

# Going Underground

A journey into the graffiti subculture.

For my dear friend Andrew,  
who became my inspiration  
and my motivation.  
1993-2010

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# Log

The task of starting my PIP was something that initially intimidated me. I wished, hoped and assumed it would do itself - it didn't. It was only after about a month of my teacher talking about PIP's that I actually listened and discovered what PIP stood for. Personal Interest Project. With this new found knowledge, a whirlwind of thoughts and idea's began to flourish within my mind. I thought of a range of issues and debatable topics; however none stood out to me like the Graffiti Sub-Culture.

After definitively selecting my topic, I became pretty self motivated. Graffiti is something that I'm in contact with every day and the individuals surrounding the sub-culture have intrigued me for so long. I was determined to provide an accurate depiction of graffiti writers and tell their side of the story.

I had a rough idea of what I wanted to do from day one, but was completely bewildered as to how to go about it, so I started slowly collecting news articles relating to graffiti, keeping my eye on the news, especially commercial networks, to grasp a full understanding of the stereotype being projected through the media of the perpetrators of this criminal act. I kept a folder of all my articles, notes and ideas which I took with me in my bag everywhere for months.

A crucial part of this project was the contrast between the individuals who do graffiti and police and council representatives. As a result, I set up three separate interviews with individual graffiti writers. Their perspective's and opinion's are what shaped my PIP and gave me valuable insight into the socialisation and personal experiences of these graffiti artists. I also set up two separate additional interviews with Senior Constable and Youth Case Manager Michelle Dreury of NSW Police, and Council Spokesperson Tarek Barakat who were extremely co-operative and insightful and assisted by giving me a legal and completely contrasting view of this act and perpetrators of it.

With the help of my teacher, I created surveys which I distributed to the general public. I handed these out to an equal demographic of people in order to get fair and un-biased responses. These surveys were important to grasp the community's opinions of graffiti and those who do it.

I was eventually faced with the mammoth task of putting all my research together. I found deciding what content to leave out due to the new word limit extremely

challenging as the sub-culture is so complex – more than I ever expected. Also, with so many levels and differences of opinion, understanding and interpretation within the graffiti community, I could have kept writing for years.

I now find myself passionate about the topic I have researched and I am proud of my work. Constructing my PIP has been stressful at times, but on a whole it is one of my favourite accomplishments in my schooling career to date.

# Introduction

Throughout my whole life I have been intrigued by what surrounds me. I am forever interested in a wide range of social issues, particularly those which don't attract as much attention as they deserve. My parents have always encouraged me to look at the whole story, to read between the lines, and like my Dad so often says to me, there are always three sides to each story, one point of view, the other side's point of view, and the truth. It's in the search for this truth, that I find myself looking at the graffiti sub-culture.

Graffiti is a subject that seems to divide communities and give rise to heated debate within society. Living in an area favoured by graffiti writers I have had plenty of exposure to graffiti in all its forms. I still remember the day I realised that the walls were saying things, telling stories which the casual observer fails to see as they go to and from work every day, carrying on their daily lives. It was exciting, a thrill and a new challenge, to get my first insight into this secretive underground sub-culture.

The intention of this project is to tell the story from the graffiti writers' perspective. I will attempt through my research to give them a voice as a contrast to the many voices of criticism coming from various social institutions and the public in general. Reasons, motives and meanings are all too often missing from the picture and all too often this leaves graffiti carrying its label as 'mindless, senseless vandalism'. I will not justify graffiti on this point; graffiti is vandalism no matter how you look at it. It is defacement of property which costs the government money, the taxpayer money, and the people who write it, sometimes, their lives. It's dangerous, uninvited and illegal. But it is far from mindless or senseless. There is a point and a purpose behind what graffiti writers do, and this still needs to be explained to people.

I conducted four interviews with graffiti writers, whom I have located through research on the internet. I also undertook extensive secondary research to augment my qualitative primary findings from my interviews. To ensure some degree of balance I also conducted interviews with Council Spokesperson Tarek Barakat and Senior Constable and Youth Case Manager Michelle Dreury to get a legal and political opinion on this issue and the perpetrators of this act.

Through my research I hope to identify elements of continuity and change in the work of graffiti writers and to gain a cross cultural perspective. Concepts such as socialisation are explored through the graffiti writer's constant interaction with the



society around them and their experiences within the subculture. Power and authority are examined both in the hierarchical structure of the subculture and also through the inclusion of council and police viewpoints. The impact of this act in my micro and macro worlds can be seen with the comparison between the graffiti writers personal experiences and opinions against contrasting opinions and stereotypes of the media, police and council and are central to the research material.

# Central Material

The fight starts out in the usual fashion, outside a train station on a Saturday night, an insult is shouted and met, and a scuffle erupts. The two men battle it out in the name of honour, and it's not long before the fight steps up and starts to weave its way down the street. One of the men begins to tire, and struggle. He is looking like he is getting ready to throw in the towel and admit defeat, until his friend jumps to his side; he's not going down that easily. The opposing side rushes to match them, and the conflict escalates. Assault meets assault and blow layers on blow, over and over, until tensions reach their peak and things finally start to wind down. The instigator satisfied with the damage he and his boys have done and a little bored with the whole event, decides to call a truce. The undisputed victor, he pulls out leaving his opponent with the shame of defeat and a tarnished reputation.

You might have been in the neighbourhood when all this was going on. You may have even walked down the same street; you'd be forgiven for missing it. While driven by the same fuel as any other fight, this one draws no crowd and leaves no wounded. Its weapons are sprayed words and its war wounds amount to nothing more than a few dented egos. This fight is between two graffiti writers and it takes place on the wall.

But who are these graffiti writers? Where do they come from and why do they do what they do?

“graf-fi-ti –*noun* pl. of graffito. Markings, as initials, slogans, or drawings, written, spray-painted, or sketched on a sidewalk.”

Graffiti has been around for thousands of years, traced back to when the very first humans first painted and left their markings, telling their stories, experiences, hardships and triumphs. Some of the most intriguing and useful information known to historians has been the markings and traditional art left by these people, notably, the graffiti markings left in Pompeii, and Aboriginal cave paintings. They were expressing their feelings, experiences and emotions on the space and environment which they inhabited, or what would in modern day times be considered as defacement of property. Whether or not the civilization in which the individual resided had a social structure which included the ownership of property is irrelevant; one could even say, the property of “Mother-Nature” was being defaced or vandalised.

Yet these ancient and historical markings have been labelled as precious, respected and valued artefacts, and each has its own place in history.

Is today's graffiti that dissimilar? Modern day graffiti has its notable differences, from the style and locations of the markings, to the modern utensils used today, there are still stories to be told, people feeling the pressure of an ever increasing day to day lifestyle in this violent, economically driven, "go-go" society who want to be heard, recognised and remembered.

An early example of modern day graffiti seen in Australia was the tag "Eternity"; it was written in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by a man named Arthur Stace, a man who could be easily viewed as a petty criminal, a bum and an alcoholic. This is, of course, quite a uniquely Australian profile for a hero. We live in a country that invariably favours underdogs, one which, despite history, romanticises its bush ranging, convict past, one which applauds its non-conformists, and one, which likes a drink. This is quite possibly the only example of modern Australian graffiti that has been internationally recognised, and accepted into Australian culture. On New Year's Eve 2000, the word "Eternity" featured on the harbour bridge, confirming to many that Arthur Stace, or "Eternity", had been accepted into Australian history and folklore.

Times have changed, but Arthur Stace was doing what would today be labelled as, graffiti. The differences are subtle between Arthur Stace walking the streets of Sydney writing the word eternity on public and private property every morning, and a person nowadays heading out in the early hours of the morning to put their tag in the view of the public, on essentially the same property.

Graffiti is still often an individual's way of venting ones emotions such as anger, frustration, and distrust with society and the system surrounding them. Whilst life's problems have changed somewhat from the days of Arthur Stace, there are still problems in life which threaten one's existence and place in society. Just like in Arthur Stace' time.

So with similar reasoning and motive behind people doing graffiti today, and Arthur Stace, it seems extremely hypocritical to accept, cherish and praise one man as an

Australian hero, and then label a whole modern sub culture vandals, criminals and thugs, people who are simply re-creating and walking in the footsteps of a so called Australian Hero.

A NSW government policy formulated under former NSW Premier Bob Carr in 2000 outlined a NSW Graffiti Solution Program that defined graffiti as, "Graffiti drawings, names and/or words written on the walls of public buildings, infrastructure and equipment, such as railway rolling stock, and on private property such as billboards, walls of buildings, fences, etc. It may be obscene or political, or it may not make any sense at all to the casual observer." The Handbook 2000 elaborates on this, describing forms graffiti may take including, "wall scrawl, wall writing, scribbling, defacement, tagging, marking, disfigurement, crude murals, street art, among others."

There is an apparent low level of acceptance towards graffiti and the people who do it from the general public. There are many factors which lead to the forming of these stances and opinions, depictions through media, as well as media hysteria, slogans such as "Spray can Spree", and constant negative reports of anything relating to aerosol art play a significant role. According to the NSW Government Graffiti Vandalism Information Website, there were a total of 809,411 incidents of malicious damage to property reported to police between January 2001 and December 2008. Just 9% of these were incidents of graffiti. In recent times, even legal aerosol art competitions, promoting the legal use of spray cans, have been dragged through the dirt by the media. The "All Ironlak Graffiti Competition" has been accused of encouraging illegal graffiti, through the distribution of 1500 spray cans as prize for the best legal mural. This association between graffiti and delinquent behaviour is apparent in Senior Constable and Youth Case Manager, Michelle Dreury's, description of the stereotypical perception of the word graffiti. "The word graffiti just constitutes a crime for most people, and it projects the perception of crime. If you were talking about art work or aerosol art, you might limit that negative opinion, but as soon as you mention graffiti, there's not many good things that people say about it."

There is a sub-culture associated with graffiti; however, it is not always clear to see at first glance to the general observer, as is expressed in Michelle Dreury's

description of the sub culture, "In my experience I don't actually see a sub culture, I see small groups who operate within themselves, and it's just one of the things that they do, there may be other activities that they get up to and graffiti seems to be a marking of territory for that group."

It is understandable why there is such a lack of understanding about this seemingly invisible sub-culture within the community, as it is a sub-culture in which most people who have a proper understanding of it, have unintentionally stumbled into it. It is only then, after stepping into the sub-culture, meeting writers and experiencing graffiti first hand, that reasons, motives, feelings and emotions surrounding graffiti can be properly understood.

There are many different aspects and types of graffiti which have been developed over the years. Some types of graffiti have been created and designed to fit in with the structure and for the betterment of the graffiti scene; other aspects have given the graffiti scene a bad name, and some, aspects of graffiti (such as political), are completely removed from the graffiti community. A number of words and phrases have come to describe different styles and aspects of graffiti. Like other jargon and colloquialisms, some phrases vary in different countries. The following terminology comes primarily from Australia.

Having developed an interest in graffiti, an individual, or writer (shortened version of the words graffiti- writer) must decide upon the name or tag they plan to use. The name is the most important aspect of a writer's work and the source of their fame and respect, as Phor<sup>1</sup>, a Sydney graffiti writer, explains "Having a tag with a good flow is important for when you need to be quick and when you want something to look good. Having a word that is simple and easy to do complex tags with is vital if you are to be looked upon by an older writer. I dropped my first tag on a fence in 2004, to this day it's still there, tags taught me hand style and what looks whack and what doesn't, now I just do my own tags the way I want."

Phor has experienced a good up-bringing, and lives a happy life in general. "Well most people call me by my first name if they know it, in the "streets" I'm commonly known by my tag Phor. I tried hard all the way through high school and normally got

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<sup>1</sup> The tag of an active Australian graffiti writer.

very good marks, I completed year 12. I'm a contractor for a respectable company in the CBD, so in my spare time I paint, I find it easier to balance out life and graffiti that way, I'm always thinking about graffiti, even while working." He has also sold a lot of his work, as he told me, "I have done a lot of commission work for people at my work, everything from drawings for their kids, to this giant canvas for a girls company she was starting."

Graffiti is illegal so writers do not usually use their 'real-life' names. A new name also provides them with a new start and another identity. Writers choose their tag names on the basis of a whole range of reasons. Most will appropriate a word, often from pop culture or some other social reference, because it communicates something about them as a person. One of Sydney's most famous graffiti writers, "Vice<sup>2</sup>" was brought up in a functional home, and was successful at school. He made state level competition for sports, and finished high school in year 10 to pursue an apprenticeship. "I live my life as every normal human does, go to work every day, I'm involved with sport, I enjoy going out with mates and I have plenty of hobbies, where as the stereotypical view of a graffiti artist from the media or the public is that of a no life kid who does drugs, hangs out in low socio-economic areas, robs people, and is an all round criminal; where actually most of us are not at all like that." As these people do not publicise their identity in relation to their affiliation with the graffiti scene, it is left to the media to make up and decide who these people actually are; so often descriptions of these people are totally inaccurate. Vice tells how he discovered his word, "I was flicking through the dictionary and came along the word "Vice". I read the meaning (a bad habit) and graffiti being a bad habit, it was perfect." Others may opt for a nonsensical word because the letters work well together. This is important because letters can affect what writers can do with their written names. For example a prominent British writer "Prime" now regrets choosing his name because the P and the R are both top heavy and difficult to mesh together in larger artistic productions. A Tag is a graffiti writer's entrance to a second life, a secret username, to the secret world of graffiti.

Once a tag has been established by a graffiti artist, bombing follows. Bombing is the action of a writer placing his or her tag in public. This can be done with markers or

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<sup>2</sup> Australian graffiti writer

spray cans. According to vice, "Bombing is the best part of graffiti and the most fun and effective way to get your name out." Bombing is all about quantity and productivity; the more tags a writer can get up through bombing, the more respect you will eventually earn. Bombing is seen as a thoughtless, disrespectful act within the wider community, and to a large extent it is, however there are unspoken rules and morals associated with this aspect of graffiti. Phor emphasises, "There are rules to bombing, places you can and cannot touch, for example, Bombing a church is a big no no and kids schools, that's just straight up dog<sup>3</sup>." A car can assist graffiti writers to get further exposure, giving writers the opportunity to reach further distances, do more graffiti, and cover more area in a short space of time; but having a car does not come without its risks, as Phor explains, "Bombing is a way of writers connecting and showing everyone that they can get out of their own area. It's harder when you're younger, to get out of your area. It's much easier but riskier when you are older and able to drive, getting spotted by cops, license plates taken down, the penalties are much heavier."

A piece is another form of modern graffiti and is the result of a writer's skill, experience and desire to meet greater challenges. The term "Piece", short for "Masterpiece", is a larger, more elaborate, colourful and stylistically demanding depiction of the writer's tag name, and as Phor explains, "Pieces come in all shapes and sizes, style is important you need your own style and it needs to express you as a person." Vice describes, "Pieces are more of the art side of graffiti, putting time, skill and effort into producing your word in a nice bold letter form." Because doing a piece takes more time and effort, writers cannot be as far-reaching in their coverage. Pieces cross over into street art, which are sometimes recognised as art by the public. Phor did his first piece in late 2004, saying "it was not good, but it's my favourite piece of all time, I love looking at it, I loved the fact that I thought it was the best piece in the world and that nobody would ever go over it, someone went over it a few days later and I was shattered." Even though he knows it's illegal he tries to "paint a piece every week. At the moment I am in a stage of doing a piece a day/night, so for July alone I have done over 20 pieces so far which isn't that much for me."

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<sup>3</sup> The label of someone who is either a traitor, or has done something in extremely bad taste, with his or her actions having negative impacts on other people.



Throw ups are simple, but larger versions of a tag which includes an outline and sits between a *tag* and a *piece in terms of complexity and time investment*. It generally consists of a one-colour outline and one layer of fill-colour. Shapes which resemble bubbles often form the letters. Throw ups are often respected more than tags. According to Vice, "Throw ups are the next best thing to bombing, it pretty much is a part of bombing but you use simple, quick and fast lettering to chuck up so it still reads what your tag is but with a bit more funk." The fact that a throw-up must be completed very quickly, yet still cleanly and with skill, means a writer must be skilled at throw ups to be taken seriously. Throw-ups are used in conjunction with bombing to gain illegal fame respect. Phor elaborates on this stating, "Throw ups are also used for if you have beef<sup>4</sup> with another writer. You can do a production (a number of pieces done together with other writers) on the tracks that took you all night and I can straight up ruin it in under 5 minutes with throw ups."<sup>5</sup>

In Australia, a "panel" refers to a writer's piece on moving transport. Found most commonly on trains, but also on trucks and buses. In a writer's mind, a train is a moving canvas, a way to gain further exposure to the public, as Vice explains; "Panels are pretty much a moving canvas which hundreds of people will see and it's a way you get your artwork seen by everyone and is a good thrill. The first time I did a Panel was with a group of older guys who were teaching me, sitting in the bush then running up to the train the thrill and excitement was amazing."

A panel is one of the best ways to obtain recognition and therefore status and respect from fellow writers. Painting a train is a very complex and dangerous activity, which takes much time and experience to perfect. From a writer's perspective, the more panels you have under your belt, the more respect you will earn. To be considered a serious writer within the graffiti scene, panels are a must.

There is a significant and discernable social hierarchy to be found within the graffiti subculture. At the bottom of the scale you have 'Toys', the most un-educated, unexperienced and stylistically untalented writers, and at the very top you have 'Kings' the most talented and respected writers.

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<sup>4</sup> grudge or trouble

<sup>5</sup> I have quoted him directly, and even though it may not appear to make sense, it is important to the integrity of the research.

A toy is a writer with either little experience, little skill, or does not understand graffiti, or the graffiti scene, yet attempts to become a part of it. Older, more experienced writers become frustrated with toys for a number of reasons. Through their lack of respect and experience, toys infuriate the public by doing selfish and disrespectful things within the community such as tagging schools, churches and houses. The public will then often go to the media, who provide negative stereotypes, giving all graffiti writers a bad name both within the community and abroad.

Toys will make rookie errors and be caught by police, increasing awareness, patrols etc. This increases the chance of established writers being caught.

Toys will often bite<sup>6</sup> known writers in order to improve quickly. Due to the toys lack of understanding and respect, they will often do graffiti over a well respected and established writer without giving the action a second thought. This is one of, if not the, most disrespectful actions that can be done within the graffiti community.

Toys don't tend to stick around; they tend to either give up, or learn and improve their skills, graduating from being a toy to becoming a writer. There is often some level of sympathy shown towards toys, as it is common knowledge that most writers began as toys, and progressed in their knowledge, skills and talent to a level where they are respected as a writer. Toys will sometimes be taken under the wing of an old and more experienced Writer, as Phor explains, "I like painting with toys and showing them the ropes, it beats toys running around thinking they are king shit, it's been good this year, we've seen less and less toys pop onto the local scene, and they are actually listening to the older guys and pulling their heads in."

Kings are not easily defined, but they appear to be writers who have been doing graffiti for many years, and are well entrenched in the graffiti scene. A writer can become a king through years of persistence and commitment to bombing, and graffiti. A king must have a clean, recognisable and relatively unique style to attain the status of king, and most writers will never rise to become a king.

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<sup>6</sup> meaning to steal a writers letter structure, colour scheme or style

A king must have his longevity in his graffiti in many different suburbs, cities, main roads, train stations, and be extremely consistent and dedicated to staying on top of the graffiti scene. This is extremely difficult and may take a tremendous toll on the writer's personal and social life. "Cap<sup>7</sup> was a true throw up king in my eyes, he showed people that graffiti wasn't only about pieces, it was about being an all round writer and mastering all aspects of graffiti." – Phor.

Usually by the time a writer has achieved king status, through the years of devotion to graffiti, and dedication to improving his style and attaining extreme illegal fame, he lives and breathes graffiti. The writer would be nothing without the graffiti scene; the writer's life now revolves around it. The moment a king starts to put other priorities first (e.g. family, work, social life), he will slowly but surely lose his status as king, as some other writer who is still 110% dedicated will steal his crown.

These labels, and the people associated with them are controversial within the sub culture, and subject to much debate and opinion. A good example of this is Phor's opinion of kings. "Kings in my eyes are often over rated and use the same style all the time, nobody will ever deserve a crown on their tag because there will always be somebody up and coming who is better than you and pumps it 100 times harder than you, easy come easy go."

Self-declared kings will often incorporate relevant symbolism into their pieces e.g. crowns; a commonly used element of style. However, the writer must be very self-confident when doing it, since other great writers tend to go over and disrespect self-proclaimed kings who have not gained that rank yet in their eyes. Typically a writer can only become a king if another king with that status already has expressed so, or a writer has such tremendously overwhelming, sustained and gained respect from other respected writers.

The meaning of graffiti is a very personal thing; each writer has their individual reasons for doing graffiti. Some graffiti writers can't remember why they started. It's not uncommon that a person sees a piece of graffiti which he or she takes a liking to, and uses that image or the feelings he or she felt whilst looking at it, as motivation to

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<sup>7</sup> An "Old School" New York graffiti writer, prominent in the 1980's

do it themselves. With the meaning of graffiti being such a personal thing, the resulting debates, produce extremely conflicting viewpoints within the community, as some people would view their work as pure artistic expression, others, such as Spokesperson of my local council, Tarek Barakat, view it differently, "Aerosol art done on canvas, or on the artist's own property or on property, or the owner of which has provided written consent, can be viewed as art. However, a distinction must be made between this and graffiti vandalism. Graffiti vandalism is a crime and should therefore not be considered art."

Sometimes a person will see a writer doing graffiti and will become so amazed and intrigued by the mystery of graffiti, that they will start doing it themselves, as was the case with established graffiti writer Vice, "I was on my way home one day from school in the back carriage minding my own business, then this bloke pops up, looks up, down and around and then started to write on the walls and producing this amazing funky lettering, I was so intrigued and from there on I went."

It only takes a small reason, motivation or experience for a writer to start, and then a graffiti interest turns into hobby, which transforms into an addiction, and then a lifestyle. Feelings and emotions brought out by graffiti, affecting the meaning of graffiti for an individual writer, do change over time as Vice explains, "When I started graffiti it was this amazing rush. Like the first time having sex, the feeling of being this person who has their own tag and no one else knowing who you were, and being a part of this other art sub culture, I still remember the first time of jumping a fence onto a live train line for a paint. The feeling was unexplainable"

Graffiti can also be an emotional release for the artist. Feelings such as depression, anger, heart break and frustration are all emotions which encourage and give writers the fuel to pick up a spray can and do graffiti as a way of expressing these feelings and venting emotion, as Australian graffiti writer "Phor" explains, "I battled depression in 2009, that was a pretty rough time for me to go through and not many people knew I was going through it, I painted a lot during this time and graffiti really helped me get through a lot of life's problems, helped me deal with break ups, being jobless and many other things ... my little brother has autism and graffiti is a really good escape from household stress, it's hard to live with someone suffering a

disability like that but it also taught me so much about myself which I apply to my graffiti.”

Some people use graffiti as a way not only to express emotions about what is going on in their life, but as a distraction from problems surrounding them as Vice explains, “By doing graffiti it keeps my mind off things like depression, and problems happening at home, and it helps a lot, I just feel free when I’m doing it. It is a great outlet and emotional release, I love expressing myself and having this freedom. It releases a lot of tension built up.”

As well as graffiti having a deep mental and emotional meaning to writers, it also has impacts on and meaning for the community. As Tarek Barakat explains, “Graffiti vandalism has immense social, environmental and financial costs to both council and the local community. Graffiti creates a negative perception of the local area, increases people’s fear of crime and, in some cases, increases the level of actual crime by forcing people out of the space, reducing passive surveillance and giving criminals an area where they can perpetrate their crimes without fear of being seen.”

The impact of graffiti also has enormous financial implications for the community. Tarek Barakat explained that graffiti vandalism can also destroy the livelihood of local residents by driving down property prices and forcing businesses to close due to lack of patronage. Financially, his Council spends “upwards of \$500,000 per year on graffiti prevention and removal projects.”

The local police agree with Barakat in terms of the damage graffiti can do to a community both environmentally and psychologically so police exert their authority to prosecute those found engaging in this act. Michelle Dreury states, “...we are serious about putting them before the courts, or the young offender’s act, whichever is applicable for their age. It costs the community, it costs state rail.”

There is no clear definition of a graffiti writer. However it is apparent, that there is a huge misconception within society in relation to graffiti writers, and who they actually are. There is an image which has been projected into society through politicians and media outlets, of a trash bag, delinquent, smoking, thug, teenager with no respect for society, or the community, from a broken home with bad parents, un-educated and unemployed. Whilst every culture has its rotten eggs, and bad people, my research

has surprisingly demonstrated that this is actually a stereotype. The truth is, the person described in the example of a stereotypical graffiti writer, is the extreme minority within the graffiti sub-culture. Michelle Dreury supports this stating, "As police, we often think it's maybe the worst kids (bad families, poor school grades etc.), the community would probably think it's the worst kids as well. But in my experience it's lots of kids, kids who go to fancy schools, kids who go to state schools; it's a mix across the board."

An overwhelming 68% of my survey respondents described a 'typical' graffiti artist as resembling a lower class, disadvantaged teenager with a big ego and who displays thuggish behaviour towards the community in general, confirming the absence of cultural understanding and lack of cultural awareness from society towards this secretive sub-culture. 22% of respondents produced a description of a "normal" or "average" teenager, from a good family, who attends school, has a normal social life and is just like any other teenager, simply with an artistic side and a different way of expressing him/herself. 10% admitted to not knowing who did graffiti.

Graffiti writer Seuk questions, "If the people committing these acts didn't care about society or people's opinions of them, why do they keep their "graffiti life" separate, secret and locked away from the people they look up to and respect?"

Phor deplores, "How "society" or the label society has given graffiti writers is "they smoke weed, they do drugs, they bash people, they steal things, they break into houses, they do this, they do that" I'll admit that the scene has a select few people like that but a majority of writers aren't anything like that, you'd be surprised how many people almost have had a heart attack when they found out that I do graffiti. Then they flip through a sketch book and they are surprised about how wrong they are. With such an incorrect stereotype being held within the community, both previous and current anti graffiti initiatives put in place by state governments, councils and community organisations have often been centred on targeting a type of person who may not even exist within the graffiti-subculture, or at the most is a tiny minority.

# Conclusion

Through doing my PIP and conducting my research into the Graffiti Sub Culture, I find myself being an informed observer, accustomed to and able to empathise with the Graffiti sub-culture and the surrounding individuals. I have discovered that the walls are telling more than just stories, just like photo albums, they are moments in time which are frozen for those who know about them. Through my knowledge and involvement with these graffiti writers and their lives, I have been able to show discernment towards the media and have come to realise that the media so often create an unnecessary, over the top hysteria. This hysteria is triggered by unrealistic stereotypes and inaccurate depictions of graffiti writers, which are put through the media, and as a result spread through society, impacting on people's attitudes and beliefs. I have become much more critical of the media as a result.

I have realized that there is a tremendous lack of cultural understanding that is being shown towards the sub-culture. It has both bewildered and infuriated me and has brought other similar issues in my micro world to my attention. I feel I am less of a passive observer now and more inclined to speak out about these issues however now from with an informed viewpoint.

The intention of this project has been to tell the whole story, and to vocalize graffiti writers, in contrast with various police, council representatives and members from the general public, and define who does graffiti, and what sort of people they are. I cannot definitively say that I have defined a graffiti writer within this project; however the individual's attitudes, thoughts, emotions and experiences shown throughout my PIP are examples of writers who not only challenge the stereotype, but are not simply a minority.

I was also intrigued with the level self analysis the graffiti writers I interviewed were able explain. The writers have a strong understanding and opinion on society and the way in which society thinks, moves and works. It was a pleasant surprise to realise how socially literate these people actually are. I have learnt to be more self aware through speaking to these people. I now feel a sense of personal, social and cultural identity. You may call them petty criminals, vandals, or artists, but at the end of the day they are human, and these graffiti writers can make more sense of their lives and have a greater sense of their place in society than your average citizen.



I became more socially literate through completing this project as I became a more critical observer of the world around me and have a better understanding of how to look at the three side of an argument. I was also able to empathise with the different perspectives of this affected by this subculture.

# Bibliography

# Websites

## **City Of Sydney-**

**[cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Residents/Graffiti/Default.asp](http://cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Residents/Graffiti/Default.asp)**

- This website was relatively useful as it assisted me with my research through presenting statistics, management strategies and also reporting the impacts of graffiti felt by the community, and what is being done to counteract graffiti on a local level. However the information on this website was limited.

## **Eternity in the heart of Sydney**

**[wesleymission.org.au/publications/eternity/eternity.html](http://wesleymission.org.au/publications/eternity/eternity.html)**

- This website was useful in giving me an insight into the background behind one of Australia's oldest graffiti writers, the society he grew up in and factors which both surrounded and impacted on his life. It provided me with some factual information regarding Arthur Stace, which I was able to use in my project.

## **Roman Graffiti: From Pompeii with Love**

**[heritage-key.com/blogs/ann/roman-graffiti-pompeii-love](http://heritage-key.com/blogs/ann/roman-graffiti-pompeii-love)**

- This website was only somewhat helpful. It gave me a good insight into Ancient graffiti in Pompeii, assisting my research. However it did not have a substantial amount of information that was relevant to my topic.

## **Strathfield Council – NSW Graffiti Laws**

**[strathfield.nsw.gov.au/page/residents/community-safety-/graffiti-vandalism/nsw-graffiti-laws/](http://strathfield.nsw.gov.au/page/residents/community-safety-/graffiti-vandalism/nsw-graffiti-laws/)**

- This site only gave me limited information in regards to official NSW Law in regards to graffiti. It was useful to a small extent when I was searching for content to support statements made by both Council Spokesperson Tarek Barakat and Senior Constable and Youth Case Manager Michelle Dreury.

## **We Run This Graffiti Forum**

[werunthis.org/index.php](http://werunthis.org/index.php)

- This website was extremely helpful as it gave me access to opinions and viewpoints of graffiti Writers. It gave me access to the thoughts and motives of graffiti Writers, and allowed me to get inside the minds of some Australian graffiti Writers, which was essential to the project.

## **Melbourne Graffiti**

<http://www.melbournegraffiti.com/index.php>

- This site is one of the biggest graffiti forums in Australia, it gave me access to interviews from some of Australia's top writers, newspaper articles and a taste of Australian graffiti history. The website gave me a good insight into the Graffiti Sub Culture and provided me with some solid information which was used in my PIP. It was extremely useful.

# Books

## **Premier's Department, New South Wales**

### **NSW Graffiti Solutions Handbook for Local Government, Planners, Designers and Developers**

- This document was extremely helpful with the designing of some of my interview and survey questions. It was useful in gathering deep insights into Government official initiatives, stances and viewpoints. This document was an essential factor in the scheme of this project as it helped me put some statistics behind the opinions of both Senior Constable and Youth Case Manager Michelle Dreury, and Council Spokesperson Tarek Barakat.

## **The graffiti sub culture "Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York"**

- This book has been a great help in giving me useful information regarding definitions and cultural background to graffiti overseas. It has also allowed me to view and absorb other writers' viewpoints on the graffiti sub-culture.