HIP
HOP
Grafitti Culture

Andrew Collins

Amid political cries to get tough on graffitists, a NSW police officer shows there are sensible and economically rational alternatives to follow.

Graffiti is evident in all communities throughout Australia and manifests itself at all levels of society. Graffiti can be defined as occurring in four distinct forms: toilet, community, political and gang related. There is only one manifestation that typically draws a reactive commitment from police and the community, that being graffiti carried out by young people.

Gang-related graffiti in this country developed with the increase in popularity of hip hop culture which had rapidly developed in Los Angeles and New York during the early 1970s. Hip hop culture developed three artistic strands which quickly replaced gang violence as a means of dispute settlement. These were music, dance and graffiti. It is therefore essential to draw a distinction between graffiti crews and 'home boy' gangs both of which are perceived by police and the community to symbolise the same culture. Although 'home boy' gangs possess members who engage in graffiti, their orientation and motivation exclude them from being identified as members of hip hop graffiti culture (HHGC). Indeed it is a source of amusement amongst 'writers' that the more a person dresses like a writer the less likely they are to be one.

HHGC in Australia is commonly thought to have started with the establishment of a crew known as International Bomb Squad (IBS). IBS is believed to have been the first graffiti crew established in Australia and is believed to have been established by an American serviceman who travelled the world initiating young members of the population into graffiti culture.

IBS soon saw the development of Rock City Funk and the rest is history. It is a commentary on the durability of the culture that IBS continues today and still contains some of Australia's most accomplished aerosol artists.

All major States in Australia have implemented anti-graffiti strategies. These have been largely unsuccessful. As with most strategies attempted in the US and Europe they have failed to address the significant cultural and social components of graffiti culture:

> ... current measures against illegal graffiti have failed because the social and cultural aspects of graffiti production have not been taken fully into account.[1]

It is true of policing in general that social or cultural issues which manifest themselves in any form of crime are generally left to be dealt with by reactionary methods. In the case of HHGC, once the cultural and social issues involved are reviewed and the necessary strategies, both reactive and pro-active, implemented utilising broad community resources, then police and communities are much better equipped to address the issue.

It is not true that a broad-based policy can be implemented on a state-wide basis. graffiti culture like any culture presents itself in different forms, dependent on the social and cultural component of their local communities, the distribution of cultural knowledge, the age of the

Andrew Collins is a Senior Constable in the NSW Police Service and Youth Arts Officer at Newcastle Community Arts Centre.

culture and particularly the presence or lack of an established graffiti hierarchy possessing experienced writers.

Even in relatively close communities, graffiti will present itself in cultures at different stages of development, orientation and priorities. Therefore, a broad-based policy will not adequately address individual cultures on a patrol, district or community level:

> ... It is therefore crucial to find those informants who hold the most cultural knowledge relative to their peers in order to get the most reliable and valid representations of cultural patterns.[2]

Similarly, according to Freeman and others:

> Systematic research on social intelligence has demonstrated that the more individuals are integrated into a group (as measured by the number of links with other individuals or in-group/out-group designation), the greater the knowledge that individual has about the interactions and communication of others in that group.[3]

It is, therefore, necessary to develop graffiti strategies on a local level utilising people possessing complex and detailed knowledge of the individual cultures. This poses a complex problem for law enforcement bodies who are seen as the enemy by hip hop graffiti crews and have never been able to penetrate the gang structure or culture to any significant degree. The one exception to this rule was NCACORD. The police response, Operation ORD, 1994–1996 was run in the Hunter Police District. The co-ordinating body for the operation, Newcastle Community Arts Centre, provides staff with detailed knowledge of hip hop culture. Staff also possess knowledge of community projects and modern community strategies and provide an aid to local councils in evaluating local culture, development and implementation of local anti-graffiti projects.

The easiest distinction to be made between orientations of graffiti crews is that between 'traditional' and 'modern' crews. Traditional crews are those which possess an orientation almost solely toward illegal activities, rationalising that the culture came from the streets in competition with authorities and should remain in its base form. Indeed they view legal opportunities as being a 'sell out' and have a favourite bias toward activities against rail services. Crews such as THC (The Hunted Children: Qld) would have been totally opposed to legal opportunities. Traditional crews pose a significant problem to law enforcement bodies. Being totally opposed to legal opportunities, no pro-active strategies are going to modify their behavioural patterns.

Modern crews are those which see the culture as being in a developmental stage, the primary goal being to develop the artform. While still possessing a strong orientation toward attacks on the rail system, this is the element of the culture most open to change and the influences of pro-active strategies.

It is possible through extensive use of community cultural policing to sufficiently modify crew behaviour to reorient the focus of an individual culture from traditional too modern.

NCACORD (Newcastle) through the use of reactive strategies (arrest of those members most opposed to modern hip hop culture) and intensive use of skills courses, development of business/personal skills, computer graphics, and inclusion or exclusion from legal projects, promoted those modernist members rapidly through the ranks until an entirely modernist hierarchy existed.

Once the hierarchy has been structured to reflect the aims of the community and police, a snowball effect occurs through the culture. The role models presented to *taggers* are those of *modernised* orientation. The influence placed on younger members of the culture is greater than current reactive measures used by law enforcement bodies.

Once the hip hop culture has been sufficiently steered towards *modernism*, intensive strategies must be formulated to deal with inexperienced members of the culture, commonly referred to as *toys* who form the majority of taggers.

Taggers are those usually responsible for most damage caused by this culture. Not possessing the skills to attempt *pieces*, they must content themselves with tagging, through which they develop their abilities. Through the use of skills courses to enhance the individual's ability, rapid development of skills is achieved and a corresponding decrease in tagging by the individual occurs.

Supported by the necessary community resources the individual can then be redirected from tagging to attempting pieces. It is common to find that those individuals at the top of the tagging ladder are reluctant to make the next step to the bottom of the piecing scene. This is combated through utilising *king* writers to run courses, making them more attractive to members of the culture.

For any strategy to be effective, early identification of members of the community is essential. As individuals within graffiti culture seek to gain *fame* from their activities, no problem exists for law enforcement bodies to identify individuals. Unfortunately, much damage can be caused before this identification is successful. A pro-active strategy provides an ideal medium for the early identification of individuals. Strategies run through arts bodies or youth organisations provide an ideal intelligence source for law enforcement bodies. A problem arises with the reluctance of workers to provide information to law enforcement bodies. This was a main criticism of the Victorian Association of Youth in Communities projects run by Joe Morris in the early 1990s. A further criticism was that insufficient regulation and control was put on distribution and control of paint supplies at projects.

This situation is circumvented through the use of a *police* worker in the co-ordinating and running of projects. NCACORD projects run since 1994 by Newcastle Community Arts Centre have involved the use of a member of the NSW Police Service employed as a Youth Arts Officer to develop, co-ordinate and run various arts-based anti-graffiti strategies. The officer is also the commander of the police anti-graffiti operation (Operation ORD) for the local police district.

This symbiotic relationship enables the police to immediately identify offenders, and the trust relationship which exists between the hierarchy and the police worker enables much of the reactive effort of police to be carried out by members within the culture. More direct influence can be exerted by members of the culture's hierarchy to curb the activities of *toys* and indeed they can use methods not available in modern policing.

Once the HHGC has been steered towards modernism rather than traditional practices, a situation occurs where the hierarchy has a vested interest in seeing the level of tagging decreased. An increased public awareness of the artform leads to an increase in commercial projects providing a source of income to writers. Further employment and status

is provided by individuals running skills courses and increased publicity of projects provides *fame* for a *writer* through a larger audience base than any individual effort could.

With the increase in public awareness, law enforcement agencies achieve an increase in the reporting of this type of crime and an increase in customer confidence. As community resources are provided, there is a decrease in the culture's *us and them* mentality which views the community and law enforcement agencies as the enemy. A decrease in crew competition is achieved through community projects where previously rival crews work together, resulting in a decrease in *tagging* wars.

To further modify HHGC, education programs need to be conducted within the culture and within community organisations and education bodies. Community education increases the knowledge of the culture and decreases the community fear associated with the presence of graffiti. Education programs conducted in schools need to address both students and teachers.

Individuals engaged in HHGC will undoubtedly have their tags present in schoolbooks and this can assist police in the early identification of members of this culture. Teachers also can play a valuable role in the reorientation of the culture. Through legitimising aerosol art and including it in the school curriculum, it loses its appeal to individuals who see it as a tool to rebel against the community. Tertiary and post secondary eduction facilities commonly fail to recognise aerosol street art as a legitimate artform and thus another door is closed to those members of HHGC who wish to progress to graphic arts or cartooning.

Law enforcement bodies also need education to reorient both management and those in the front line to see the problem as a social and cultural one rather than as a crime problem. A total misrepresentation of youth involved in HHGC has been fostered by law enforcement bodies in this country. Once police begin to see the youth culture which manifests itself in crime in real terms rather than in those portrayed in the media, then decisive programs can be formulated.

Reactive organisations such as the Graffiti Task Force (GTF) (NSW) did nothing to address the cultural and social aspects of HHGC. Indeed statements by this and other policing groups throughout Australia have led to the belief that the typical writer is one carrying a 30 mm texta and an iron bar. Squads such as this, which rely solely on reactive efforts to address the complex issues involved in this culture, were destined to fail. Although at times good reactive results are achieved, the overall problem is not addressed and any result is at best simply a rear guard action.

Units such as the GTF, when compared with operations or agencies which address the broad-based community issues, pale into insignificance. This was shown when the Victorian Government addressed the cultural issues leading to a decrease in damage from $20 million to $2 million (1990–1996).[4]

Education of business groups is also of vital importance and must include issues such as modern anti-graffiti building design, explanation of modern anti-graffiti tactics (example early removal, anti-graffiti coatings, placement of surveillance cameras) and the necessary support of legal projects by the provision of legal walls.

Local courts also provide a valuable tool in addressing HHGC. Through the use of legal projects and local council clean-up crews as referral agencies for offenders, the culture can be further addressed. Courts also come into contact with members of the culture who have not been previously identified. It is, however, of prime importance to avoid introducing young people into the juvenile justice system. The establishment of a dedicated court, such as exists in the USA, to deal solely with graffiti offenders, places a greater emphasis on redirection of youth rather than on appeasing public opinion by handing down large sentences.

Indeed it is possible through amendments to the NSW Community Aid Panel scheme to totally bypass the justice system via a pre-court panel dealing with first occasion offenders. This system is currently operating at Murrurundi (NSW) with great success.

Evaluation of any project as outlined above is difficult. An increase in the reported incidents of crime should be the aim of any such project so that greater evaluation can be undertaken. As education programs and media coverage increase, so does the reporting of this crime. In real terms significant decreases in actual crime will be achieved, yet the level of reported crime will, in the short term, increase. NCACORD (NSW) saw a dramatic ongoing decrease in the actual incidents of crime for the period 1994–1996.

A far more accurate estimate of the level of graffiti crime occurring can be achieved through identifying the increase/decrease of the number of incidents attended by either local government clean-up crews or individual companies specialising in graffiti removal.

Once the cultural and social aspects of HHGC have been addressed, the culture becomes self-policing. Through the use of a multi agency approach, resources and expertise become available to law enforcement bodies which are currently not utilised. To fully address HHGC, strategies must include community, juvenile justice, local courts, local and State government, business groups, youth and social organisations, public transport organisations, law enforcement agencies, members of the culture and particularly arts and education bodies.

The principles of community cultural policing explained above can be used to address cultural/social problems which manifest themselves in crime. Utilising a broad community base and individuals with expertise and knowledge in the area as well as traditional reactive policing methods, major inroads can be achieved.

Through the use of strategies including modification of hierarchy, redirection of cultural orientations, design and implementation of legal alternatives, comprehensive education programs throughout the entire community and the implementation of self-policing roles by individuals within the identified culture, the principles of community cultural policing can be adapted to address any social/cultural orientated crime.

Coupled with these strategies, mechanisms must be put in place covering all aspects of the program, with the evaluating process dealing with all levels of achievement rather than simply statistical evaluation based on crime figures. Support mechanisms within the individual culture and through the wider community need to be established.

References

1. Brewer, D.D. and Miller, M., *Bombing and Burning: The Social Organisation and Values of Hip Hop Graffiti Writers*, (1990) 11(4) *Deviant Behaviour* 345 at 351.

Queer theory attempts to deconstruct the categories of identity and render them problematic. This is because it is not grounded in any positive truth. It acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. This shows that queer is more of a relation than a category. In this way queer adopts a Foucauldian analysis of power. Power, according to Foucault, is not a linear relationship flowing in one direction. He argues that power is an all embracing concept. Nothing is outside power, and no single institution or person owns power. This organic model is perpetrated through a myriad of power relationships. Power from one institution over an individual is more precisely described as dominion, which is one type of power. This is a negative form of power. Power is also positive. As it is all embracing it can come from below in the form of resistance. As such there is nothing in particular to which it *necessarily* refers. Queer is thus fluid — its boundaries are flexible.

Queer can also be seen as a strategic manoeuvre, a resistance to the attempt of categorisation inherent within the dominant culture. As such it challenges the binary opposition of hetero/homo.

Within the legal discourse queer challenges the categorical thinking which, as already outlined, is the foundation of legal analysis. It challenges the idea of a marked category in which the individual is known.

The notion of any type of binary is based on categorical thinking. Any binary is categorical in that it requires two terms with identifiable features and strong distinctions between the two so that they are easily separable.

The classification taking place in the hetero/homo binary is definite and assured. A distinction is firmly drawn with the identity of the defendant who has killed the victim. This then is translated into the hetero/homo binary by a concerted effort to model a heterosexual defendant and homosexual victim who, through the act of killing, are put at odds with each other. Once this device is in place the court maintains the binary through various methods such as assimilation of peripheral sexualities into homosexuality and the use of stereotypes. There is no common ground between the two; even those otherwise heterosexual victims who have made a sexual advance to the male defendant are believed to be homosexual.

This categorical thinking is the antipathy of queer since queer transcends barriers. The queering of the hetero/homo binary can begin in any of the methods outlined to maintain the binary. It can reinvent the assimilation process by relating sexualities via their marking as the other and rejecting the idea that they can be known because they fall within the category. In repudiating this idea, queer sets the whole objectification process on its head and restores the object to the subject.

However, queer is an attempt to transcend barriers, so it can be used to confuse the boundaries between the hetero and the other. Its pluralist framework denies the notion that there is one type of heterosexuality and one type of homosexuality and in place asserts the multiplicity of sexualities. In doing so it disrupts the opposition set in place between heterosexuality and homosexuality which is vital to shifting blame from the defendant to the victim.

Conclusion

This analysis shows there is an explicit discursive maintenance of the hetero/homo by the courts of law. The deconstruction or refusal to recognise other peripheral sexualities,

the use of stereotypes to preserve the binary, and assertion of heterosexuality evidences this type of essentialist approach by the defendants.

Queer represents an important tool to resist this dominant classification system as it transcends the boundaries that have been erected. This allows it to resist the objectification process and reinstate the victim to a subjective status, and it fractures the hetero/homo opposition.

References

1. Fuss, D., 'Inside/Out' in *Inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, D. Fuss (ed.), Routledge, 1991, p.2.
2. George, A., 'The Gay (?) Victim on Trial: Discourses of Sexual Division in the Courtroom' in *Homophobic Violence*, G. Mason and S. Tomsen (eds), The Hawkins Press, 1997, p.51.
3. George, A., *Homosexual Provocation: The Courtroom as an Arena of Gender Conflict in Australia*, A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Newcastle, January 1995, p.34.
4. George, above, ref. 2, p.48.
5. The insistence in using this type of language becomes even more questionable when it is noted that the deceased characterised the victim's initial advances as gentle (unreported High Ct at 14).
6. Fuss, above, p.2.
7. Halperin, D., *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p.44.
8. Halperin, D., above.
9. Foucault, M., *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. 1, translated by R. Hurley, Vintage Books, 1978, 1990 repr.
10. Halperin, D., above, p.57.

2. Kirk, J. and Miller, M., *Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, 1986, p.76
3. Freeman, L.C., Romney, A.K. and Freeman, S., 'Cognitive Structure and Information Accuracy', (1987) 92 *American Anthropologist* 231 at 239.
4. Statistics given to author by Victorian Public Transport Commission during visit as part of duties with NSW Police.

References

1. Chesterman, M., 'Contempt by the Media: How the Courts Define It', (1986) 58(94) *Australian Quarterly* 388-97, p.395,396.
2. *Davis v Baillie* (1946) VLR 486 at 495 — where the media were allowed to warn the public of housebreakings by the accused in the course of his flight.
3. Murphy J the trial judge in *Hinch v Attorney-General (Victoria)* (1987) 61 ALJR 556 at 569.
4. Mason CJ in *Hinch* at 561.
5. Kirby, Justice M.D., 'Pre-trial Publicity — Free Speech v Free Trial', (1995) 6(3) *Journal of Media Law and Practice* 221.
6. Carroll, J., Kerr, N., Alfini, J., Weaver, F., Maccoun, R. and Feldman, V., 'Free Press and Fair Trial: The Role of Behavioural Research', (1986) 10 *Law and Human Behaviour* 187-201, p.193.
7. *Hansard*, 19 October 1994, House of Reps, p.2416.
8. Kirby, above, p.240.
9. Starke J, (1988) 62(4) *Australian Law Journal* 253-4.
10. Koomen, K., 'The Real Issues in Who Weekly', 14(2) *Communications Law Bulletin* 3-5. Subsequent comments in the text are based on this article.