

Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology

Graffiti

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Subject: Crime, Media, and Popular Culture Online Publication Date: Jul 2017

DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.132

Summary and Keywords

Graffiti has a long history. There are many examples from the history of human cultures of signs and symbols left on walls as remnants of human presence. However, the origins of modern graffiti reside in the explosion of creative activity associated with the development of urban cultural expression among marginalized individuals, groups, and communities in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Graffiti has expanded in form and content as well as geography to become an almost universal urban phenomenon. It is a ubiquitous feature of cities and an adornment of the modern urban landscape. It has developed beyond its original expression and identification with lettering and spray paint to now encompass a range of media and practices that are associated with street art.

Graffiti in particular, but also street art, has engendered contrasting opinions and reactions about its effect, meaning, and value. It elicits a variety of responses both positive and negative. Is it art or is it crime? Is it a creative expression or resistance to dominant urban design discourses and management? Is it vandalism? Is it the result of deviant youthful and antisocial behavior? It has been linked to urban decay and community decline as well as regeneration and gentrification. Graffiti writers and street artists have been criminalized, while others have been lauded and promoted within the commodified world of the art market. The popularity and spread of graffiti as a global phenomenon have led to an increasing academic, artistic, and practitioner literature on graffiti that covers a range of issues, perspectives, and approaches (identity, youth, subculture, gender, antisocial behavior, vandalism, gangs, territoriality, policing and crime, urban art, aesthetics, commodification, etc.). The worlds of graffiti and street art are therefore complex and have provoked debate, conflict and response from those who view them as forms of urban blight as well as from those who perceive them as an expression of (sub)cultural creativity and representative of urban vibrancy and dynamism. The study of who does graffiti and street art, as well as why, where, and when they do graffiti and street art, can help develop our understanding of the competing and contrasting experiences and uses of the city, of urban space, of culture, of design, and of governance. Graffiti is therefore also the focus for social policy initiatives aimed at youth and urban/community regeneration as well as the development and exercise of criminal justice strategies.

Keywords: graffiti, street art, culture, crime, the city, the urban, space

A Brief History of Graffiti

Graffiti has a long history. The term is derived from the Italian, *graffio*, meaning scratching or scribbling. Making marks and writing on walls have long roots in human culture. They were practiced by our distant ancestors as they made cave paintings that represented their life worlds and environment with the depiction of themselves and the animals they depended on or feared. Ancient Greek and Roman buildings throughout their empires of influence have signs, symbols, and messages scratched and drawn by those who sought to leave signs of their presence and passing. The architecture of Meso-American cultures and civilizations similarly is adorned with the graffiti of their populations. Viking adventurers and explorers left marks on walls of places they visited or plundered. Victorians making grand tours in their cultural and tourist pilgrimages felt compelled to leave their mark on historic monuments and important sites they visited. Such signs, symbols, and messages from the past found scratched, carved, written, and drawn on ancient walls therefore reflect a human need to signify existence and presence in spaces they visited, inhabited, or thought of as important (Lovata & Olton, 2015).

Graffiti's modern manifestation resides in the creative expression associated with, and located within, the disadvantaged and deprived communities of U.S. inner cities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In particular, modern graffiti arose as one of the four pillars of hip-hop, which emerged during this period as an innovative and imaginative explosion of urban street culture. Alongside mix masters, MCs, and break dancing, graffiti was fundamental as a visual backdrop for, and signifier of, a new cultural field of expression. For a more detailed discussion of the interlinks between graffiti and hip-hop, see Hager (1984), Forman (2000), and Rahn (2002).

Graffiti was written across neighborhoods, the transport system, and increasingly the whole city as its practitioners spread the word and the signs of their times and culture. This was, at least in part, a demand for the recognition and acknowledgment of the lives and experiences of an urban population who were discriminated against, disenfranchised, alienated, and ignored, except in negative representations in popular and political discourse. Graffiti was a very visible opportunity to give voice to, to paint, to draw, and to write about marginalized urban youth. It was a means of expressing their identity, creativity, worth, and status through the signs and symbols of a new urban aesthetic and cultural politics that expressed their inhabitation and colonization of the city. It demonstrated and celebrated existence, meaning, being, and belonging.

The development of modern graffiti, particularly in New York City, has been documented and illustrated by a number of authors (see Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987; Cooper, 2009A, 2009B, 2013; Cooper & Chalfant, 1984; Felisbret, 2009; Stewart, 2009), reflecting its increasing popularity and appreciation as an important and influential form of urban cultural practice. The rise of graffiti and its spread from the walls of the ghetto through the subway and transit systems of the city (see Austin, 2002; Gastman & Neelon, 2011), as well as its representation in film and music videos, have seen it expand not only geographically beyond its original locations but also socially, beyond its association with the particular groups, ethnicities, and cultures where it began. Graffiti has gone global.

Graffiti has had an influence beyond its manifestation as an adornment to, or as vandalism of, the urban streetscape. It is now the subject of coffee table art books, gallery exhibitions, and auction house sales, and it features as scene-setting in films, music videos, and advertising. It is a ubiquitous feature of towns and cities across the world (Benavides-Venegas, 2005; Best, 2003; Brighenti, 2010; Chmielewska, 2007; Ferrell, 1993; Manco, Lost Art, & Neelon, 2005; Valjakka, 2011). It now bridges time and space and crosses cultural divides. It has become a global popular and populist urban phenomenon. It has an influence beyond its original function as an expression of youthful identity, politics, and practice as well as an accompaniment to, and part of, musical and

cultural expression within specific urban landscapes. It has now become a very common feature of contemporary cityscapes everywhere as it has been adapted by new writers, in new urban geographies, using new methods and media, with new influences and aesthetics. While the influence of hip-hop graffiti can still be seen, local graffiti scenes, practices, and outputs reflect the historical, cultural, social, and political contexts and locations in which they are produced (Ganz, 2004; Jaka, 2012; Schacter & Fekner, 2013).

Modern graffiti originally was, and still is, associated with the use of permanent marker pens and aerosol spray paint to adorn the city with a mainly calligraphic or text-based writing based on “the tag” and its expansion into throw-ups, bombing, blockbuster, and wildstyle, as well as large-scale murals, sophisticated and skillful (master)pieces. However, graffiti remains a street-based embodied practice, in which those who engage in it have a physical presence as they write without permission or approval. It is made on, and in, the streets as unsanctioned and illegal embellishment, adornment, and decoration of the city by predominantly young people who write for a variety of reasons and audiences, not least each other, and the recognition and status to be achieved among fellow writers. Graffiti research among practitioners provides evidence that most writers work within areas and communities that are known to them, and that being recognized and praised by their peers was a prime motivation for their activities.

Since the late 1990s, new means and methods of adorning the streets and walls of cities have developed. Street art employs a variety of techniques and methods that include stencils, stickers (slaps), the pasting up or gluing of prepared posters (“wheatpastes”), and the placing of objects in the public sphere. While for some this reflects an extension of graffiti, for others there are clear distinctions (see Bengsten & Arvidsson, 2014; Catterall, 2010; Iveson, 2010A, 2010B; McAuliffe, 2012; Young, 2012, 2014). Street art not only may be more varied in terms of methods and means, but also may be considered more “legitimate”—attracting paid commissions for work and appreciated more as “art” by the public, by some policing authorities and criminal justice systems, and by the art market. It has also become the focus of growing public attention as “urban art” and has become popular and of interest as a form of creative practice that is collectible and saleable. Banksy may be the best known example of a graffiti artist whose work is regularly bought and sold in auction houses as well as appearing in galleries. However, there are many more writers and artists who are now recognized and promoted as having “value.” This acknowledgment of graffiti and street art and its commodification have led to criticism that the original meanings and values associated with graffiti have been diminished (Bengsten, 2013, 2014; Dickens, 2010). Not all those who have work sold in auction houses, featured in books, or exhibited in galleries are considered as having “time served” in the street or within a community of practitioners. Therefore, graffiti’s location and association with the “street” as an unapproved, unpaid, unsanctioned activity is undermined by its commodification and exchange value.

Motivations and Reasons for Graffiti

Academic research and graffiti writers’ own words reflect a range of motivations and reasons for writing graffiti. It is possible to identify a number of themes, which include territoriality, the marking and claiming of space through writing or painting individual and crew tags, whether or not it is associated with gang affiliation. Engaging in graffiti may also be a reaction to the boredom and frustration experienced by urban youth, where commodified leisure pursuits are out of reach for impoverished, underpaid, or unemployed young people. Spending time on the street corner, hanging out with others, provides solidarity and the opportunity to mark favorite locations or

significant spots. Whether it is explicitly defined as deviant or criminal, tagging or bombing a wall or street has a sense of excitement, adventure, and danger that has appeal and attraction to youth who have little to do and less money to do it with. Writing graffiti can also reflect the need for individual and/or group recognition and status. It provides a means for personal expression, individual and group recognition, and “fame” as an active writer with an identifiable tag. Being known by having your unique tag “spotted” in locations throughout the city brings recognition, status, and notoriety within the community of practitioners and “watchers” of the “scene.” The development of techniques, skills, and abilities through practice in the very public art gallery of work portrayed on the street advertises participation in, and belonging to, a creative community.

Graffiti and street art represent “signs of passing,” remnants of the fleeting presence of those who mark their existence through symbols and signs left on walls, street furniture, and the transport system. There is also (self) identification and (self) publicity within a group of practitioners who assess, critique, and comment on each other’s works. This is supported, promoted, and promulgated through the increasing use of social media. There are any number of digital repositories, open and closed Facebook pages and groups, Instagram posts, forums, and blogs for making and developing contacts, swapping tips, techniques, warnings, and advice as well as publicizing work and creating a sense of group identity and collective endeavor. This sense of graffiti and street art as form, style, and symbolism for an intentional and signifying communication and meaning system demonstrates what Hebdige (1979) argued were defining and characteristic features of subcultural forms of practice and identity.

Thus, there are values, beliefs, meanings, and codes of conduct and practice (e.g., places where it is or is not appropriate to paint or write) that can be associated with graffiti and street art as a subculture. The codes of conduct, the knowledge, and the belonging function as means to bind or include members, however loosely, within a group. Similarly, one can also reflect on the subcultural career of writers/artists as they progress from being novices (“toys”) to experts (“kings”). What is evident is that there are a range of identifiable styles or types of graffiti as well as abilities and skills, from the simple, quickly done tags to the very elaborate and often breathtaking full-wall (master)pieces. There are a language and vocabulary as well as a complicated hierarchy involved in graffiti that reflects an internal communication between practitioners as well as its display and promotion to a general urban public. What is created is an urban (sub)cultural aesthetic and practice that uses the streets of the city as a free gallery, notice board, and medium for display, conversation, and communication among practitioners but also open to a wider public audience. The subcultural activity, style, and material objects can be subsumed and commodified by the market as the subculture becomes more widespread and popular. This has led to internal debate, discussion, and conflict over what is or is not “authentic” and therefore representative.

The Urban Context of Graffiti

Graffiti and street art are inextricably linked to practices and material products that are associated with, and embedded within, urban frameworks of living, working, and being. To understand the practice and products of graffiti, one must appreciate the urban context in which it is situated. Analyzing and understanding the complexity of the modern urban requires an understanding of conflicts over the structure, organization, design, control, and use of urban space. Graffiti’s role in challenging and contesting the sociospatial norms of increasingly privatized and commodified public and social space reflects competing use values between different populations and communities as well as the needs and requirements of capital and business spaces that prioritize commodified exchange. Space is a social product, a creation of particular concatenations of circumstances, ideologies, and institutionalized discourses of privileged power that seeks to limit differences within increasingly homogenized and standardized forms of public space (Lefebvre, 1991; Zieleniec, 2007). Urban social and public space is both

delineated and delimited by its functional requirements and its identification and regulation are oriented toward the necessities of governance, safety, security, and the needs of capital. Urban space is subject to the operation of power that prioritizes ownership and control. Who owns space seeks to exercise power over how it is used, by whom, for what, and when. This can lead to conflicts about how the spaces of the city are used as well as over claims to ownership and the right to be represented and considered in the organization and regulation of those spaces and places that are used, inhabited, and familiar. Space is more than an abstract principle. It is also the lived experience of neighborhood and community.

Conflicts over meanings and values underpin how graffiti and street art reflect contrasting representations of, and use of, urban space. It is viewed by its practitioners and supporters as *a* means to remake the city through the everyday practices of producing ever-changing ephemeral works of inscription or art on and in the material spaces of the city. Practitioners of graffiti and street art employ means and methods of making and owning space, however temporarily (see Bengsten & Arvidsson, 2014; Iveson, 2011). This colonization of urban space through their creative interventions makes claims on how and what space is, what is depicted or portrayed, what is allowed, and what and who it is for. Graffiti as the production and circulation of a symbolic and aesthetic realm of signs, marks, emblems, and characters carries meanings and messages that can be understood as an engagement with, and an intervention in, urban space.

Both graffiti and street art are embodied practices that demand both knowledge of space and physical presence. These creative acts and activities of writing and painting, adornment, and decoration have a clear association with the material urban environment (see Schacter, 2008, 2014; Schacter & Fekner, 2013). They have the potential to subvert dominant spatial and aesthetic forms through creative engagements with, and interventions in and on, the material fabric of the urban. Thus, writers and artists make claims on the right to use, usurp, colonize, and “create” urban space (Nandrea, 1999; Zieleniec, 2016). Graffiti as praxis is an active encounter with the physical and material form of the city that attempts to make space social and public, through the promotion of use values and meaningful acts of inhabitation versus the homogenizing practices of planning, design, and commerce, and their overarching concern with surveillance, order, and security. That is, graffiti can be read as a means for reclaiming and remaking the city as a more humane social space by reflecting the meanings and values of those who inhabit and use the streets and public space of the city that counterbalance the dominating requirements of business (Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 1996).

Making Meaning: Graffiti and the Semiotics of the City

Graffiti as a practice as well as the outcomes or products created and added to the landscape of the city often raises conflicted reactions. On the one hand, it reflects an active engagement with the world and provides opportunity for expressing meanings and values as a practice that sees, reads, and writes the world in ways meaningful not only to the individual but also to a community of other practitioners engaged in similar activities. It can be considered a creative, artistic, and aesthetic urban cultural practice that colonizes, subverts, or adorns often subjugated, dominated, and commodified space. It represents a number of embodied practices (your body has to be there in order to make it) that challenge the delineation, regulation, and policing of the urban as a social and public cultural sphere. It is an everyday act and experience for those who practice graffiti writing but it also can be associated with resistance during particular events, such as riots, protests, occupations, and sit-ins. By utilizing walls for new meanings and messages that represent alternate aesthetic, cultural, or political values, graffiti can be understood as

a form of spatial appropriation, reflecting on and representative of alternate readings and uses of community and space. By conveying new ways of not only reading space but also being in it, graffiti and street art challenge and conflict with the discourses and activities of capital that dominate the built form of the city (that is, the development of an ordered and policed environment that prioritizes consumption, the pursuit of profit, the privatization of collective resources, through the application of urban design, architecture, policing, surveillance, and governance strategies to ensure law and order and security).

Graffiti reaffirms the use value of space, the lived experience and quality of collective or communal life. Graffiti as a practice represents and makes space social by its colonization, by the active engagement and intervention with the urban environment, by challenging the right to occupy space and leave signs, symbols, messages, and images that are not commodified, driven by and for the market, but by and for those who inhabit urban space, urban communities, and neighborhoods. Graffiti can create counterdiscourses that encourage debate, discussion, and potentially conflict over the use and misuse of public space; however, it also encourages and manifests a physical participation in the life and culture of the lived material environment through the appropriation, use, and colonization of urban space. One can read and understand graffiti, painted by night and read by day, as an embodied praxis in the living experience of the city. Graffiti is an everyday practice, using walls and surfaces for expression, for “free” art, and for communication as part of continuing arguments and analyses, that seeks to prioritize and reflect a different understanding of what the city is and who the city is for. Graffiti enacts a use value of space not based on merely business, commerce, and the market.

The city, like every other aspect of life, involves the consumption of signs. All urban citizens need to “read” and understand the semiotics of the city to make sense of information that comes in the myriad meanings and messages that confront us in our everyday experience. The city is a complex process and concentrated node of existence that requires knowledge and understanding of its social and spatial practices to ensure competence in everyday life. However, the dominance of signage and communication that is directional, prescriptive, or only associated with the security and ordering of the city for commodification and the conditions of the market produces mundane and banal spaces of sameness. Global capitalism produces increasingly homogenized spaces of production, consumption, and residence (Harvey, 2001; Sassen, 2001).

However, there is also the need to engage with difference and the creative potential of urban people and urban spaces. The city and the urban need to remain places of encounters, of meaningful interactions, of difference and diversity, to encourage and maintain creative and surprising potential for growth, development, and change. Graffiti, and to a lesser but similar extent, street art, is the unsanctioned intervention of those who are relatively powerless and disenfranchised to claim space through use, an attempt to make space meaningful by inscribing, writing, and painting the walls of the city. It challenges dominant representations of space as purely functional and commodified. Graffiti offers the possibility of coming across something new, unique, surprising, shocking, informative, humorous, or provoking. As a very public practice and embodied act of engagement and intervention in the urban environment, and as a living (albeit temporary or ephemeral) art or commentary, graffiti can add meaning, value, beauty, distraction, and amusement to cities increasingly dominated by concerns with safety, security, and the needs of global capital. As free quotidian public art and communication, it can challenge the normal, banal, functionalized and increasingly commodified, and privatized space of cities increasingly owned and controlled by and for business. Graffiti, then, can be understood as an expression or embodiment of the right to appropriate, appreciate, know, use, and make its spaces and places.

Graffiti provides alternative ways of seeing the city, not just for those who write or paint on walls but also for those who read and see it. Graffiti is a means to communicate a range of ideas, perspectives, and opinions on the walls and streets of the city and is thus a very public forum as well as demonstration of street life and activity. We make sense of the world and of the city by reading what is written, displayed, and represented to us. We exist as a social collectivity by recognizing and understanding the signs and symbols, meanings, and messages that our shared urban existences and experiences engender. This can come in various forms, including graffiti. It has the potential to surprise and change the way we view not only the city and others but also ourselves and society as a whole. By creating new ways of utilizing walls for meanings and messages that represent aesthetic, cultural, or political values, graffiti makes the city come alive to new ways not only of reading space but also of being in it. Graffiti is a means for appreciating the life of the city in ways that can counter the dominating discourses and activities of capital: gentrification, development that prioritizes consumption, the privatization of collective resources, etc.

Graffiti can therefore reaffirm the use value of space and the lived experience and quality of collective or communal life, through active engagement and intervention with and in the urban environment by those who inhabit urban space and leave signs, symbols, messages, images, and traces of life that are not driven by and for the market, but by and for, and thus making, communities and neighborhoods. Graffiti encourages us to see and understand it as an embodied praxis in the living experience and knowledge of the city. Graffiti is an everyday practice in the living city, using walls and surfaces for expression, for “free” art, for communication as part of continuing arguments and analyses that seek to prioritize “Cities for People, not for Profit” in which the “right to the city,” as Mitchell (1999) argued, is “the right to participation, participation in the making of the city, the actual producing of that space.”

Review of the Literature and Primary Sources

The spread and popularity of graffiti as an urban cultural form, practice, and aesthetic have engendered a response from a range of disciplines. There is now a fairly large and diverse literature that reflects a range of disciplinary approaches and analytical perspectives, including sociology, criminology, geography, cultural studies, urban design, planning, and governance. Some of the earliest published work (Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974) focused on the use of graffiti tags as a means to establish or signify the territoriality of gangs. More recent work on this aspect has added analytic and ethnographic detail and contemporary context to U.S. African-American and Chicano gangs’ use of graffiti as space markers (Phillips, 1999) and graffiti crews in northeast Italy (Brighenti, 2010).

A range of ethnographic and subcultural studies have sought to document the real-life experiences and embodied practices of graffiti writers and the meanings, values, aesthetics, risk, and excitement they encounter in their mainly nocturnal painting of the urban (Ferrell, 1993, 1996; Halsey & Young, 2006; McDonald, 2001; Schacter, 2008, 2014; Snyder, 2009; Young, 2014). These studies provide valuable insights into the world of graffiti writers and street artists, their motivations and practices, their understanding of what they do, and the environments and spaces and places they choose. The studies also discuss the artists’ keen awareness of the physical dangers they face while working in the streets and on the walls of their cities and the changing landscape of policing and criminal justice system sanctions should they be caught.

Graffiti writers speaking for themselves through self-reflective discourses about their motivations and experiences are, therefore, an important and essential resource for understanding their creative practices and products as well as the physical and social worlds they inhabit. To read them in their own words supplements and deepens the

ethnographic observation and critical analysis carried out by academic researchers. Such accounts, observations, and discussions are included in a number of texts that illustrate their work, attitudes, and sense of self and belonging to both place and communities of practitioners. This approach can be found in Banksy (2002, 2006, 2012), Cochran (2010), Colt 45 (2010), Desa (2006), Eine (2010), and Zephyr (2010). There are also contributions from graffiti writers and street artists in Jaka (2012), Schacter and Fekner (2013); Frank, Steam156, Malt, and Stewart (2013), Martin (2009), Monsa (2013), Puig (2008), Scholz (2003), Madrid Revolutionary Team (2013), Uys and Uys (2013), Manco, Lost Art, and Neelon (2005), Ruiz (2008), and Gastman and Neelon (2011).

Other studies have considered and analyzed graffiti as a pedagogical tool that can promote identity, as a form of learn cultural education, and as a means for the practitioners to explore, know, and understand their cities, space, and place (see Burnham, 2010; Calvin, 2005; Civil, 2010; Iveson, 2010A; Nandrea, 1999). The globalization of graffiti as it has migrated and expanded into non-U.S. urban spaces has also been addressed in specific case studies and analyses (see Chmielewska, 2007, on Warsaw and Montreal; Valjakka, 2011, on graffiti in China; Benavides-Venegas, 2005, on the role of walls in Bogota, Colombia; Best, 2003, on graffiti in the Caribbean context; and Ferrell, 1993, on Moscow graffiti). In all of the above there is an implicit, if not explicit, recognition not only that graffiti is an urban cultural product but also that its practitioners seek to use and transform the space of the urban through their engagement with it. By creating signs, symbols, and motifs that convey meanings and messages, they transform urban space with adornment and co-opt it as a canvas for the expression of identity, status, style, and culture. While many artists and writers may be paid for some commissioned work, or sell prints and pieces in shops or galleries, almost all remain committed to the ideal of graffiti as embedded and practiced on the street as a free canvas and gallery for their work.

However, perhaps the most prevalent discussion of graffiti in the literature arises from what might be called the diametrically opposed views it elicits. On the one hand, graffiti is portrayed and understood in positive ways: as symbolic of a vibrant urban street life and culture, as an important practice in the creation of subcultural and youth identity, as urban decoration and quotidian art in the streets, as symbol and representation of youth, urbanity, and creativity that requires intimate knowledge. Urban graffiti, in its various forms, styles, meanings, and values is seen as demonstrating aspects and features that represent the need to appropriate and use space in everyday life. To write and paint on walls, to decorate the city, is creative communication and intervention in and on public space that reclaim the city from the structural and formal perquisites of capital. This reprioritizes the understanding, as Harvey asserted, that “the social spaces of distraction and display become as vital to urban culture as the spaces of working and living” (1985, p. 256). Graffiti signifies creative engagement with, and the colonization and appropriation of, space through imaginative, playful, and artistic interventions that conflict with, contest, and challenge dominant discourses, representations, and regulation of space. It treats the walls of the city as a free art gallery. Thus it is used in advertisements, on book and CD covers, in music videos, and in film to illustrate and represent aspects of city life and urban experience.

Just as there are many who consider graffiti and street art a positive and beneficial contribution to the life, aesthetic appeal, and vibrancy of the city, there are also those who see graffiti as a social problem, as vandalism, and as deviant or antisocial behavior. Clearly, it can be all or any of these. While there may be unwritten rules or codes among the community of graffiti practitioners about where is and is not fair game for writing (for example, religious sites, private property, etc.), the rules are not necessarily followed by all. The prevalence of graffiti in some locations can lead it to be portrayed as vandalism, as antisocial deviant behavior, as a symbol of community breakdown and decline, as a symptom of urban blight, and as demonstrating the lack of direction, lack of discipline, and deviance among youth.

Wilson and Kelling's (1982) well-known "broken windows" concept argued that commonplace examples of low-level criminality, such as graffiti, vandalism, street begging, public drinking, and public urination, are precursors of community decline that have a causal effect on levels of serious violent crime. Harcourt (2005), Harcourt and Ludwig (2006), and Bowling (1999) have provided devastating critiques of the efficacy of the broken windows thesis underpinning claims made for the success of crime reduction in New York City. However, the widespread identification of "specifically, such harmless displays as subway graffiti impart to the citizen the inescapable knowledge that the environment . . . is uncontrolled and uncontrollable, . . . thereby discouraging them and undermining their dedication to public order" (Ferrell & Welde, 2010, p. 49). Glazer (1979) identified a similar response and placed emphasis on the negative effects of graffiti, and Austin (2002) explored in detail how graffiti in the subway was identified and associated with a crisis in urban policing. Despite the lack of evidence for the broken windows thesis and its application in zero tolerance policing in the United States, it was supported by overseas politicians and migrated to other cities around the world (see Waquant, 2006). What developed was a range of surveillance and "designing out crime" strategies (see Fennelly & Crowe, 2013) that Iveson (2010B) referred to as a "war on graffiti." The development and use of new technologies and innovations in urban design, with the aim of securitization of urban public space (see Dickinson, 2008; Ferrell, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2001; Young, 2010) were applied, implicitly and explicitly, to graffiti as an urban problem.

Similarly, the creation of specialist municipal and police anti-graffiti units (see Barnard, 2007) and a lucrative business in anti-graffiti strategies (graffiti-resistant paints, materials, street furniture, etc.), surveillance, and policing (CCTV, razor wire, increased use of private security guards in identified graffiti "hot-spot" locations) have been developed and employed alongside specialist graffiti-removal squads. The identification and criminalization of graffiti writers reflect how graffiti practice and performance conflict with the values and priorities of property holders, developers, the state, the police, and the courts (see Bengsten & Arvidsson, 2014), which view graffiti as a threat to law, order, and security and have sought to purge it from the public urban realm. Graffiti thus represents conflicting ideas about who and what the city is for, and practitioners who are caught are punished with fines, confiscation of property, and, in some cases, jail sentences.

The contradictions in responses to graffiti (is it art or crime?) are also an example of competing understandings of what "value" graffiti brings to the urban environment. Social activity, including the aesthetic, needs to be framed in, and by, space (see Simmel in Frisby & Featherstone, 1997) and what is deemed to be art or culture, or indeed crime and deviance, is what is designated, framed, or contextualized as such by those with the means and power to delineate and "place" them, whether in the appropriate containers of galleries, museums, and auction houses or in social policy and criminal justice discourses of norms, delinquency, deviance, and order. Thus Banksy's stencil art is now recognized by the art market and is collected from the street and sold at special auctions of his work (BBC, 2015; Sotheby's, 2014). Eine's graffiti is now deemed an appropriate gift from a U.K. prime minister to a U.S. president: a transformation from being framed as a criminal in the street to being framed and hung in the White House (Henley, 2010). This also applies to the differentiation between street art and public art: the latter is sanctioned and commissioned, controlled and legitimated, while the former is illegal and is unconstrained in content, form, and location (see Bengsten, 2013, 2014).

Graffiti and street art can have both negative and positive impacts on urban communities and neighborhoods. In contrast to the broken windows thesis, Zukin and Braslow (2011) argue that graffiti and street art can act as a signifier of a creative urban culture that proves attractive to an urban bohemianism and lived experience. A vibrant street culture, as written and painted on the walls of a neighborhood, is often a precursor to gentrification processes that seek to identify interesting up-and-coming areas as investment and development opportunities. Consequently,

the indigenous writers and artists can be driven from the areas and neighborhoods they have helped to create and popularize, by increased real estate prices and increased cost of living. Ultimately, this process produces a more exclusive, upmarket “community” that has a more sterile, safer, more sanctioned street aesthetic than what made it interesting and attractive in the first place.

Complexity and Conflict in Understanding Graffiti

The motivations and practices of graffiti and evolved forms of street art, as well as the responses to them, are complex. What is common to most of the analyses and perspectives on graffiti is the emphasis on how modern graffiti is inherently associated with the city and the experience and use of the built environment of the urban. Thus, there is an increasing body of work that presents graffiti as an expression of, and indication of, the modern urban condition, one that represents a clash over the use and exchange values of social and public space. Meanings attached to how the lived experience of space can cause conflict have been associated with graffiti. It can be seen not only as increasingly representative of a juxtaposition of competing and conflicting understandings and uses of the urban but also as sign and symbol of spatial as well as social divisions and differences.

Despite its criminalization and attempts at its eradication, the categorization of good or bad graffiti (Gomez, 1993; McAuliffe, 2012; Mitchell, 1990), and the accommodation of graffiti within approved and restricted areas, such as legal walls (Halsey & Pederick, 2010; Young, 2010), graffiti continues to flourish in cities and urban areas around the world. As an embodied practice, as risky excitement, it still offers many urban youth a means to express themselves in an everyday and accessible art form as well as to belong to an informal creative community that provides individual as well as social benefits.

Graffiti practices and products are everyday acts that intervene in, and engage with, the spaces and places that urban youth have knowledge of and use through inhabitation. They claim space and make it their own by marking walls and leaving traces of their existence on them. That is, lived space is literally, figuratively, and artistically created through imaginative acts that reassert, through embodied praxis, a visual, if ephemeral, reminder and remnant of the colonization, appropriation, and use of public and social space. Graffiti then can be considered a political as well as an artistic and aesthetic practice and process that challenges dominant understandings and functions of space. Graffiti represents conflicts over meanings and values as well as differences in understandings of what urban public space is and whom it is for. It challenges different conceptions of what the city is and contests the schemes and structures imposed by urban designers, planners, and architects. Who has the power to mold, shape, adorn, decorate, and control what does—and what does not—appear there, how spaces and places are organized, policed, and regulated make the city a continuing arena of social conflict. Graffiti confronts and resists the restrictive political regulation and imposition of the spatial order of commerce and state authority and offers a noncommercial alternative aesthetic adornment in contrast to, and conflict with, economic, commercial, and financial interests. The creation of socially meaningful space through the reassertion and reprioritization of use values, rather than exchange values, can result in conflict between youth and those who seek to police and regulate urban space. Graffiti provides an urban semiotic involving new, alternate, and ever-changing ephemeral spatial practices. It offers the possibility of new ways of seeing, reading, and understanding the urban, the city, and everyday life. Graffiti offers a way of reading the everyday life of the streets of the city through the writing on the walls of those who live in the city and attempt to make it meaningful. Studying and understanding graffiti can offer

analyses of modern urban space that provide insights into the complex interactions between the delineation and representation of popular and everyday culture and its policing and regulation in the contemporary city.

Links to Digital Materials

The following is a short list of electronic sites giving access to a range of examples, blogs, discussions, etc., of graffiti and street art from around the world.

Art Crimes: **The Writing on the Wall**.

Fat Cap: <http://www.fatcap.com/>.

Global Street Art: <http://globalstreetart.com/>.

Blog sites: http://blog.feedspot.com/graffiti_blogs/

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date: 09 August 2017

