The Portrait of a Vandal
How Vancouver reduced graffiti by 80% over 3 years

Madison - 2007

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Scanning the Graffiti Problem

- Understanding what you see
- Graffiti as art or crime?
- Graffiti lingo
- Graffiti tag typology
Graffiti Classification

If you can read it:
Hate graffiti
Socio-political graffiti
Art based graffiti
Gang graffiti
Bubble gum
If you can’t read it:

Hip Hop Graffiti

80% of the Problem
Gang Graffiti

Recognition - Intimidation - Turf Marking
Hate Graffiti

Discriminating comments - use of symbols
Socio-Political Graffiti

- Adult oriented
- Social issues
- Used by anarchists

Slide from Wendy Hawthorne at TRANSLNK
All Other Wall Markings

Art projects
Satanic comments
Religious ideas
Threats
Doodling
Graffiti

Art or Crime?
Art can be a group of visual messages that has meaning for a select audience.
A^2 + B^2 = C^2
MICHAEL HALSBAND

Andy Warhol and Jean Michel Basquiat
SUBWAY ART

Martha Cooper  Henry Chalfant
Lingo and tools of the trade
TAG

Signature

4 to 6 letters

Invented or real words
CREW

Multiple taggers
Cross jurisdictional
Acronym
2 - 4 letters
Analyzing the Graffiti Vandal

• Are they artists or vandals?
• Academic documentation of the problem
• Graffiti = youth at risk behavior
• Graffiti suspect profile and network
• Evolution of the graffiti suspect
Graffiti Writer Perspective

- William Wimsat (1994)
  - Bomb the Suburbs

- Andrew Witten and Michael White (2001)
  - Dondi White Style Master General.

- Roger Gastman (2001)
  - Free Agents A History of Washington D.C. Graffiti

- Ivor Miller (2002)
  - Aerosol Kingdom: Subway Painters of New York City

- Paul 107 (2003)
  - All City: The Book About Taking Space
“If you get stopped by building security or anyone who isn’t a cop, run. Odds are they can’t chase you off the property they are paid to protect. Plus they’re probably fat. If you’re in a crowd and a civilian catches you in the act and grabs you, start yelling: “He grabbed my dick faggot faggot.” This may not be the PC thing to do, but it will embarrass the hero. When he loosens his grip, bust a Carl Lewis. Carrying mace or bear spray can also be handy in these situations.”

Paul 107, 2003: 14
Project funded by the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council
Academic Documentation: Qualitative Perspective

- Craig Castleman (1982)
  - *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*
- Jeff Ferrell (1993)
  - *Crimes of Style Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality*
- Susan Phillips (1999)
  - *Wallbangin’: Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.*
- Nancy Macdonald (2001)
  - *The Graffiti Subculture*
- Janice Rahn (2002)
  - *Painting Without Permission Hip-Hop Graffiti Subculture*
“Politics of Wall Painting”

“Illegal wall painting exists at the intersection of art and crime, at the crossroads of cultural production, political resistance, and criminalization. Though wall painters worldwide draw on a plethora of folk art and art world traditions, and in some cases benefit from training or participation in legitimate art worlds, the illegality of their art alters the lived experience and lived politics of their artistic production.”

Academic Documentation: Quantitative Perspective

- **David Shannon (2001)**
  - *Graffiti and Adolescent Delinquency: An Analysis of Short Term Career Trajectories*

- **Valerie Spicer (2005)**
  - *An Aggregate Study of the Vancouver Graffiti Suspect Network*

- **Graham Martin (2006)**
  - *Graffiti Linked to Personality Disorder*
“Those in the graffiti subculture are more likely to report serious or extreme drug use, perceived academic failure, physical and sexual abuse, suicide thoughts and behaviours, and are more likely to indicate higher family pathology, parental overprotection and criticism, depression, hopelessness, anxiety, external locus of control and risk taking behaviours, and lower parental care and self esteem.”

(Martin, 2003: 6)
Prior Research Findings

- The primary motivation for doing graffiti is artistic.
- Graffiti produces positive outcomes for those who do it.
- Society misunderstands graffiti and criminalizes this behavior.
Current Research Findings

• The primary motivation for doing graffiti is vandalism

• Graffiti produces negative outcomes for those who do it

• Graffiti is an at risk behavior and should be properly addressed
Graffiti Subculture

- Cognitive Deconstruction
- Female Objectification
- Hostility
- Self Entitlement
- Male Bonding
- Anti Establishment
- Substance Abuse
- Low self-esteem
- Risk Taking

Overlap into other social situations
Graffiti Subculture Structure
Graffiti Subculture Hierarchy

KINGS

LEGAL

ORGANIZED CREWS

ILLEGAL

TOYS

ILLEGAL
The Beginner

Selects a tag
Practices
Writes on everything
Close to home or school
Developing

Practiced
Joins a crew
Difficult targets
Addiction
Practiced

More piecing
Elaborate piece book
Showcase their work
May be schooling younger taggers
Well known by other taggers
Tend to be older
Mad Bombers

Specific Targets
Motive = destruction
More violent / gang mentality
Five finger discounts
17 - 21 years
Often unemployed or out of school
Suspect Profile

- Male - Caucasian
- 12 to 40
- Other at risk behaviours
- Self centered
- Low empathy
- ODD - conduct disorder
- ADHD - ADD
- Crime mentality
- Compulsive and addictive
- Start in grades 8 - 10
- Most damage from 17 - 20
Vancouver Graffiti Suspects

- 94% are males
- 77% are Caucasian
- 1 to 73 police contacts with a mean of 7
- 0 to 26 charges with a mean of 2.1
- 55% of first offences are property related
- 46% have graffiti as their first offence
- 0 to 86 associates with a mean of 3.7
- 44% are known graffiti suspects
Age of Graffiti Offenders

Count

Age at analysis
The Vancouver Response

- City Graffiti Management Team
- Vancouver Police Graffiti Unit
- Partnerships – Networking
- Changing the perception
- Restorative Justice
City of Vancouver
Graffiti Management Program
City of Vancouver Program
Based on five principles

1. Leadership
2. Education
3. Eradication
4. Enforcement
5. Empowerment
Vancouver Police Department
Based on 5 core policing strategies

1. Education
2. Enforcement
3. Partnerships
4. Intelligence Management
5. Restorative justice
1- Education: Changing Perceptions

BEFORE
- 911 call for graffiti
- Low priority
- Patrol attendance
- Graffiti suspect gets away

AFTER
- 911 call for graffiti
- Mischief in progress
- Higher priority
- Patrol attendance
- Graffiti suspect gets caught
2- Enforcement: Beyond Arrests

1. Patrol education
2. Obtaining good release conditions
3. Graffiti ordinance
4. Relating to the subculture
5. Generating fear of apprehension
6. Talking to mom and dad
3- Partnerships

1. City agencies
2. Police sections
3. Other police departments
4. Community agencies
5. Local universities
6. Legal graffiti writers
4- Intelligence Management

- Networking
- Graffiti sources
- Internet
- Database – 800 suspects listed
- Dictates surveillance
- Guides specific projects
5- Restorative Justice
Results

- 80% reduction of graffiti after 3 years
- Over 800 vandals identified
- Radical change in perception
- Over 50 murals implemented
- Other municipalities now on board
- Graffiti investigator conference
Graffiti Is Everywhere

- MacDonalda
- IBM
- Pepsi
- IPOD
- Fugi Film
- Walmart
- Video Games
- Movie backdrops
- Clothing
An Aggregate Study of Vancouver Graffiti Suspect Network

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QUESTIONS?