieces can incorporate slogans. As we move through this typology from tags and throw-ups to pieces there is a major increase in both the time of application and design skill. Pieces, stencils and paste-ups are often semantically rich but with ambiguous meanings - in this they take on characteristics of the fine arts. The best examples of these categories are widely regarded as street-art rather than vandalism. In some cases they have been informally legalised through arrangements between writers and property owners; there is not the same pressure to complete a work in the shortest time possible. We also begin to see other forms of slippage as pieces can be legally commissioned as wall murals or student art-projects, paste-ups can slide into bill posters and art slides into advertising.

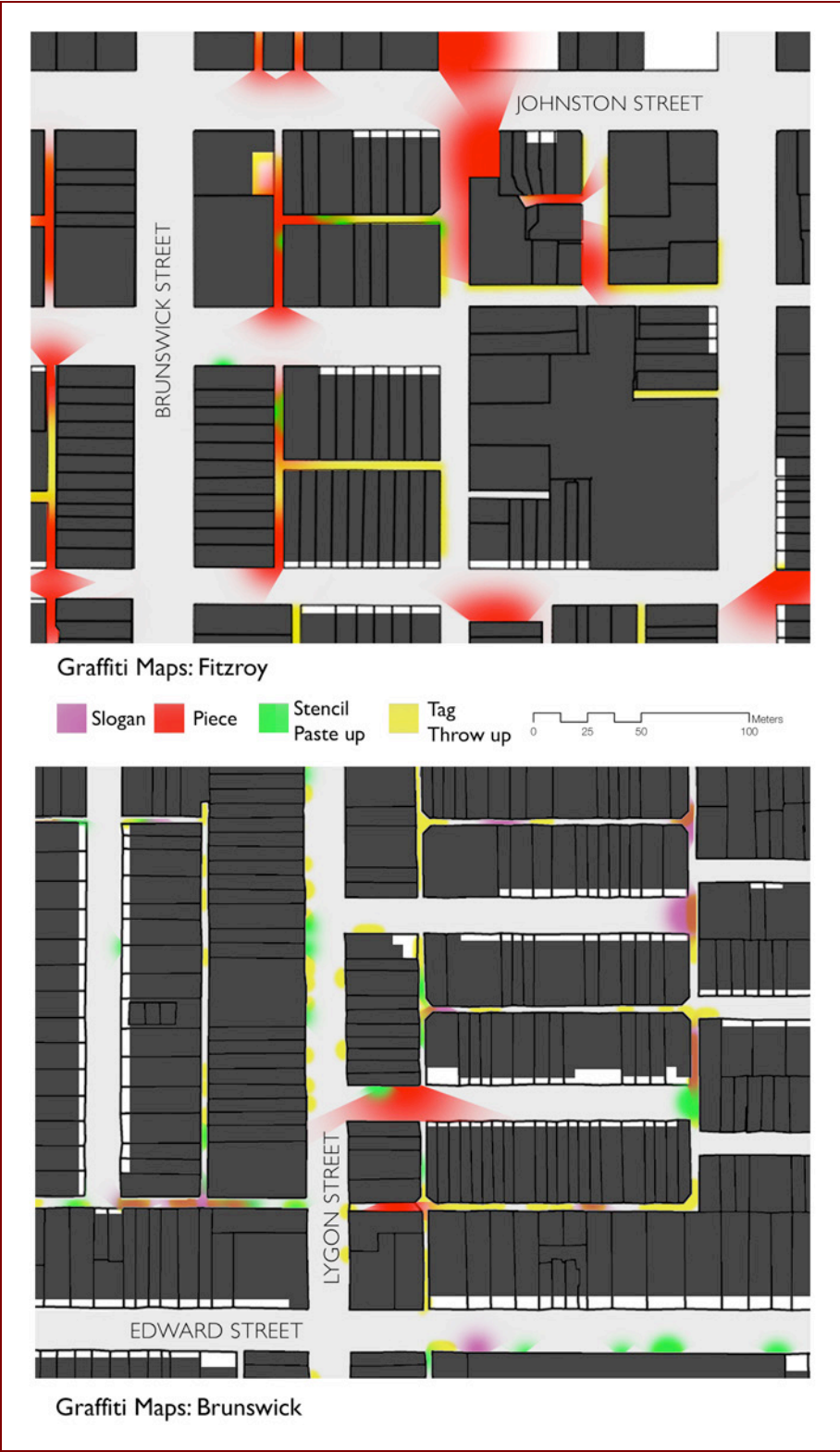


Figure 2: Graffiti and morphology in Fitzroy and Brunswick

Figure 2 maps all publicly accessible space in key sections of Fitzroy and Brunswick and shows how the materiality of urban morphology links to the expression and visibility of graffiti. The sprayed cones represent zones of visibility in public space and shows how large ‘pieces’ can

become visible from long distances. The map also shows how the urban morphology mediates complex fields of visibility and opportunity. Both traditional and recent building types and development processes in Brunswick and Fitzroy tend to produce large amounts of visible blank wall but also stretches of garden frontage (shown as setbacks behind lotlines). The street network of both places can be loosely divided into main streets (largely lined with retail) side and back streets (lined with a mix of residential, warehouse, industrial and some retail); and laneways (primarily rear entries). Both suburbs are well provided with rear lanes lined with publicly accessible blank walls and fences. In some parts of Fitzroy and Brunswick laneway frontages are roughly equivalent in length to street frontage. When we add the fact that corner properties often present a blank side wall to one street, the amount of blank side and rear walls often exceeds entry frontage. There are also many blank streetwalls produced by non-residential buildings such as warehouses, workshops and offices as well as the blank facades and garage doors of new infill housing. Most of the older housing stock is row housing with small front gardens. Patterns of pedestrian movement within this morphology are primarily along the streets although the public gaze regularly penetrates into and through the laneways. While the lanes are often derelict and little used, in Fitzroy the spatial structure is regarded by residents as integral to the urban character and is legally protected by heritage legislation.

It has been noted in the literature that graffiti is mediated by the field of public visibility or what Brighenti (2010: 329) calls "an economy of public attention." Ferrell and Weide (2010: 51) argue that: 'graffiti writers seek recognition... they need people to see their graffiti. Because of this, each act of writing graffiti involves a deliberate decision weighing visibility, location and risk.' The contradictory desire is for the performance to be hidden from the public gaze but for the results to be exposed. Tagging and throw-ups proliferate in back laneways where they are safe from surveillance lack publicity – plenty of surface but not enough gaze. The public streetwalls have plenty of exposure but this exposure carries the danger of arrest. The more time one spends on a piece the less likely it is to be quickly erased but the more likely one is to be apprehended. The location of large pieces ranges from the deepest laneways to side streets and depends on the degree to which the wall is territorialised or identified with a specific household, institution or enterprise. Legal ownership is not sufficient to define the territoriality of a surface - a complex interplay of rules, customs, uses, building forms, materials and ethical codes mediate the degree of appropriation by graffiti. Ferrell and Weide (2010: 54-5) suggest that 'moral codes of the subculture' generally protect private house frontages and this was evident in this study where terrace house frontages were largely clear of graffiti (Figure 2).



Figure 3: Row end

One highly visible location for elaborate works of graffiti is the end of a row of terrace houses, where blank brick walls face the street or laneway (Figure 3). These row ends are generally visible in oblique view as they punctuate the streetwalls of row housing. In such locations the pieces quite often run right up to the corner but not onto the front of the house. These end walls may or may not include windows but are more likely sites for graffiti if they do not. Such locations have an ambiguous quality in that they are both part of the house yet not fully identified with it. The Victorian style of most of these buildings reinforces the distinction between an expressive front and a blank side of exposed brick wall. Some of these pieces tend towards wall murals (or 'legals') since they are likely to have been commissioned by or negotiated with the residents and are signed by well-known graffiti artists. They often last for a number of years and are commissioned by residents to deter tagging.

Row-end walls to shops that occur adjacent to the main streets have a largely identical morphology to that of the residential rows but offer a substantially different role in the assemblage. The very high visibility of these walls lends them a capital value that both excludes and co-opts graffiti. Any tagging or throw-ups in these locations is likely to be erased because it damages the brand of the shop. Yet there are a number of locations where large pieces have been either authorized by the shop-owner or incorporated into the advertising regime for its products. In such cases there is generally a close connection between the youth subcultures who identify with the street art and the clientele of the outlet. Figure 4 shows a range of types on a corner shop from the tags and throw-ups of the laneway to a series of co-ordinated pieces (faces) along the street frontage. These pieces also frame (and informally advertise) the entrance to a gallery at the rear of a shop and then compete with the billboard at the point where they become visible from the main street.



Figure 4: From laneway to billboard

On the main shopping streets the wall surfaces are largely saturated with advertising and display; graffiti is largely confined to tags and stencils located on the boundary columns between shopfronts. The main street in Brunswick which has less intensive retail development than Fitzroy also has significantly more graffiti (Figure 2). The slippage that occurs between legal/illegal and art/advertising on the end walls of shops sometimes extends to the shopfront and interior design of the shop. Again there may be a level of ambiguity involved as the art/advertising slippage lends a certain street-cred to the products within the store. Figure 5 shows a Brunswick restaurant where a rather messy mix of advertising billboards and graffiti has been replaced with a long graffiti-themed mural as an integral part of sidewalk dining. Here the image

is at once readerly and writerly: advertising the restaurant while incorporating graffiti signatures that are largely illegible. Figure 6 proclaims 'just another mural' on a laneway adjacent to a shop that sells graffitied skateboards. There are also corporate commissions where the goal is not advertising; in Figure 7 a food warehouse has commissioned a wrap-around mural that establishes both corporate and artist identities, yet its prime task is protection against tagging.



Figure 5: Graffiti republic



Figure 6: Just another billboard



**Figure 7: Prophylactic graffiti**

This slippage of street-art into advertising can also be practised across the larger neighbourhood and on pavements. In 2009 stencils advertising fast food, mobile phones and the dangers of ecstasy began to appear in Fitzroy while others advising safe sex practices (with links to a Government-run website) appeared in Brunswick. Informal and rhizomic practices of graffiti production are here infiltrated by top-down advertising and public health campaigns precisely because graffiti has the attention of the target market – like an advertorial this is advertising camouflaged as street art.

While most laneways are lined with a mix of tags and throw-ups with pieces appearing only where they intersect with the public gaze, some laneways emerge as highly developed but informal graffiti 'galleries'. The locations of these galleries are generally close to shopping strips with easy access and visibility from main streets. Though the content of the graffiti may change, these locations continue to be used. As with many subculture districts these galleries may drift or disappear as newer ones emerge.

The practices of graffiti writing go well beyond the logic of visibility and are mediated by the microscale material and morphological potentials of particular wall surfaces. The urban or micro-context can be used to add meaning to graffiti that then becomes inextricably grounded in place. Figure 8 may read "Are you afraid..." or "...to make a new culture?" depending on one's position in the street. Figure 9 appears imprisoned or freed depending on the gate being open or closed respectively. Graffiti is often layered like a palimpsest with new work responding to the work beneath it with transformed meanings and partial erasures. This links to the erasures that occur when residents attempt to keep the walls of their houses clean or when one graffiti writer erases older work with a new layer. Some residents have a practice of instant erasure and writers soon learn not to bother. Even the most elaborate of pieces do not last forever (Figure 10).



Figure 8: Changing perspectives



Figure 9: Context as frame

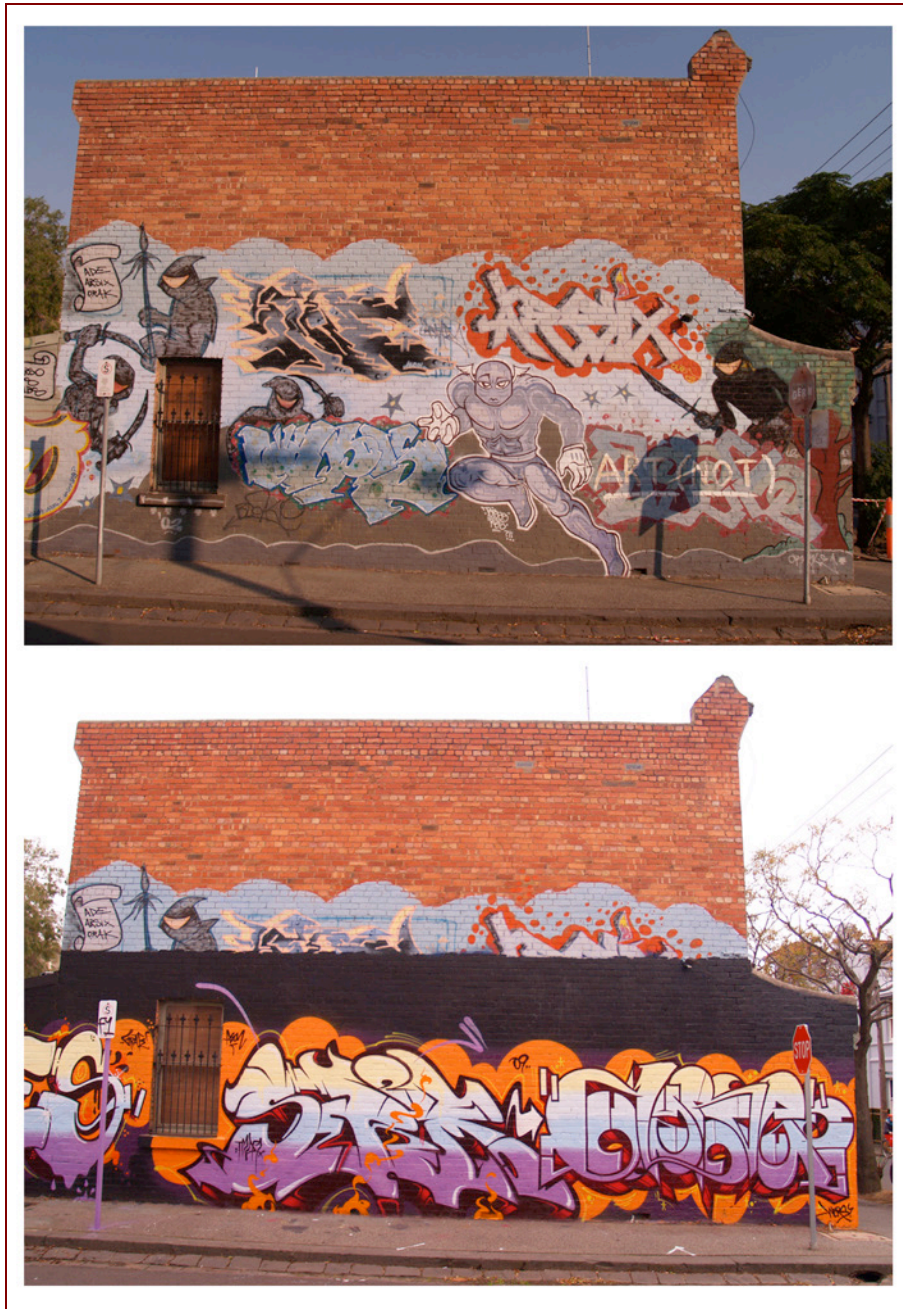


Figure 10: Transformations

## URBAN CHARACTER

We now turn to an account of resident attitudes to graffiti in these two case studies. This material is based on a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, as part of a series of larger studies into place and urban character (Dovey et al, 2008, 2010; Woodcock et al, 2009). These studies involved an attempt to understand the different ways that 'character' is experienced by residents in different parts of Melbourne. In all cases character is described in general terms as the 'feel' or 'atmosphere' of a particular place that is seen as both objectively based in urban form and subjectively experienced. Character is slippery because it is inseparably both social and physical. Resident attitudes to urban form are strongly aligned with social attitudes to other residents; support for or opposition to proposed developments often intersects with issues of class and ethnicity (Dovey et al, 2010). Neighbourhood 'character' is not a fixed and stable condition, but an emergent property of everyday life that is produced in part by the struggles to defend it. The character of both case studies here was

primarily portrayed as a valued diversity of both people (differences of social class and ethnicity) and buildings (differences of building type, scale and setback); dynamism and change were conceived as integral to place identity.

The discourse on graffiti was not a key focus of the methodology of these case studies but rather emerged as one dimension of urban character. Our mapping and spatial analysis of it followed its emergence as a salient issue in the interviews. Fitzroy's character is defined in terms of a rich social and spatial mixture - different people as well as different building types and styles. This is not seen as a stable or necessarily harmonious mixture but a somewhat seedy, edgy and transgressive character:

[Fitzroy] is different, it is...it has that 'edge' that people are interesting, that it has a good atmosphere. It has a sort of a seedy side, a sort of an underbelly that is in a way a little bit scary, but it also has a community, it has character and it has depth.

Brunswick is also seen as characterized by a spatial and formal mix rather than consistency:

Brunswick is chaotic and it's crazy and its noisy and its smelly and it's all that stuff, sometimes that stuff really gets to me, but ... if we got rid of all the trams and the traffic and the light industry it wouldn't be Brunswick ... (B2)

In both places attitudes to graffiti are decidedly ambiguous:

I admit that when I see it on my own wall here, you know I have a flitter of irritation. If my whole wall got painted like that, I would (care)... but I really don't care. If I'd tidied up the front of the house and then they sprayed it, I'd be irritated. But there's a big wall there... No, I don't mind the graffiti. I like the graffiti. (F7)

Well, I don't like this stuff [tags] it's not - but if it's done properly, then, yeah, there's nothing wrong with that, it adds a bit of character really. We don't want it all spick and span. (B1)

In both of these cases the attitude moves from irritated to neutral and then to positive in a single response. The distinction between good and bad graffiti is linked to both where it is and to the artistic quality. A good number of resident responses reflect the idea that graffiti, like dirt, becomes vandalism when it is 'out of place'. The most trenchant opponents tend to link graffiti to abjection, rubbish and obscenity, but always qualified with the sense that it has a place somewhere else:

the one thing I really really don't like is the graffiti, I find that really obscene... is it art or is it vandalism?... Some of it's very clever but they put it on private property... it is vandalism, bottom line. (F4)

It's just vandalism. If it was their home or their place, I'm sure they wouldn't like someone coming to do it to their place. It's vandalism. I like it when I see it on, sometimes inside or under a bridge or something like that and if it's done nicely. (B15)

when I see people just tagging somebody's front fence, I just think surely there's somewhere else you could have tagged which wouldn't have upset anybody. (B13)

While it is acknowledged that all graffiti conveys meaning, it is often the resident's exclusion from this aesthetic field that marks graffiti as vandalism.

I suppose for some people it means something. Personally I feel it's an eyesore. You see some of the stuff and it's a real work of art, others it's just this shit with a texta. (B9)

Opposition to graffiti is sometimes linked to the idea that graffiti writers are not residents:

I think that's a bit of a problem about Fitzroy, that that it's so acceptable to actually go around and write slogans on people's property... It sort of adds to it and it makes it Fitzroy, but most of them are not even people that live there, just people that come in and put their labels on ... I do appreciate

some of it, I think the template stuff is brilliant— visually very clever—but the obscenities and the spray can stuff is just rubbish... (F4)

Note again the ambivalence – the graffiti is a ‘problem’ that also ‘makes it Fitzroy’; this identity is seen as mostly produced by outsiders but is nonetheless appreciated for its aesthetic contribution. Graffiti in Brunswick is also widely seen to contribute to character, however, one resident suggests the opposite.

It’s just recent this graffiti business, windows getting smashed, graffiti, I think some of that has to do with the little bars that are opening everywhere... the graffiti in the area is taking away from the character... (B15)

Here, as in some of the literature discussed earlier, graffiti is conflated with other forms of crime and even bars. While long-term residents may see graffiti as an intrusion, newer residents see it as an inherent part of the character and even part of what attracted them there. The very sense of disorder that upsets some residents is valued by others, albeit at a distance:

We’re inner-city people. Graffiti, as long as it isn’t on the side of my car, I don’t care about the rest of it... Look, I think a certain amount of disorder is a positive thing. It provides some sort of creative energy. Places that are too orderly and neat aren’t great. (B12)

Graffiti is sometimes linked to the idea of a social mix which is widely seen as an integral part of the neighbourhood character:

I think it’s healthy to have one community against another community within the same community (F10)

The best of the graffiti brings an image of creativity to these neighbourhoods, making them more attractive for gentrification which in turn threatens creative subcultures:

if more people like me move there eventually it will become maybe cleaner and smarter and nicer and it will lose some of that character that was actually the reason we moved there ... and that’s why I don’t complain about .. the graffiti because I don’t want it to change.. (F4)

We see in this quote the way that graffiti produces a kind of productive discomfort - the ambivalence is a result of conflicting desires to keep graffiti at a distance yet to remain part of a rich urban mix. For some residents graffiti writing embodies the edginess of new ideas:

I’ve actually accepted it as a form of urban entertainment and I must say, when I see a new genre of it I ... genuinely look at it and think ‘that’s different!’ (laughter) ‘that’s clever!’. I don’t have a problem with it, which doesn’t mean to say that I might not have it painted out. (F10)

For some residents the acceptability of graffiti is more about social or legal agreement:

It can look effective if it’s done right or if it’s someone comes and asks you "Can I put a picture on your wall?" and you agree if it’s a shop or something and if they draw something that complements the shop and it’s something to do with the shop, advertisement for the shop or something, I don’t see a problem with that. (B15)

In other words, it would be more acceptable if it were a wall mural or advertisement rather than graffiti. The categories of art and commerce thus provide social legitimation for what are otherwise perceived as transgressive personal acts of expression signifying social decay and a loss of authorized control.

## THE PLACE OF GRAFFITI

There are many theoretical lenses that might be deployed here and it may be useful to view this connection of graffiti to place identity and character through some of them. Inasmuch as

local character and place identity is genuinely unique, it can be seen through an economic framework as a form of local monopoly (Harvey, 1996: 297–298). From this view the distinction between tagging and street art is that the former repels while the latter attracts capital through a market desire for authenticity. While tagging is linked to dereliction and abjection, street art can be a key dimension of gentrification. Halsey and Pederick (2010) suggest that graffiti generates value by appropriating and transforming the undervalued sites of urban space. It has long been well known that artistic subcultures are the harbingers of gentrification (Smith 1996) and graffiti can be seen in this framework as a set of practices that appropriates the underused wall surfaces of post-industrial urban landscapes before they are re-appropriated in turn by both housing and arts related industries. Thus there can be a close relationship between graffiti and the ways in which subcultural creative clusters emerge and migrate around the city.

Both Fitzroy and Brunswick are identified as places where a dynamic social and formal mix is key; they contrast with places of purity and closure where all graffiti is seen to pollute the character. Massey has been a key proponent of a progressive, global and open sense of place that is open to difference, forward looking and globally connected (Massey 1994, 2005; Cresswell 2004). From such a view notions of place identified with stasis, nostalgia and enclosure are problematic because they privilege deeply rooted and essentialized identities that marginalize difference. The 'progressive sense of place' is always in process; it valorises routes rather than roots (Massey 1993: 66-7). In this view a place can have a complex and unique character without essentialism; a sense of place that is neither inward nor backward-looking. We have argued elsewhere that this is the case for both Fitzroy and Brunswick where place identity is deep-seated without being deep-rooted (Dovey et al 2009; Woodcock et al, 2009).

The question of the relation of graffiti to place identity also affirms the Lefebvrian insight that spatiality and sociality are inextricably intertwined – space is at once a product and a mode of production; space is socially constructed as sociality is spatially constructed (Lefebvre 1991). This reciprocity is apparent in the continual slippage (often in mid-quote) between social and spatial aspects of both graffiti and character. In Fitzroy both the people and the morphology are 'edgy' and 'seedy'; in Brunswick they are 'crazy' and 'chaotic'. In both cases the graffiti is inextricably intertwined with both urban morphologies and social identities. In such contexts there is a need for concepts and approaches that cut across sociality/spatiality and subject/object divisions.

Bourdieu's conception of the habitus is one such socio-spatial concept that joins habit to habitat as it structures the taken-for-granted experiences and practices of everyday life (Bourdieu 2000; Dovey 2010: Ch 3). The habitus is described as 'a sense of place, a sense of one's place' and a 'sense of the other's place' (Bourdieu 1990, p.113). It is also a 'feel for the game' of social practice (Bourdieu 1993, p.5), embodied rather than selfconsciously understood. The integration of graffiti and place involves the degree to which dispositions to write, consume, tolerate and erase graffiti have become embodied into the urban habitus. The appropriation of public wall surfaces by graffiti writers is an integral part of the practice of everyday life that requires a sophisticated 'feel for the game'. The 'rules' of graffiti writing are embodied, unselfconscious and reproduced through performance; its habits and its habitats form a sense of place that is also part of an urban habitus. Bourdieu's phrase 'feel for the game' also resonates with the way residents describe character as a 'feel' of the neighbourhood.

The work of Bourdieu on 'fields' of cultural production (Bourdieu 1984; 1993) is also of interest here. Art, architecture, urban planning, commerce, advertising and criminology are all relevant fields in this sense. The stakes available in any field are defined by Bourdieu as kinds of capital and of key interest here is symbolic capital - the social distinction that accrues with aesthetic 'taste'. Fields of cultural production are seen in terms of an opposition between a popular mass culture and a more esoteric avant-garde - the sub-field wherein popularity and profit are disavowed; where the complex and difficult is privileged and the boundaries of art are transgressed. Graffiti has some characteristics in common with the avant-garde – it is not-for-profit, transgressive and can be difficult to understand. As Austin (2010: 44) has argued graffiti

'disrupts the coherence of common-sense aesthetics. It violates the urban habitus.' (Austin 2010). Within Bourdieu's critique, the blank canvas becomes a painting only through the act of framing in a gallery where the capacity to see it as art becomes a mark of social distinction (Bourdieu 1984). In some ways graffiti involves the reverse - the blank streetwall becomes a canvas; rather than found objects or ready-mades being turned into art, urban walls are founded as ready-made galleries. While the gallery works by establishing a contemplative distance between the artwork and everyday life; graffiti erodes this distance and inherently resists incorporation into the field of art. There are no curators to authorize whose work gets on the wall and no way to stop good work being over-painted except peer group respect. Graffiti is inextricably enmeshed in the city with its intersecting fields of commerce, architecture, planning and law.

This grounding of graffiti in the myriad forms and practices of everyday life links also to the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) on 'assemblages' produced by flows of desire (DeLanda 2006). While the rhizomic practice of graffiti writing is often seen through a Deleuzian framework (Brighenti 2010, Halsey & Young 2006), the link to conceptions of place is less clear. From such a view what we call 'places' can be seen as assemblages (Dovey 2010: Ch.2). A neighbourhood is a dynamic assemblage of connections, of which the desires to write or erase graffiti are part. The desires of graffiti writers to find new walls and to find an audience escalates until it reaches certain limits where it is checked by the desires of residents to erase it or those of capital to exploit it. While tagging often escalates in the back lanes, limited only by a lack of visibility or by saturation, on the more visible streetwalls graffiti reaches a range of informally negotiated settlements with the interests and desires of residents and traders. Such negotiations include both the 'where' and the 'what' of graffiti - both the extensiveness (not on my front wall, maybe on the side) and the intensity of the imagery (no tagging). Such 'settlements' can be seen to link the settlement as place to the concept of the 'plateau' - a concept deployed by Bateson to define a level between levels where escalating conflicts are contained by social codes (Bateson 1973: 113). This complex social and formal mix of the urban assemblage is what Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p.33) call an 'intensive multiplicity'. The mixed 'sense', 'feel', or 'character' of the neighbourhood is akin to the flavour of a soup where the addition of spices that may be painful by themselves can add to the experience of the mix. Graffiti, like spice, only makes sense in the context of the urban mix.

\*

This discussion of the place of graffiti and its acceptability to residents has been framed and mapped through a series of twofold constructs: public/private space, visible/invisible walls, legal/illegal practices, vandalism/art and art/advertising. In each case graffiti is shown to operate in the spaces between these poles where the one folds into the other. Graffiti is variously regarded as both street-art and vandalism, it seeks both the privacy of crime and the publicity of exhibition. Graffiti takes on both positive and negative symbolic capital; it both sells and pollutes these places, streets and buildings.

In the case studies we have outlined here graffiti is ingrained and integrated with conceptions of place and character. It is also dependent on the particular materiality and morphology of the neighbourhoods. While it is applied to and erased from urban surfaces, it is more than a veneer applied to the urban fabric because of the deeper social identifications it both facilitates and expresses. The graffiti, like the sense of place, is deeply ingrained without being deeply rooted as essence; it is immanent rather than transcendent. In both Fitzroy and Brunswick place identity is constructed by differences of people, practices and built forms. The different viewpoints on graffiti are integral to this mix. The graffiti is not only produced in opposition or competition to gentrification and commercialisation but is also produced and transformed by them.

The graffiti is also thoroughly ingrained with the urban morphology of these places - the degree to which the street grids, building types and architecture produce public or semi-public blank surfaces is crucial to the potential for graffiti. Blank public walls are largely a side effect of density - detached suburban houses with setbacks and perforated fences effectively prevent graffiti. Brunswick and Fitzroy embody not only a mix of people, functions and forms, but also a mix of public and private interfaces. The graffiti covered walls become connections not just

between writers, but between different parts of these communities and between these communities and a broader world.

Graffiti is often an integral part of creative clusters or production ensembles that have come to form key nodes of an information economy - an important source of new symbolic capital for creative industries as both graphic styles and graffiti artists spin off into advertising, graphic design and art galleries. Fitzroy has long housed a significant cluster of creative industries and Brunswick is an emergent cluster.

The key significance of this issue is that it relates to the where of the graffiti and the ways in which it has become appropriated for commercial gain. While graffiti occurred in all our case studies in the other neighbourhoods it was largely limited to tagging in back lanes and was seen by residents as vandalism that violated the urban character. While we do not suggest that creative clusters necessarily produce graffiti we hypothesize that such clusters may create a market for high quality street art, may be linked to tolerant of tagging as a conjunct activity. Creative production is often attracted to mixed-use districts with former industrial buildings with blank external walls forming part of the mix. We suggest that the profusion of graffiti (in Fitzroy in particular) may be linked to a synergistic effect of supply of blank walls and artistic talent together with demand for street art. Creative clusters create the conditions under which graffiti becomes advertising. Graffiti artists in some cases act as globally mobile creative knowledge workers producing work in other cities while that of the imagery they draw on is both highly internationalised and locally inflected. These global flows are a key part of the place-making assemblage.

Such clusters are now well known to work in concert with neo-liberal agendas of gentrification and place branding (Peck 2005; Hutton 2009). A major public wall in Fitzroy was recently covered with a giant mural (Figure 11) that integrates the place branding of Fitzroy ('Welcome to Fitzroy'), an advertisement for the adjacent entertainment venue and promotion of the graffiti crew (Everfresh), who now produce graffiti-themed tee-shirts and books. This mural was completed over several months during which time the blank parts were labelled 'reserved - please respect'. While one could pursue such connections of graffiti, street art, advertising and place marketing to the larger scale assemblage of political economy and globalization that is not the focus here.



Figure 11: Place marketing

By overstepping the codes of property and behaviour graffiti calls these codes into question and constructs a sense of place where sociality is in question. Graffiti becomes integral to urban character in places where it helps to construct this legitimation of transgression, yet it cannot do this without also and at the same time becoming a form of symbolic capital and place branding. Graffiti that emerges and is practised in opposition to advertising is tolerated under condition that it partially becomes its nemesis; as Halsey and Pederick (2010: 97) put it: "graffiti is permitted to exist when it ceases to be itself". McGaw (2008) links this appropriation of graffiti through commodification to the situationist concept of recuperation. This dance with the devil between graffiti and advertising is echoed in the relations of graffiti to the legitimate art of the gallery. Artists often become torn between fields, earning an income from one to subsidize the other. Practices of graffiti writing operate between categories and it is tempting to construct a policy for this middle ground. Young (2010) has suggested a policy of 'negotiated consent' whereby graffiti can remain with the consent of property owners, coupled with 'zones of tolerance'. Yet such progressive policy begs further questions: who determines that blank streetwalls are not public property and who inscribes the boundaries of tolerance? Halsey & Pederick (2010: 97) call for a response that "makes room for graffiti as neither publicly sanctioned art nor crime". Whatever the policy outcomes it is crucial to acknowledge the role of erasure in ensuring both the transience of most graffiti and the ongoing provision of available wall surfaces.

The adaptive game of move and countermove is also played out between writers/artists and residents. Some residents allow their houses to be written on to deter gentrification; others commission large pieces to deter tagging. Each is an attempt to stabilize the assemblage and neither is successful. Near the main streets writers compete with advertising bills and billboards; some shops commission pieces to accrue cultural cachet within their niche market. It is often the struggle between different desires to territorialize that produces intensity – taggers tag and residents erase; one writer overwrites another. Erasures play a key role here - they stimulate both new work and a higher quality of work that will not be quickly erased. Inevitably all work is erased in time. Graffiti finds a place in those parts of our cities where identities and practices are open and unfinished. It is caught in the paradox of authority and authenticity: if graffiti is authentic then it cannot be authorized and once authorized it cannot be authentic.

What graffiti adds to urban space is that it throws its publicness into contention. To understand this requires that we go beyond the question of 'is it art or vandalism?' As Brighenti (2010: 328) puts it: "... the two conventional, opposing views that interpret writing alternatively as art or as deviance fail to identify the real stake in the practice of writing... the definition of the nature and the limits of public space" and affirmed by Halsey & Pederick (2010: 96): "One of the key effects of graffiti is to awaken the city to spaces it has forgotten about and in so doing to redefine the limits and purpose of city-space".

The stencilled image by Banksy that was 'protected' with perspex was soon destroyed when grey paint was poured behind the perspex; another small one by the same artist remains camouflaged in the Fitzroy mix. Meanwhile Melbourne's graffiti attracts tourists and other Australian cities discuss how they can emulate this success (Westbury 2009). The State Premier is adamant that graffiti will not be tolerated nor used for place marketing. This is his role in the larger assemblage - nothing will kill graffiti more effectively than promotion and preservation. Graffiti cannot be fully defined or preserved without becoming purified and killed; a quality it shares with urban character and place identity.

#### References:

- Austin, J. (2001) *Taking the Train* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Austin, J. (2010) 'More to see than a canvas in a white cube', *City*, 14 (1-2), pp. 33-47.
- Bateson, G. (1972) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantyne).
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction* (London: Routledge).
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *In Other Words* (Cambridge: Polity).

- Bourdieu, P. (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Bourdieu, P. (2000) *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
- Brantingham, P. & Brantingham, P. (1993) Nodes, paths and edges', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 13 (3).
- Brighenti, A. (2010) At the wall. *Space and Culture*, 13 (3) pp. 315 –32.
- Castleman, C. (1988) *'Getting Up': Subway Graffiti in New York* (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press).
- Chmielewska, E. (2007) Framing [Con]Text : Graffiti and Place, *Space and Culture*, 10 (2), pp. 145-69.
- Coleman, A. (1985) *Utopia on Trial* (London: Hilary Shipman).
- Cresswell, T. (1992) The crucial 'where' of graffiti, a geographical analysis of reactions to graffiti in New York, *Environment & Planning D: Society & Space*, 10, pp. 329-344
- Cresswell, T. (2004) *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Cubriilo, D., Harvey, M. & Stamer, K. (2009) *Kings Way* (Melbourne: Miegunyah).
- DeLanda, M. (2006) *A New Philosophy of Society* (New York: Continuum).
- Deleuze, G & Guattari, F. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Athlone).
- Dew, C. (2007) *Uncommissioned Art* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press).
- Douglas, M. (1966) *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge).
- Dovey, K. (2008) *Framing Places* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London: Routledge).
- Dovey, K. (2010) *Becoming Places* (London: Routledge).
- Dovey, K., Woodcock, I. & Wood, S. (2008) Senses of urban character, in: Vanclay, F. et al. (eds) *Making Sense of Place* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia).
- Dovey, K., Woodcock, I. & Wood, S. (2009), A test of character, *Urban Studies*, 46 (1/2) pp. 1-21.
- Dovey, K., Woodcock, I. & Wood, S. (2010) Slippery characters, in: Dovey, K., *Becoming Places* (London: Routledge).
- Eck, J. & Weisburd, D. (eds) (1995) *Crime and Place* (New York: Criminal Justice Press).
- Ellis, R. (1975) *Australian Graffiti* (Melbourne: Sun Books).
- Ferrell, J. & Weide, R. (2010) Spot theory, *City*, 14 (1-2) pp. 48-62.
- Ganz, N. (2004) *Graffiti world* (London: Thames & Hudson).
- Halsey, M. & Young, A. (2002) The meanings of graffiti and municipal administration, *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 35 (2), pp. 165-186.
- Halsey, M. & Young, A. (2006) Our desires are ungovernable: Writing graffiti in urban space, *Theoretical Criminology*, 10 (3), pp. 275–306.
- Halsey, M. & Pederick, B. (2010) The game of fame, *City*, 14 (1-2), pp. 82-98.
- Harvey, D. (1996) *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Hutton, T. (2009) Trajectories of the new economy, *Urban Studies*, 46 (5/6), pp. 987-1001.
- Iveson, K. (2007) *Publics and the City* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell).
- Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Ley, D. & Cybriwsky, R. (1974) Urban graffiti as territorial markers, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 64 (4), pp. 491-505.
- Lunn, M. (2006) *Street Art Uncut* (Melbourne: Craftsman House).
- Macdonald, N. (2001) *The Graffiti Subculture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

- Manco, T. (2004) *Street Logos* (London: Thames & Hudson).
- Massey, D (1993) Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place, in: Bird J et al (eds), *Mapping the Futures* (London: Routledge).
- Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity).
- Massey, D. (2005) *For Space* (London: Sage).
- McGaw, J. (2008) Complex Relationships between Detournement and Recuperation in Melbourne's Street (Graffiti and Stencil) Art Scene, *Architectural Theory Review*, 13 ( 2), pp. 222-39.
- Mitchell, G. (2008) Graffiti tourism storm over a mini-Melbourne, *Herald Sun*, Sept.30.
- Newman, O. (1972) *Defensible Space* (New York: Macmillan).
- Peck, J. (2005) Struggling with the creative class, *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, 29 (4), pp. 740-70.
- Rahn, J. (2001) *Painting Without Permission* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).
- Reynald, D. & Efficers, H. (2009) The Future of Newman's Defensible Space Theory and the Routine Activities of Place, *European Journal of Criminology*, 6 (1) 25-46.
- Sanders, B. (2005) *Youth Crime and Youth Culture in the Inner City* (London: Routledge).
- Smallman, J. & Nyman, C. (2005) *Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne* (New York: Mark Batty Publisher).
- Smith, N. (1996) *The New Urban Frontier* (London: Routledge).
- Stahl, J. (2009) *Street Art* (Berlin: Ullman).
- Westbury, M. (2009) 'Like it or not...' *The Age*, June 15, p.19.
- Wilson, J. & Kelling, G. (1982) Broken windows, *Atlantic Monthly*, March. Reprinted in: E. McLaughlin et al. (eds) *Criminological Perspectives* (London: Sage).
- Woodcock, I., Dovey, K. & Wollan, S. (2009) Not in my republic, in: P. Maginn et al. (eds) *Proceedings: State of Australian Cities Conference*, <promaco.com.au/2009/soac>.
- Young, A. (2005) *Judging the Image* (London: Routledge).
- Young, A. (2010) Negotiated consent or zero tolerance?, *City*, 14 (1-2) pp. 99-114.

Notes:

1. In the State of Victoria, it is a crime, punishable by a A\$550 fine, to be found in public space in possession of a spray can (Graffiti Prevention Act 2007).
2. While graffiti gangs do not operate in Australia, graffiti 'crews' collaborate on particular pieces and in particular zones without any strict sense of territory (Halsey & Young 2002: 170).
3. This paper was drawn from research funded by Australian Research Council Discovery Grant (DP0344105) 'What is Urban Character?' and Linkage Grant (LP 0669652) 'The Character of Urban Intensification'. Linkage partners are the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development, and the Cities of Melbourne, Moreland and Yarra.
4. Fitzroy is a smaller and older suburb, closer to the central city with a high proportion of public housing (25%) , a significant presence of recent migrants and a higher level of gentrification. Brunswick houses the remnants of a multicultural working class with less public housing and gentrification.