# PAVEMENT GRAFFITI

## an exploration of roads and footways in words and pictures

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# Contents

# Abstract

This project is an invitation to notice the paved surfaces of roads and footways and to read what is written on them. It is based on some hundreds of photographs of pavement inscriptions, taken over a period of thirteen years, and is presented in two parts of equal value. The creative component is *Pavement appreciation*, an on-line gallery of images and interpretive text ([www.pavementappreciation.net](www.pavementappreciation.net)). The written component is a cross-disciplinary exegesis that canvasses different aspects of pavement graffiti.

Paved surfaces are so familiar that they have become almost invisible, so utilitarian that they have seldom merited contemplation. To counter such neglect, the project takes the reader on a series of intersecting journeys.

The first journey is a metaphorical expedition through the written word, searching for evidence of the pavement's symbolic presence in people's thoughts. Along the way this expedition pays brief calls on road engineers and urban eccentrics, literary luminaries and newspaper letter-writers.

The other journeys are photographic traversals of streets and sidewalks, scanning the asphalt for signs and messages written in chalk or spray-paint. These journeys are exercises in reconstructing stories – of vilification and romance, marketing and mourning – from fragments gathered off the pavement. Such stories transcend particular locations and individual instances of graffiti, and offer insights into the complexities of everyday life.

The project is a travel guide to the horizontal. It suggests by example how the pavement might be studied for new perspectives on the built environment and the lives of people who inhabit it.

# Declaration

I declare that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

The project received approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at Macquarie University – Reference number HE28AUG2009-D00089.

Signed:

Date:

# Acknowledgments

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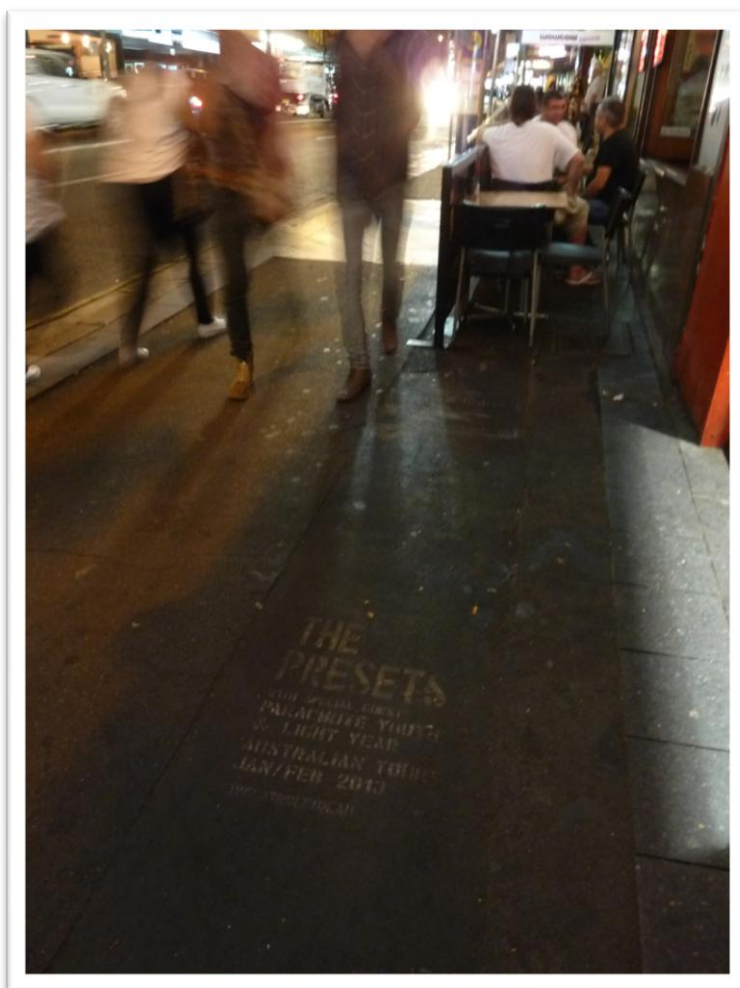
And finally, all those unknown pavement writers and artists who transform a walk round the block into a literary adventure.

# Introduction

## Introduction

> As he walked, Stillman did not look up. His eyes were permanently fixed on the pavement, as though he were searching for something. Indeed, every now and then he would stoop down, pick some object off the ground, and examine it closely, turning it over and over in his hand. It made Quinn think of an archaeologist, inspecting a shard at some prehistoric ruin. Occasionally, after poring over an object in this way, Stillman would toss it back onto the sidewalk. But more often than not he would open his bag and lay the object gently inside it. Then, reaching into one of his coat pockets, he would remove a red notebook – similar to Quinn's but smaller – and write in it with great concentration for a minute or two. Having completed this operation, he would return the notebook to his pocket, pick up his bag, and continue on his way.
>
> - Paul Auster, *City of glass* (1985)

**Discovery**

In public places we are accustomed to seeing messages on vertical surfaces. Businesses, government authorities and advertisers utilise existing vertical spaces – or erect them specifically – to grab our attention with their names and notices. The built environment is covered with words and pictures – on walls, shopfronts, buses, bus shelters, road signs, billboards and electronic screens. Whatever space remains is fair game for graffitists – not only the taggers, wall artists and stencillers of recent times, but the writers of slogans, whose history can be traced back to classical Pompeii and beyond, and whose motives and meanings are the subject of intermittent scholarly attention.

But paved horizontal surfaces are as much a part of the built environment as vertical structures and they too serve as the background for many kinds of writing. The most obvious are the regulatory lines and signs painted by traffic authorities to control the use of the pavement itself, but a host of other communicators have also taken advantage of the smooth surfaces offered by roads and sidewalks to express themselves. There is an extensive anthology of works lying waiting to be discovered on the pavement.

I first began to take notice of this anthology around 1999 when small arcane stencils had begun to populate the footpaths in the main street of Newtown, a node of graffiti activity on the City of Sydney's inner western fringe close to where I live. Some of them were artistic works but others, as it later turned out, were advertisements for dance parties. Intrigued, I began photographing them as a way of documenting their ephemeral existence. Without being able to articulate why, I had, for a long time, considered the pavement to be a disturbing urban presence, but as soon as I turned my camera downwards I discovered that it was also the bearer of many written messages. After that I began photographing pavement graffiti wherever I went.

**Collection**

My definition of 'pavement graffiti' is a broad one. By 'pavement' I mean hard, paved surfaces in public places. These include roads (or 'carriageways' in older terminology), footpaths ('footways' in older Australian terminology, 'sidewalks' in America), public squares and parking lots. Their paving materials range from cobblestones and flagstones to tarmacadam, asphalt and concrete.[1] By 'pavement graffiti' I mean any

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[1] The term 'pavement' can be problematic in that usage varies across English-speaking countries. Respondents to my blog, *Pavement graffiti*, have pointed out that people in Britain usually think of the pavement as a paved footway; in Australia this seems to be the more generally accepted meaning as well, although the term 'footpath' is more widely used. In American English the term 'pavement' is used for 'the durable surface material laid down on an area intended to sustain vehicular or foot traffic, such as a road or walkway' (see the entry for *Road surface* in Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Road_surface, accessed 3 March 2013).

The Oxford English Dictionary's list of definitions of 'pavement' covers all these uses. Condensed, the OED's meanings (excluding the specialised mining and zoological uses), are: a paved surface *OR* hard covering laid on the ground (used chiefly in technical contexts); paving or similar surfacing (used as a mass noun); the paved or metalled part of a road or other public thoroughfare *OR* the roadway (used chiefly in North America and in Engineering); a paved footpath alongside a street or road (but the preferred term in North America is 'sidewalk') (OED Online, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/139087?rskey=T0MIQZ&result=1&isAdvanced=false , accessed 20 March 2013).

In my extensive reading of current as well as older references – mainly from Australia, but also from Britain and USA – I have seen the term 'pavement' variously used by both engineers and laypeople to refer to the paved surfaces of roads, of footpaths alone, and of roads *and* footpaths. For my project I have chosen to use 'pavement' in this last, broad sense because it

inscription deliberately made on these paved surfaces. Examples can include anything from stencilled advertisements to romantic declarations, from chalked trompe l'oeil artworks to tyre burnouts. I am mainly interested in marks made unofficially or transgressively, but from time to time I also photograph legitimate signs and instructions painted or stencilled on the pavement.

Although it occurs more densely in some places than others, horizontal graffiti can be found wherever there are paved surfaces. I seldom specifically seek it out, but always carry my camera with me. Inevitably most of the photographs were taken in those parts of Sydney that I habitually frequent, but my collection also includes images from rural areas, different states of Australia, and overseas places where I have travelled in recent years. I am not a skilled photographer and my images are documentary snapshots rather than art photographs.

My actions are strikingly similar to those of Paul Auster's character Stillman, as I wander through the streets with my eyes fixed permanently on the ground, searching for things that I can collect, though not in a bag but in my camera.

I could have gone on like the mad Stillman, collecting my finds and secreting them away. Or I could have gone a step further, by opening a Flickr file and sharing them with the world. But even so, without interpretation such an accumulation is merely obsessive stamp collecting. Instead, I decided that undertaking a postgraduate research project would give me the motivation to study more closely the artefacts I had been photographing. In *City of glass* it transpires that Stillman's walks each took the shape of a letter. If Stillman's daily routes spelt out a phrase, mine would spell out a thesis.[2]

**Two routes**

My intentions were, first, to approach pavement inscription as a cultural phenomenon and look for meanings that transcend particular locations and individual instances of

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is the only term available that can collectively refer to all the different kinds of hard surface laid down on the ground for ease of passage, whether by wheels, feet or hooves.

[2] Stillman's phrase, spelt out one letter at a time, was 'Tower of Babel' (see Auster, 2011b, 67-70).

graffiti; and secondly, to make publicly available my collection of photographs by way of a medium that allows for some level of interpretation. But before I began, I needed to locate the recording and study of pavement graffiti within the context of other serious – though not necessarily scholarly – work, and to legitimize what might otherwise appear to be a trivial pursuit.

In my literature search I found that I had antecedents who perambulated, photographed and theorized the urban environment, including some whose studies included graffiti as an urban phenomenon. But I found very few instances where the pavement – or specifically, the inscriptions upon it – had been dealt with at all.

Michel de Certeau's *The practice of everyday life* has had a great deal of influence in steering cultural studies towards a ground-level view of the city.[3] Given this, it seems surprising that so little attention has been paid to the pavement, the platform upon which pedestrians – de Certeau's 'ordinary practitioners of the city' – trace out their urban text. Even if walkers and motorists (the latter of which de Certeau does *not* take into account) defy in their own ways the administrative system represented by street layouts, they must nevertheless have an intimate acquaintanceship with the physical fabric of the grid over which they must pass. That an appreciation of the pavement's existence may be deeply embedded in people's psyche, even if unconsciously, is illustrated by the frequent metaphorical use of 'paving the way' as scaffolding for conceptual structures in everyday conversation.[4]

The apparent scholarly neglect of the part played by the pavement in everyday life prompted me to undertake an unexpected expedition, searching further afield for evidence of the pavement in people's thoughts. My readings have taken in, not only publications from a range of academic disciplines, but also literary, journalistic and

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[3] The phrase 'ground-level view of the city' has been borrowed from Soja's (1997, 21) critique of the 'over-privileging of what has been called, often with reference to the work of Michel de Certeau, the "view from below"'.

[4] Metaphorical 'paving' is more complicated than this, however. In her British National Corpus linguistic analysis of verbs included in path-, road- and way- sentences in English, Marlene Johanssen Falck (2010) finds that paved ways are typically metaphorical, while paved paths and roads are not. A further discussion of her study is beyond the scope of this present project.

popular publications, as well as websites and blogs. This pavement-seeking detour through the written word intersects and complements the main route of my project – a photographic traversal of the pavement itself.

**Encounters**

Helen Liggett's work *Urban encounters* (2003) is 'a book of images and text written for people who read on the way to work instead of looking at the city around them'. By presenting her montage of 'urban encounters' Liggett is seeking out cities as places of life, pointing out that 'when used to make connections to the city, the camera is not an instrument of representation; it is a way of making space and attracting meanings' (Liggett, 2003, vii, ix, 120).

Liggett's photographs, taken in Cleveland, Ohio, are of shop dummies, road workers, shoppers, pamphleteers, Frisbee throwers and traffic cops. Her book might have been a model for my photographic traversal, except that she chooses to juxtapose images and text independently of each other, with neither merely illustrating the other. The images sometimes complement the text, sometimes contradict it (pp. ix-x).

Taking a rather different approach, my exercise has involved the accumulation of images (taken in cities, but elsewhere as well), all the while sifting and resifting through them, looking for patterns, groupings, stories and insights. The point of the exercise has been to draw out meanings and stories from the pavement and find ways in which these stories might be relayed to audiences more accustomed to reading off the page or off the screen than off the asphalt. It is in this way that I have taken on Liggett's closing challenge:

> To photograph the material of everyday life is to become an heir to the storyteller, infinitely productive, a faithful witness, bearing a happy responsibility for the spaces in which you find yourself (p. 158).

By taking the two routes – one as an examiner of the written word, one as a photographer/storyteller of the pavement itself – I have aimed to reveal the symbolic role the pavement plays in people's lives, provide a model of how pavements might be read as texts, demonstrate the breadth of material available, and suggest a new

perspective from which the built environment – and the people who live in it – might be viewed.

**Presentation**

The submission is presented in two parts of equal value – a written component and a creative component in the form of a website.

*Written component*

At the core of the written component are seven 'stories' or essays, each canvassing some aspect of pavement graffiti. In my 'storyteller' role I experimented with different ways of bringing together text and images for different audiences, and the result was a suite of works which were published, some in print media, some digitally. It is these works that appear, in an adapted form, in Chapter 5 'The traveller's tales'.

To provide context to the stories, in Chapter 1 'Imagining the pavement' I examine a selection of texts to find out people's attitude to the pavement and how this might affect the act of writing on the its surface.

The next three chapters serve as literature review and commentary, providing a scholarly lineage for my storytelling project. Chapter 2 'Exploring the unknown' reviews studies on the subject of urban exploration, while Chapter 3 'Capturing graffiti' looks at the ways in which modern (and post-modern) graffiti has been recorded and studied. In Chapter 4 'Looking down' I introduce some authors who have already noticed the pavement and review the work of others whose attention is directed elsewhere, but whose ideas might be extended to the business of reading the pavement.

In the Conclusion I reflect on my explorations and come to the realisation that the underlying preoccupation of the project has been something that goes deeper than surface graffiti.

*Creative component*

The complementary half of this project is an on-line exhibition that features the majority of my photographs. *Pavement graffiti: a step-by-step guide to asphalt graffiti* is at www.pavementappreciation.net.

I began collecting photographs of pavement graffiti in August 1999 and have continued ever since, with a graduation from semi-automatic analogue camera to digital in 2005, and to mobile phone (occasionally) in 2013. Dates, times, locations and my reasons for being there are transferred to my digital catalogue, having first been recorded on the spot in a notebook (like Stillman's red book). I also file material that will give context to particular examples of graffiti, including newspaper clippings, posters torn off light poles, and scraps of information passed on by interested people.

There is no particular artistry in my images and it is the fact that the horizontal artefacts are even being photographed and displayed at all, rather than *how* they are photographed, that invests the images with the potential to alter my relationship, and the relationship of viewers, with familiar and unfamiliar places.

It was always my intention to share the photographs in some way, and from early in the project I had decided that a website would be the most appropriate medium.[5] *Pavement appreciation: a step-by-step guide to asphalt graffiti* was launched in August 2012.

Prior to that, in May 2009 I started a blog, which gave me a web presence and was a try-out for the creative work that was to follow. Keeping a blog was a way of sharing some of the photographs with others, telling some stories and rehearsing some

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[5] Other possibilities that might have been developed for the creative component include a picture book; an exhibition of photographic prints and/or a looped slide-show in a museum or gallery; the full collection of images, or short slide shows ('digital storytelling'), loaded onto social websites such as Flickr, YouTube, etc; or an expansion of my existing blog. However, the advantages of a unique website include:  ability to display the full database of photographs, with links to interpretive text; possibility of capturing the interest of an audience for more than a fleeting moment; internal linking between and among text and photographs; audience ability to choose their own non-linear pathway through the layers of the site; opportunity for the audience to provide feedback via email or Facebook; database available in perpetuity; and not least, it is a medium suited to my style and skills.

arguments. *Pavement graffiti: stories from the ground level gallery* is at

[www.meganix.net/pavement](www.meganix.net/pavement). It does not form part of this submission, but I

occasionally refer to one of its posts in the following chapters.[6]

The website that was eventually developed, *Pavement appreciation,* is an experiment
in making a collection of images publicly available in an interesting format, and with a
level of interpretation not geared to an academic audience. The apparent simplicity of
the site belies the work that went into making it appear simple. Some 500 images
were eventually chosen and sorted into a set of thirteen categories – or 'galleries' –
whose topics were based on nodes that emerged as I drew up a concept map. These
are not the obvious topics into which a set of graffiti photos might be sorted because,
after all, the object of the project is to draw attention to meanings that are not
obvious. The commentary introducing each gallery is honed to a self-imposed word
limit and is succinct but not trite. In fact, in these aphorisms I have tried to capture the
essence of all the stories I have discovered on the pavement – those stories that have
been expanded into essays, those that have been mentioned in blog posts, and those
that had hitherto remained in my notebooks.[7]

Professional designers Stu of the Day were engaged to design the 'look' and the back
end of the site under my direction. The navigation was based on wire frames that I
had already drawn up.[8] The end result is a site that works the way I wanted it to work
but that has been enhanced not only by Stu of the Day's suggestions for additional

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[6] The blog does not get a huge amount of traffic, but there is a steady stream of visitors and
the occasional, mostly positive, comment. How could I not be gratified by comments from
strangers like this: "I was telling someone over Christmas about this blog. I was a little
stunned that this person couldn't see how our relationship to the ground is any different to
the walls (and by extension, how pavement graffiti is any different from 'normal' graffiti). In
response, I felt like they were missing out on a whole aspect of our everyday world. / So
thanks for seeing the difference - and helping me see it too. I love this blog"
([http://www.meganix.net/pavement/about/#comment-17010](http://www.meganix.net/pavement/about/#comment-17010)). Or this from another blogger:
"On visiting the Pavement Graffiti blog, I quickly realised what a rich seam of social study the
pavement can be in the hands of a dedicated researcher. Go check it out and I promise, you'll
find there is more to the pavement than you ever expected"
([http://petemclean.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/pavement-graffiti/](http://petemclean.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/pavement-graffiti/) ).

[7] Individual images have been captioned with general whereabouts and the year the
photograph was taken. I deliberately chose not to give more detailed information, such as GPS
co-ordinates, because the point of the exercise is not to send people looking for particular
instances of what are, usually, ephemeral artefacts, but rather to encourage them to make
their own discoveries.

[8] Financial assistance for the various aspects of creating and registering a website was largely
provided by Postgraduate Research Funding from Macquarie University.

ways of navigating around the layers, but also by their work with the typography and graphics that frame the galleries. In this website, my collection of flat photos has been elevated from archive to exhibition.[9]

A glance at my bibliography will show that I have relied heavily on the Internet throughout this project to find information and inspiration. *Pavement appreciation* is my reciprocal contribution to that now indispensable adjunct to the world of study and reflection. The purpose of my website is not only to showcase the graffiti that I have found, but to encourage others to engage with the pavement in their own part of the world. It is a digital guide for the exploration of places they thought they already knew.

To the readers of this project, I recommend visiting the website first, even if only to take a preliminary stroll through the images, before going on to read the rest of the written component.

*Pavement appreciation: a step-by-step guide to asphalt graffiti* can be viewed at www.pavementappreciation.net .

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[9] The website has been well received. Of the readers who have responded, a number have been keen to tell me about pavement-writing events in their own part of the world. Their emails have pointed me to, for example, an astonishingly spontaneous and extensive chalk memorial in Toronto, following the death of well-liked politician Jack Layton; pavement chalking included in acts of visual activism and resistance in, for example, Hong Kong, Zurich, London and the University of Arizona , the last resulting in an arrest; the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire Memorial chalk project in New York City; romantic messages on streets readable from the balconies of Soviet residential tower blocks in Kiev; religious messages on the sidewalks of Salt Lake City; a memorial to Holocaust victims involving the placement of stones on pavements in Germany; and the artworks of Ben Cummins who chalks around the shadows of unsuspecting loiterers in the streets of London. For me, these emails indicate that pavement writing continues to be a potent means of communication and that drawing (or re-drawing) people's attention to it is a worthwhile pursuit.

# Chapter 1

## Imagining the pavement
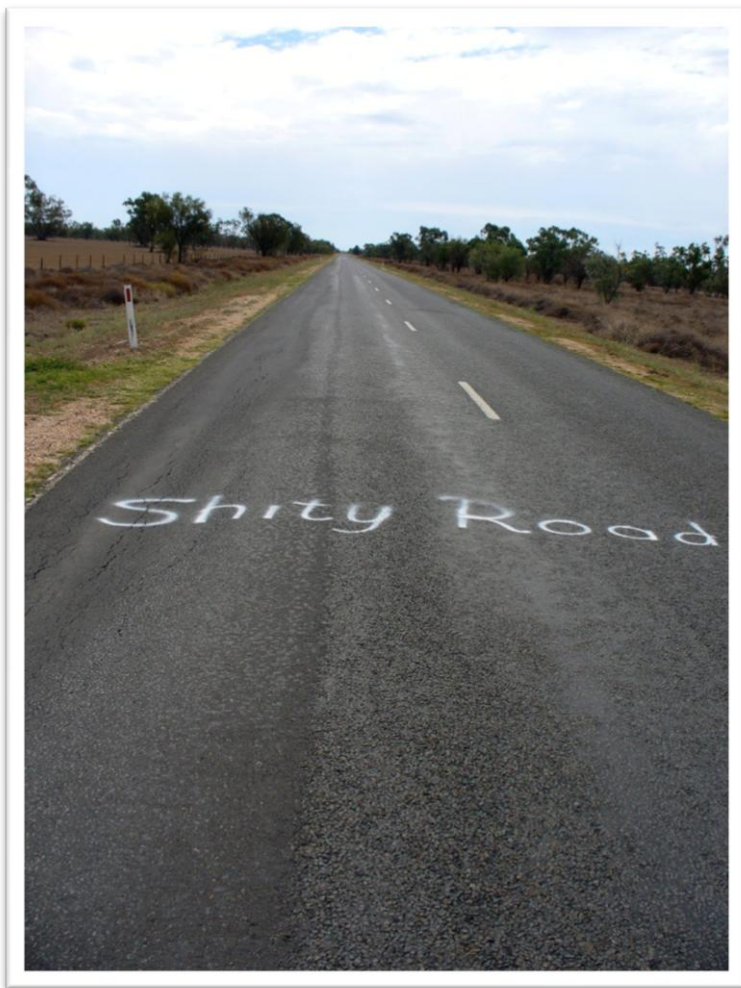
## Chapter 1.  Imagining the pavement

> Each one of us, then, should speak of his roads, his crossroads, his roadside benches.
>
> - Gaston Bachelard, *The poetics of space* (1964)

**Background reading**

Roadways. Footpaths. Plazas. Parking lots. This is the domain over which I range in search of horizontal graffiti. I am looking for spray-paint and chalk, engravings, inclusions and thermoplastic applications to photograph and puzzle over. But before embarking upon any sort of exploration, it is important to gather existing knowledge of the terrain to be covered. So, if I am to study pavement inscriptions then first I need to read something about the background they are written on.

That background is the street where you live, it's the long and winding road that leads to your door, it's the desert highway. It's not really the route I need to know about, but the surface. It's paved with gold, it's paved with good intentions, it's the concrete and clay beneath my feet, it's the cobblestones I'm kickin' down, it's the sidewalk the jackhammer is diggin' up again in the neighbourhood.[10]

I need to deal with this surface because, as Barthes (1985b, 167) has remarked,

> We know that what constitutes graffiti is in fact neither the inscription nor its message but the wall, the background, the surface (the desktop); it is because the background exists fully, as an object which has already lived, that such writing always comes to it as an enigmatic surplus...

Graffiti is dependent on its substrate. If I want to decipher the stories encoded in pavement graffiti, I should first find out how the pavement 'exists fully'.

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[10] Alan Jay Lerner/ *On the street where you live*; Lennon-McCartney/ *The long and winding road*; Neil Young/ *Unknown legend*; Tommy Moeller and Brian Parker/ *Concrete and clay*; Paul Simon/ *The 59th Street Bridge song*; Tom Waites/ *In the neighborhood*.

This does not mean that I am setting out to write a history of road making or a scientific tract on pavement engineering. Rather, I need to know where the pavement exists in people's minds so that I can see how this mental construct might affect the act of writing on the pavement's surface.

**Noticing the invisible**

The concrete and bituminous surfaces that seal our public thoroughfares are marvels of modern technology.[11] They are a mark of civilisation and enterprise, the pride of civil engineers, a constant drain on the budgets of local governments, the raison d'être of main roads boards. But what place do they hold in the imaginations of ordinary people? Are they so familiar that they have become invisible, so utilitarian that they do not deserve contemplation, so unremarkable that they are only remarked upon when a pothole or a displaced slab causes inconvenience?

Eccentric appreciator of ruins, Robert Ginsberg, was forced to contemplate the pavement as he wandered about Pompeii:

> We stumble. The street of the ruin is a ruin, the floor of paving is fragmented, scattered, missing. Discovery replaces authenticity […] We are steeped in what we have stepped in. The sidewalk energizes us, even as we are obliged by it to stop walking. We discover that what has been beneath our attention is worthy of elevation to intense consideration. So, too, the ruined sidewalks of intact cities can prove aesthetically interesting, though we might complain, "Why don't they get that fixed!" (Ginsberg, 2004, 10-11).

It might seem that people only notice the surfaces of streets and sidewalks in prosaic circumstances, but I suspect that the pavement in its ubiquity is embedded in our

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[11] Terms referring to different types of road surface are generally used imprecisely by lay people not familiar with the finer points of pavement engineering. In this present chapter, for example, I quote writers who use – usually indiscriminately – the terms 'bitumen' and 'bitumenised', 'tarmac' and 'macadamization', 'asphalt', 'tar' and 'blacktop' to refer to grey or black-coloured roads. The terms concrete and cement are used interchangeably for white roads. For the purposes of this project it is not important that the terms that lay writers use are not really correct. However, for the sake of clarity, in Appendix 1 I have compiled simple definitions of some common types of pavement-surfacing materials.

unconscious. It is a lurking presence that remains unacknowledged until some unusual event – like Ginsberg's stumble in Pompeii – disturbs our thoughts. Even then, these feelings about the pavement may remain inchoate until expressed by someone in the business of writing (or singing).

To discover what these feelings might be I have embarked on a preliminary exploration, not of the streets, but of a selection of texts. The exploration has not been limited to academic treatises because the pavement is hardly ever mentioned in these, even though skyscrapers of words have been expended on the aesthetic qualities and human experience of the built environment's vertical elements. Instead I have investigated memoirs, magazines, novels and news reports, noting down clues to any symbolic role that the pavement might have but, like my graffiti-hunting excursions on the streets, these investigations have hardly ever been systematic, my attention being drawn to different publications by habit, accident or speculation about their relevance.

'When one writes about the road', says Stephen Muecke in *No road (bitumen all the way)*, 'one attends to its form and function […] but the deep narrative is what has interested me as I write and drive, drive and write, so the two almost become the one thing' (Muecke, 1997, 192). I may not necessarily be following the same mind-tracks as Muecke, but something similar is happening here: as I write and read (the pavement), read (anything that comes to hand) and write, I am thinking not only about the surface, but about what goes on beneath the surface. What does the pavement mean to people, and what has that got to do with inscriptions written upon it?

**Breaking news**

My initial investigations suggest that people regard the pavement as representing stability and equilibrium in their environment; its solidity, smoothness, impassivity and blandness embodying a status quo – real or imagined – that is reassuringly undisturbed and undisturbing. Judging by the way the pavement appears incidentally in news reports, this symbolic role is recognized by journalists and news bloggers –

something I confirmed when compiling a novelty blog post of my own in December 2011 titled 'The year in asphalt'.

In the preceding twelve months the world had experienced a full quota of wars, insurrections, notable deaths, devastating weather and large scale seismic events, tempered by royal weddings and sporting triumphs. When I made a list of the major international news stories, I found that there were sixteen of them, as reckoned by the USA and UK press and skewed by an Australian perspective. As an exercise in pavement awareness for my blog post, I then trawled on-line and print news services to see if there were any references to the pavement in the reporting of these events. It transpired that each of the sixteen stories had been interpreted by at least one news service or blog, and often more than one, through the medium of the pavement.[12]

Most of these reports involved upheaval or disfiguration of the pavement. There were, for example, videos of boys skateboarding over the 'post-apocalyptic' landscape of fissured asphalt after the Christchurch earthquake; images of blood smears on a city sidewalk following the Oslo massacre; descriptions of protestors hurling chunks of broken asphalt during the Cairo riots; accounts of cracks ripping in the asphalt as the Fukushima nuclear reactor exploded.

In stories like these, reporters refer to the pavement in words or pictures to make a news event more graphic for readers and viewers, so that when civilised equilibrium is disturbed by natural disasters or mass acts of civil disobedience, fractured asphalt is invoked to convey an idea of the havoc created. Descriptions of pooled blood staining the pavement heighten the shock of an assassination. Photos of a 'broom army' of citizens sweeping away rioters' debris from the streets illustrate that safety and security have been restored.

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[12] The name of my blog site is *Pavement graffiti* and the post titled 'The year in asphalt' is at http://www.meganix.net/pavement/2011/12/22/the-year-in-asphalt/. I have listed the reports cited in that post in Appendix 2.

Broken asphalt has become a symbol of past or present disorder, used by news services as a visual or descriptive cliché that taps into the reading public's (usually unconscious) embrace of the pavement as a rock of dependability.

However, not all feelings about the pavement are as simple as this. To understand how complicated and ambivalent people's attitudes can be, it is necessary to look further than clichéd news reports. In other sorts of reading matter I have discovered the differing thoughts of writers who express feelings about the pavement through their own voice or the voices of their fictional characters.

**Depression and destruction**

There are many writers who draw mental associations between 'cities' and 'streets'. As urban activist Jane Jacobs maintained, 'Streets and their sidewalks, the main public places of a city, are its most vital organs. Think of a city and what comes to mind? Its streets' (Jacobs, 1961, 29). And at around the same time as Jacobs wrote this, research by urban planner Kevin Lynch showed that 'paths' – by which he meant the channels along which people move, including streets and walkways – are the predominant elements by which people form an image or 'mental map' of a city (Lynch, 1960, 47).

It follows that the pavement is used as a synecdoche for the city, and although Lynch found that 'pavement texture' seemed less important than other, spatial qualities when people visualised city 'paths', my exploration of the written word suggests otherwise. It is often the materials that pavements are made from that appear in figures of speech. Architecture columnist Elizabeth Farrelly, for example, talks about 'that old Australian dilemma – call it conflicted, call it hypocritical – that glues our lives to the tarmac while our hearts beat for the bush' (Farrelly, 2005). Walter Benjamin, in his reflections on 19th century Paris, describes the leisurely type who strolled about the streets and arcades observing life in the city as 'the *flâneur* who goes botanizing on the asphalt' [*der auf dem Asphalt botanisieren geht*] (Benjamin, 1973, 36; 1974, 34).

The dominance of black and grey paving frequently appears in people's recollections – both real and fictional – of the city. A character in Jessica Anderson's novel *The*

*impersonators*, for example, on a return home from overseas has a revelation as she walks up the arcade from Wynyard railway station:

> "This hideous ramp. I hate it. I have always hated it. It's like the black inside of someone's mouth".
>
> Yet it made her notice for the first time in her life the part played by bitumen in the Sydney scene. She had always sensed that, in her visual memory of Sydney as a city predominantly blue and green and terra-cotta, there had been an element missing. And here it was, this ashen skin covering not only the road, but the footpaths as well. Her interest in the discovery eased her melancholy (Anderson, 1980, 72).[13]

It is unusual that the rediscovery of asphalt should ease this woman's melancholy, because it is more usual for the city's pavement monochromes to be invoked precisely when writers want to emphasise the lonely, monotonous and depressing aspects of city living. Such feelings are encapsulated in one-hit-wonder Verdelle Smith's song about moving away from the countryside 'far from my family/ far from my home/ into the city, where lives can be spent/ lost in the shadows of tar and cement'.[14]

A loathing for urban landscapes is attributed by some writers to the replacement of green by grey, as comedian Paul McDermott observes:

> Our cities have always been the sites of artistic atrocities. Do you remember when green was an offensive colour? Where enormous communal areas were paved and pebbled, when trees and shrubs were removed in favour of pile-encouraging concrete slabs?
>
> Grey was the approved tone and drab, lifeless city squares sprang up

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[13] My thanks to Drusilla Modjeska's book of women's memories, *Inner cities* (1989), for drawing my attention to this passage. In the same book writer Susan Hawthorne, revisiting the time in her life when she had exchanged her country childhood for a city adolescence, describes the view from her Melbourne boarding school: 'Beyond the gardens what dominates is the glass and the concrete; the vertical lines of high-rise buildings and the horizontal black lines of asphalt roads' (Hawthorne, 1989, 193).

[14] *Tar and cement* song by Adriano Celentano; English language version written by Lee Pockriss and Paul Vance, 1966.

everywhere. The amazingly sterile and inhuman spaces look magnificent on the drawing board. Sparse, architecturally sound monuments to Bauhaus, and so dysfunctional that people avoided them like the plague (McDermott, 1999, 56).[15]

The recurrent theme here is that the pavement is antithetical to life. When the pavement makes incursions into the countryside, this same theme is taken up by many who are environmentally concerned or visually aware, placing the blame on the pavement for the destruction of nature and the natural environment. Joni Mitchell sang that 'They paved paradise to put up a parking lot'[16], but others – like historian and artist Paul Carter – go further by associating paving materials with the aggravation of injury:

> Observing the machines at work removing hillsides, bulldozing topsoil, blasting away reefs of rock, scattering swathes of gravel, concrete, tarmac in the still raw wounds of the levelled site, one might conclude that our culture was indifferent to the beauties of natural localities (Carter, 1996, 5).

When regrets are expressed for loss or destruction caused by disturbing and covering over the earth it is inevitable, at least in Australia, that 'indigenous people' will become conflated with the 'natural environment'. Here, for example, is journalist James Woodford explaining that Aboriginal relics found from excavations in Sydney are there because Aboriginal culture has been stifled by built structures, both horizontal as well as vertical:

> Underneath your shoes, past the asphalt, concrete and ruins of buried colonial and twentieth century buildings, lies a place called Weerong. It is the name that the Cadigal people had for the shoreline at the modern location of Circular Quay [...] Just as the natural, chaotic, sandstone-covered low-lying ridge,

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[15] Susan Hawthorne (see above), expressing her regrets about moving back to the city as an adult, says, 'I missed the country enormously, after two years of watching the daily changes, suddenly they were imperceptible. Asphalt moves only in decades, not in days or hours. I chose a place with a small garden because I needed the green' (Hawthorne, 1989, 197).

[16] *Big Yellow Taxi* song by Joni Mitchell, 1970.

carpeted in Angophoras and other woodland species, is now all but lost except to the most vivid of imaginations, so too are the easily visible signs of Weerong's people (Woodford, 2008, 55).[17]

This kind of obliteration is not confined to cities because, Muecke (1997, 192) reflects, 'Australia is a country where the deep indigenous narrative lines have been confused by the imposition of another grid of lines'. Elaborating on this theme, Muecke maintains that:

> In the first half of this century, European modernism told history, traditions and old rituals to get out of the way because progress was going to make everything new. Now in the latter part of the century, postmodernism says let the new moon hold the old moon in its arms, because history remains in the cycles of change, just as in postmodern architecture an old façade is retained on a new building. Reality, however, tends to be bitumenised (Muecke, 1997, 19).[18]

In these sorts of accounts the pavement is accused – either directly or through metaphor – of depressing city dwellers, crushing nature and smothering Indigenous culture. In contrast to its symbolic role – previously discussed – as an indicator of lawlessness and chaos when it is broken or disfigured, here the pavement itself is implicated as an active agent of destruction.

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[17] Nadia Wheatley is another who has been peering under Sydney's pavement: 'As a historian, I too have always done my preliminary research by walking and looking and making mud-maps [...] This experiential way of research shows me how to see the Aboriginal land that lies beneath the city's thin skin of buildings and bitumen' (Wheatley, 2008, 93).

[18] Muecke's 'bitumenising' metaphor refers back to his borrowed anecdote about an Aboriginal man who, when asked by Muecke's friend Gloria Brennan (an educated Aboriginal public servant) if there was a good road to his remote Northern Territory community, proudly retorted, 'Road? No road … NO ROAD. Bitumen all the way. Bitumen aaall the way' (Muecke, 1997, 17-18). For this man the term 'road' meant an unsealed road. 'The joke plays around the anxieties of "modernist" and "postmodernist" Aborigines. Gloria, from a corrugated iron mansion in [outback] Kalgoorlie, via a house in Canberra she used to share with [parliamentarian] John Dawkins, finds herself in the Top End where she makes a cultural assumption about the (poor) state of the roads, only to run up against a guy who is quite enthusiastic about the progress being made by the Main Roads Department' (Muecke, 1990).

**Reinforcing conformity**

Ostensibly the real – and positive – function of paving is to facilitate transport and communication by making roadways and footways smooth, hard and fit for traffic. But in the same way as it covers over the greenery of the natural world, the pavement also serves as a barrier to the dirt and muck of the earth's natural surface. In this light, 'macadamization' – the construction of a sealed pavement – is something to be wished for. In 19th century Melbourne, for example, where carts sank in the mud and people drowned in the streets' water channels, one citizen cried, 'It was the boast of Augustus, that he found Rome of brick, and left it of marble. A greater triumph awaits the man who finding Melbourne mud, will leave it macadamized' (*Australian Builder*, 19 June 1856, cited in Brown-May, 1998, 32).

These days it is taken for granted that city streets will form a seal against mud and dust,[19] but what follows from the pavement's efficacy in guarding against dirt is a belief in its power to solve social problems as well.

> How ironic, then, that we traverse the globe in search of local colour but when it comes to our own, our knee-jerk reach is for the bulldozer […] The question is why we persist in this city-cleansing thing, as if there's a refresh button somewhere to make it all innocent again. As if, in reborn houses on newly paved streets, people will drop their bad habits and behave. Like nice folks (Farrelly, 2004).

It seems that the streets are paved, not so much with good intentions, but with great expectations. It is these oppressive expectations that bored the Paris Situationists[20] and angered the May 1968 protestors, so that when they rioted in the streets they expressed their contempt for what paving stones represented by using them as both physical and verbal weapons, hurling them at police and writing them into slogans. For

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[19] Concrete-fancier Julia White writes: 'In an industrialised world, among the ethics and ideals of capitalism, in the ambience of glamour that characterises late capitalist society, dirt is repellent and the earth is wrapped in concrete' (White, 2001, 181).

[20] 'We are bored in the city, we really have to strain to still discover mysteries on the sidewalk billboards, the latest state of humor and poetry' (Chtcheglov 2006, originally 1953).

them, '*Le dépavage des rues est l'amorce de la déstruction de l'urbanisme*' (Ripping up the paving is the trigger for destroying urbanism),[21] and probably their most famous piece of graffiti was:

*Sous les pavés, la plage!* (Beneath the paving stones, the beach!).[22]

The 'urbanism' they wanted to destroy meant regimentation, suppression of creativity and denial of alternative or 'authentic' ways of living.[23] That the pavement continues to be seen as an agent of this kind of urbanisation, complicit in expectations of conformity and 'good behaviour', is encapsulated in a recent example of graffiti photographed in the United Kingdom:

go to work, send your kids to school

follow fashion, act normal

walk on the pavements, watch T.V.

save for your old age, obey the law

Repeat after me: I am free (Teixidó, 2008, and other bloggers).

So, whether they envisage it made of cobblestones, concrete or asphalt, for many writers the pavement symbolises repression of the human spirit. 'Macadamization'

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[21] Julien Besançon's book, *Les murs ont la parole: Journal Mural Mai 68*, in which he transcribes graffiti that he saw, was rushed into print just weeks after the uprising.

[22] This often-repeated slogan was probably written by Situationist René Viénet (Pearce, 2011). It has been repurposed many times, such as on a Reclaim the Streets banner in Birmingham in 1995 reading 'Beneath the tarmac the grass' (Solnit, 2002, 234). As well as Sous les *pavés … and Le dépavage des rues …* , other examples of cobblestone graffiti recorded by Besançon (1968) include:

*La plus belle sculpture c'est le pavé de grès. Le lourd pavé critique c'est le pavé qu'on jette sur la gueule des flics.*
*Je t'aime ! Oh ! dites-le avec des pavés!*
*Je jouis dans les pavés.*

[23] 'Revolutionary urbanists will not limit their concern to the circulation of things, or to the circulation of human beings trapped in a world of things. They will try to break these topological chains, paving the way with their experiments for a human journey through authentic life' (Debord 2006, originally 1959).

has become a pejorative metaphor in works like Norman Mailer's racially loaded explanation of the birth of hip hop graffiti in New York:

> … a movement which began as the expression of tropical peoples living in a monotonous iron-gray and dull brown brick environment, surrounded by asphalt, concrete, and clangor, had erupted biologically as though to save the sensuous flesh of their inheritance from a macadamization of the psyche, save the blank city wall of their unfed brain by painting the wall over with giant trees and pretty plants of a tropical rainforest … (Mailer, 2009, 13).

**Asphalt attractions**

Given all these negative connotations, is it possible that there are people who harbour more positive feelings towards the pavement? James Fraser Bremner thought so when he wrote, 'To the general public, the surface is the most intriguing part of a road. It is the outer garment whose appearance is almost as important as its utility' (Bremner, 1948, 23). But Bremner's book, *Economic highways*, was a text introducing the then new technology of bitumen emulsion. Perhaps engineers like him delude themselves into believing that the general public is 'intrigued' by the appearance of paved surfaces. Might it not be that, for most lay people, if the pavement comes to mind at all, it is only as some destructive or dispiriting and ugly entity? The answer is no. I have found evidence that for some the pavement inspires poetic thoughts. Poet Kenneth Slessor, for example, loved the reflective qualities of asphalt:

> At night, after a slick of rain has fallen on it, turning the roadway into a long black mirror, William Street comes out like a beautiful adventuress. It is dressed in Neon signs, the blazing arrows and alphabets of light, in mandarin-yellow, tangerine-red, emerald and whites, like the witch-fires of the Ancient Mariner 'about, about, in reel and rout'. In the water silvering the pavement, people walk on reflected heels (cited by Sadler, Hayllar & Powell, 1992, 145).[24]

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[24] This passage by Kenneth Slessor is quoted by Sadler, Hayllar & Powell (1992) from an unattributed source. Slessor also included a version of this description in his poem *William Street*: 'The red globe of light, the liquor green,/ the pulsing arrows and the running fire/ spilt on the stones, go deeper than a stream' (Slessor, 1975). Note also that in his essay-let ,*This*

Historian Humphrey McQueen is another who is delighted by cities and their neon lights, and he appreciates the pavement, not because it reflects the lights, but because it has its own chromatic qualities:

> As a source of wonder, cities are as varied as any creativity displayed in nature or in art museums. The neons of Tokyo are shamed by neither coral reefs nor Abstract Expression. The tonal range of trees is more limited that those of concrete and bitumen (McQueen, 1997).[25]

For writers like Slessor and McQueen, the surfaces of streets and sidewalks are not simply the unnoticed means for getting about while taking in the experiences a city has to offer. Rather, they count amongst the sights there are to see. Nor is it necessarily pristine pavements that bring pleasure; worn pavements have their own attractions, often because disintegration and damage bring to mind organic processes. Among her impressions of a changing Vietnam, author Chi Vu notes:

> The pavement is cracked everywhere, as though Hanoi is a large grey and brown snake shedding its skin. And so for the time being the new pink skin is side by side with the old flakes of white skin (Vu, 2001, 36).[26]

Away from the city, what stirs excitement is the visual and experiential artistry of freeways and highways. For some writers, these invite comparisons with other products of human creativity but taken to a heroic scale, where 'bodies, machines and landscapes become interrelated' (Merriman, 2004b, 88). Environmental engineer Lawrence Halprin conceived freeways to be 'great ribbons of concrete, swirling

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*space for rent*, Walter Benjamin observes: 'What, in the end, makes advertisements so superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon sign says – but the fiery pool reflecting it in the asphalt' (Benjamin, 2007c, 86).

[25] My thanks to Robert Drewe for drawing attention to this passage in his Introduction to *The Penguin book of the city* (2001).

[26] Art critic James Elkins sees the pavement's skin as more human than snake-like: 'The utterly ordinary mangled surface of the road in Chicago, which I walk past blindly on my way to work, is full of metaphors for human disaster. It's aging, it's cracked and distorted, it's been pock-marked and shoved and rutted until it's nearly ready to be replaced' (Elkins, 2009, 33).

through the land, [giving] us the excitement of an environmental dance, where man can be in motion in his landscape theatre'.[27]

But even non-engineers make similarly lyrical comparisons. J.G. Ballard, for example, envisions freeway interchanges as 'inscribing a graphic narrative across the landscapes of our lives that no fiction could rival' (cited by Vale & Ryan, 2004, 205); Delia Falconer gets pleasure from driving on American highways with their 'sea-like underrush of blacktop'. In her imagination, 'they turn everything into cinema. They are as liquid and as haunted in their own right as the canals of Venice' (Falconer, 1998, 134).

Most people would not be able to articulate such impressions of the pavement even if they felt them. But I choose to trust that these writers are expressing what some less eloquent people cannot – a deeply felt relationship with the pavement in both its grand and its humble manifestations. For these people the pavement has sensuous and quasi-organic properties that more than compensate for features of the natural environment that it has replaced.

**Playground of memories**

If there is still any doubt that the pavement is embedded in people's psyche, then evidence is available in written recollections of childhood, where asphalt and concrete keep recurring in memories – real or fictionalised – of youthful days.

There are, of course, the games like hopscotch and chalk chase that need to be marked out on the pavement's hard surface. This same surface serves as a canvas for the sort of expansive drawings that Terry Larson's poem *Tar flowers* evokes:

> Tar flowers is what grows best in Newtown
>
> Tar flowers
>
> in concrete gardens

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[27] Lawrence Halprin, *Freeways*, 1966, quoted in Merriman (2004b, 86). Dancing was also on the mind of Humbert Humbert in the novel *Lolita*: 'I have never seen such smooth amiable roads as those that now radiated before us, across the crazy quilt of forty-eight states. Voraciously we consumed those long highways, in rapt silence we glided over their glossy black dance floors' Nabokov (1955, 160). My thanks to Delia Falconer's *Introduction* in *The Penguin Book of the Road* (2008), for drawing this passage to my attention.

where we draw our best pictures

with bits of tile that fell

off Mrs. O'Leary's toilet roof … (Larson, 1969, 49).

There are the rhymes and chants associated with the cracks between concrete slabs, like the one in novelist Peter Carey's (2001, 219) memory of dancing home from school 'along the footpaths chanting *Step on a crack and break a Jap's back*'.[28]

There is the hot, sticky bitumen that must be negotiated when crossing the road in summer, as writer Rosemary Cresswell (1989, 156) remembers from her beachside childhood: 'The coral cut our feet, sometimes making them bleed, but in time hardening our soles so that you could boast of walking on the bubbling tar of the midday roads without it hurting'.[29]

Perhaps it is not remarkable that the pavement should emerge in people's reminiscences of childhood, especially if they lived in inner city areas. After all they were close to it and playing on it was an everyday experience. As Mumford (1961, 486) points out, urban growth in the 19th and 20th centuries meant reduced recreation space and 'the over-developed street, […] this paved desert, adapted primarily to wheeled traffic, became also park, promenade and playground: a grim park, a dusty promenade, a dangerous playground'.

Even in the sprawling suburbs where spacious backyards were the norm, streets served as a communal playground for ball games and for competitive races that could only be staged on paving, as Clive James (1981, 37) recounts:

Other children, most of them admittedly older than I, but some of them infuriatingly not, constructed billycarts of advanced design, with skeletal hard-

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[28] 'Stand on a crack and break your mother's back', as remembered by a character in a piece written by Julia White (2001, 177), is the more usual version of this particular chant.

[29] And while hot bitumen was a pain, hot concrete could be a pleasure : 'When she was little she used to go to the baths , with a bag, bathers and towel [...] Having a keener sense of pleasure than of convention, she knew that the place to lay one's towel when one was covered with goose bumps from the icy water was the concrete path, that the sun had warmed' (White, 2001, 176).

wood frames and steel-jacketed ball-race wheels that screamed on the concrete footpaths like a diving Stuka.[30]

Certainly the pavement figures prominently in recollections of these kinds of boisterous group games – and in recollections of heroically suffering that most common of childhood injuries, gravel rash, now known to skateboarders as 'pavement pizza'. But there are also quiet times in children's lives, solitary times of secret thoughts and dreamy fantasies, in which the pavement plays a part:

> What is it about lanes? What stories did you conjure up when your curious eye peered through the cracks of rusted corrugated back fences? What feet did you imagine trampling on bluestone surfaces? […] When you came back to your neighbourhood, after many years away, the lanes were still there but the textures and smells of memory are now contained in the bluestone under your feet (Spyrou, 2001, 153-154).

Spyrou's account of memories stirred by the bluestone brings to mind Proust's narrator from *In search of lost time*, who, like the ruins explorer Robert Ginsberg, has a revelation when he stumbles on the pavement. He had once had a peculiar experience when, biting into a little madeleine cake, his mind is flooded with memories of a past time. Then something similar happens, this time when he misses his step on uneven paving stones in a Paris courtyard:

> … all at once, I recognised that Venice which my descriptive efforts and pretended snapshots of memory had failed to recall; the sensation I had once felt on two uneven slabs in the Baptistry of St. Mark had been given back to me and was linked with all the other sensations of that and other days which had lingered expectant in their place among the series of forgotten years from which a sudden chance had imperiously called them forth.[31]

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[30] James's own billycart had pram wheels which left 'black smoking trails of burnt rubber' as he slid round corners (James, 1981, 38).

[31] Marcel Proust, *Time regained*, Chapter 3 *An afternoon party at the house of the Princesse de Guermantes*, 2000 (1927), 443-444.

The episode with the madeleine in Proust's novel is famous because it prompted his awareness – or at least his protagonist's awareness – of the phenomenon of involuntary memory, but it is the episode where he trips on a paving stone that confirms this discovery. For Proust's narrator, as for many other people, the pavement had been lying embedded somewhere in his unconscious.

**The writing on the pavement**

The terrain has been reconnoitred. I have browsed a selection of reading materials and found references to the pavement that confirm my suspicions. The pavement does have a symbolic existence that is imbricated with its day-to-day function as a bearer of feet and wheels, or rather, it has a plurality of existences. Consciously or unconsciously, people experience the pavement and what it stands for in many different ways. These symbolic existences are acknowledged in words and actions, openly voiced opinions and unwitting metaphors, poetry and memories.

With this in mind, it is now possible to make some preliminary speculations about any relationship there might be between the pavement and the graffiti that is written upon it. The first point to make is that the people who write *about* the pavement are not necessarily the same people as those who write *on* it, although there may be exceptions.[32]

Nevertheless, if I am right in presuming that those who do write about it are articulating the inchoate imaginings of many others, and if Barthes is right in stating that it is actually the background that constitutes graffiti, then it is likely that graffiti on the ground will reflect these imaginings of the pavement, either directly or indirectly.

If, for instance, the pavement represents the deleterious effects of colonisation, industrialisation or urbanisation, if it is shadowy, monotonous, lifeless, destructive,

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[32] People associated with the Situationist International movement and the May '68 Paris uprising might be considered exceptions. See, for example, Sadler (2010, 96-97) for references to Lettrists and Situationists chalking inscriptions on Parisian pavements and walls in the late 1940s and 1950s. Tracts railing against urban oppression and the postwar appropriation of city streets by private cars were sometimes transmogrified into slogans about and/or on the pavement.

obliterative and repressive, then it should not be surprising that some people might want to express their resistance by defacing this instrument of oppression. And indeed, as later chapters will show, there are people who make defiant gestures on paved surfaces with their paintbrushes and spray cans, although their protests are often not specifically directed at the pavement. By making these marks they assert their identity and broadcast their dissatisfaction, be it with traffic authorities, 'the system', the government, or their neighbours.

On the other hand, if the pavement is seen to be comparable with natural entities or cultural artefacts, if it is experienced as beautiful, active, intriguing, warm and welcoming, then it follows that some graffitists might embrace these qualities as children do. Later chapters will show that there are graffitists who do in fact enjoy the street as if it were a playground. They draw pictures, write stories, play games, post love letters and tell jokes on its inviting surface.  For them, the pavement *is* the beach.

# Chapter 2

## Exploring the known

## Chapter 2.   Exploring the known

> De Maistre's work springs from a profound and suggestive insight: that the pleasure we derive from journeys is perhaps dependent more on the mindset with which we travel than on the destination we travel to. If only we could apply a travelling mindset to our own locales, we might find these places becoming no less interesting than the high mountain passes and jungles of South America.
>
> - Alain de Botton (2006), Foreword to Xavier de Maistre's republished *A journey round my room* (1795).

### Establishing a tradition

An expedition to scan roads and footpaths for inscriptions can be embarked upon any day, and requires no other equipment than a camera. A foray can begin as soon as you step out the door, whether ducking down to the 7-Eleven for a carton of milk, or setting out on a campervan trip round the country. But is an unassuming pastime like this – involving such a mundane element of the landscape as the pavement – worthy of academic attention? In the previous chapter I proposed that the pavement has an imaginary presence that coexists with its physical one. But the main focus of this present project is an exploration of the inscriptions on the physical pavement itself.

Because I need to trace a scholarly lineage for such an exploration, in this chapter I will review some studies on the subject of urban exploration.  In the following chapter I will look at ways in which graffiti has been recorded and studied.

### Exploring the city

These days the term 'urban exploration' has a quite specific meaning. It is the 'discovery and exploration of unseen parts of the built environment, usually with a focus on derelict places' such as abandoned industrial sites and asylums, or disused

sewers and tunnels (Garrett, 2011a; 2011b, 1048).[33] The most intrepid urban explorers treat the city as a jungle. At their most exuberantly romantic they describe their adventurous pursuit as

> … about passion for place and a lust for unbridled experience. This is but one expression of prevalent human desire, see it in other urban subversions like skateboarding, parkour, flash mobs and graffiti … those experiences are creating, constructing and reinforcing brave personalities, free spirits, databases of knowledge and memory, a collective consciousness of ecstatic phenomenological wonder, of playful work that speaks volumes about culture … (Garrett *in* Fish & Garrett, 2010).

This does not sound very much like the comparatively tame practice of trawling the pavement for examples of horizontal graffiti, and yet pavement exploration does involve experiences that might be expected on a wilder expedition: the lure of the unknown, the thrill of discovery, and even the possibility of danger. The unknown may be a previously unfamiliar suburb or corner of the city; there's a thrill in spotting something written on the road and turning back to photograph it; the danger usually comes from dodging bicycles on footpaths and dicing with speeding vehicles on busy roads.

There are other similarities as well. The 'urban explorer' might be trespassing on ruins, while the pavement scanner is traversing functioning thoroughfares, but both are exercising their curiosity in the built environment, looking for cultural meanings that might be revealed. The idea of 'revealing' points up a more perverse similarity. Urban exploration 'seeks to discover, explore and document the hidden, abandoned and restricted sites *that the majority of urban citizens never see*' (Hale, 2006, my emphasis); pavement scanning investigates sights that are open to view but which, because of their everyday familiarity, ordinary citizens might barely notice.

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[33] Other terms for 'urban exploration' or related pursuits include UE, urbex, urban spelunking, place hacking and, in Japan, haikyu (Garrett *in* Fish and Garrett, 2010; Garrett, 2011b; Michael, 2010).

**Walking the streets**

Exposing the familiar in the urban landscape is most often associated, not with feats of daring like those of place hackers, but with the practice of walking. 'The art of taking a walk' has been taken up in recent years by 'reinvented flaneurs and flaneuses' interested in attempting to 'read, understand and re-map geographies of the city' (Pinder, 2001, 8). Pinder's reference to 'flaneurs' invokes Walter Benjamin, 'the patron saint of cultural studies' who, according to Solnit (2002, 198), 'made the flaneur a topic for academics'. To Benjamin, in his analysis of the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, the flaneur was the (male) pedestrian whose natural habitat was the street and who strolled the streets and arcades of Paris in the early 19th century observing the parade of bourgeois life.[34]

Benjamin himself was a 20th century practitioner of this style of city observation, confessing that he was taught the 'art of straying' by Paris, where his own 'endless *flâneries*' in the 1920-30s led him to declare that

> Not to find one's way in the city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to wanderers like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest … (Benjamin, 2007b, 8-9).

Here is Benjamin describing himself in the act of reinterpreting the familiar. Benjamin as flaneur had not been an indolent spectator but an acute observer who, in his various written works, 'delved into both the arcane and the mundane elements of urban existence in his efforts to apprehend the actuality of everyday life' (Hubbard, 2006, 101).

In the 1950s, the contribution of the Situationist International movement (SI) to the art of taking a walk was the psychogeographical *dérive* or drift. The drift was a group activity whose purpose was to experience the psychological effect of urban

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[34] See Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: a lyric poet in the age of high capitalism*, 1973.

environments on individuals and, ultimately, to make observations that would provide inspiration for the situationists' revolutionary, but as yet vague, vision of a new kind of urbanism.[35]

In a text prepared for the founding conference of the SI in 1957 Guy Debord wrote, 'Something that changes our way of seeing the streets is more important than something that changes our way of seeing paintings' (Debord 2006/1957). As Sadler (1998, 69, 81) remarks, 'the psychogeographic drift altered the situationists' perceptions of the street […] exotic and exciting treasures were to be found in the city'.

**Roadside observation**

Fyfe (1998a, 2) refers to 'the grand tour' of classic works that so many commentators on the street take before adding their own observations. My brief reference to the peripatetics of Benjamin, Debord and Jane Jacobs (in the previous chapter) has been an economy-class version of this grand tour.[36] But there is another city stroller whose work has largely been overlooked by Western scholars, and it is only recently that some of it has been published in English translation.[37] Nevertheless, he too contributes to the lineage of pavement exploration.

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[35] 'Psychogeographical research, "the study of the exact laws and specific effects of geographical environments, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals", thus takes on a double meaning: active observation of present-day urban agglomerations and development of hypotheses on the structure of a situationist city. The progress of psychogeography depends to a great extent on the statistical extension of its methods of observation, but above all on experimentation by means of concrete interventions in urbanism […] A rough experimentation toward a new mode of behavior has already been made with what we have termed the dérive: the practice of a passional journey out of the ordinary through a rapid changing of ambiences, as well as a means of psychogeographical study and of situationist psychology' (Debord, 2006/1957).

[36] Fyfe's (1998a) recap of the 'grand tour' of classic urban commentators takes in Walter Benjamin, Le Corbusier, Jane Jacobs and Mike Davis.

[37] Akasegawa Genpei, *Hyperart: Thomasson*, translated by M. Fargo, New York: Kaya Press, 2009. The original edition in Japanese was: Akasegawa Genpei, *Chō-geijutsu Tomason* [Ultra-Art Tomason], Tokyo: Byakuya Shobō, 1985; pocketbook edition, Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko, 1987 (*fide* Tomii, 2010).

In the 1960s Japanese conceptual artist Akasegawa Genpei formed 'a kind of neo-Dada avant-garde collective that positioned its mission somewhere between detective, explorer and natural-historian. The group peered curiously at the spectacle of the street in the city's neglected corners' (Wee, 2008).

Later Akasegawa formed the group Rojo Kansatsu (roadside observation), which was based on the same principles of observation and recording. 'The group trawled the streets, looking for striking juxtapositions and the delights of serendipity' (Wee, 2008).

A trip to Kyoto, undertaken not long after the 'Above the Road Observation Society' formed, included Akasegawa himself, who was looking to photograph 'Super-art Tomasons' – useless objects whose very uselessness transported them beyond art. A colleague collected fragments of demolished buildings, while another member of the group photographed manholes. Akasegawa saw the minutiae of the built environment as a 'man-made membrane' or film onto which 'the residues of human activity of people struggling through the world' are exposed. He maintained that above-the-road observation was 'post-scientific and post-art' (Akasegawa, [1986][38]).

In an abbreviated review of the history of observation in Japan, Sand (2009, 392-395) shows that Akasegawa's enterprise has a lineage marked by 'an obsessive fixation on what's right there, on finding, identifying, collecting, and classifying phenomena in the streets with an entomologist's eye for minute detail'.

Akasegawa's scavengers and documenters began their activities during a time of post-war rebuilding in Japan, especially the run-up to the 1964 Olympics, when 'intellectuals were worried whether there was any meaning being created at all in the slapdash layout of the re-planned city' (Wee, 2008). In hindsight, their explorations

[38] Akasegawa Genpei, 'Above the roads', [1986] (translated from Japanese, source unknown). The inclusion of this article as a reference is problematic, but I cannot let it go. All I have is a photocopy of a typewritten translation titled 'Above the roads' with no author, no indication of its source, and one page missing. It was given to me in 1999 – not long after I began photographing pavement graffiti – by a colleague of a colleague at the University of Technology, Sydney. I am no longer able to trace this person. I found the article inspirational but it was some years before I was able to deduce who the author was and the likely publication date of the original article in Japanese. I thank Noel Sanders and Sal Brereton for bringing this reference to my attention.

'offered us a way of looking at the city. Or a way of regaining some sense of the human imprint on the city in an era when that imprint was being rapidly erased' (Sand 2009, 399).

Deliberate explorations of the landscape of the city, whether on a grand scale or a microscopic one, are more than an end in themselves, but contribute to the understandings of what it means to live in a city. The excursions made by Akasegawa's group form a model for pavement exploration, where the often ephemeral minutiae of the street are examined as evidence of human activity. There is seriousness in the intent but pleasure in the adventure of searching and discovering:

> As I was going back I saw footprints on the side of the road. Set in the cement there was an imprint of a man's heel. It was hard. There was dirt in the heel part and on it, only there, there were moss-like plants growing. "It's a tsubo garden. A heel tsubo garden." I was impressed. I held the shutter very steady. I clicked the shutter as I groaned. Wonderful (Akasegawa, [1986]).[39]

**Neo-psychogeography**

In recent times there has been a renewed interest in psychogeography, the vagueness of Debord's definition allowing many subsequent writers and movements to identify their work under this label (Coverley, 2006, 89).  Merlin Coverley's 2006 guide to the ideas and practice of psychogeography introduces some of these individuals and organisations, although die-hard followers of Situationism who continue to regard psychogeography as a political instrument are scathingly critical of 'pseudo-' or 'neo-psychogeography' – with its mysticism, aestheticisation and 'ridiculous ley-lines' – as a 'a dereliction ensconced within the dereliction of Eng Lit/Art/Architecture/Geography university courses' (The Monstrous Bastards, 2012).

Nevertheless, the various contemporary approaches all seem to have in common the notion of altering perceptions of the street  and exposing 'treasures' in the way that

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[39] A form of Japanese garden art, the tsubo is a little garden tucked away in the small spaces between buildings or areas of a home (*fide* Mokurai's Temple http://mokurai.destinyslobster.com/tsubo_gardens.html)

Sadler (1998) described in his study of the original Situationists' drifts. Prominent British historian, poet and psychogeographer Iain Sinclair, setting out on one of his pre-planned excursions across London, declares:

> Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city; the changes, shifts, breaks in the cloud helmet, movement of light on water. Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself (Sinclair, 1997, 4).

It is this kind of journey across the built landscape, purposeful but not systematic, watchful but not contrived, that characterises an exploration for pavement graffiti.[40]

A level of contrivance does seem to be associated with new forms of 'psychogeography' of the kind discussed by academic David Pinder, who argues that these walks, games, investigations and mappings organised by artists and cultural practitioners 'play a vital role in the development of critical approaches to the cultural geographies of cities' (Pinder, 2005, 385). Examples of such activities that Pinder has observed or taken part in include an expedition to explore and document the service entrances and backspaces of famous buildings in New York (Pinder, 2005, 394), and an operatic sound walk of the financial district of London, tracing the scent of corporations connected to the petroleum multinational BP (Pinder, 2008, 731-732).[41]

These are not tourist trails rehashing the received histories of places as 'infotainment', but commentaries that reveal hidden stories and challenge existing power relations in a city, drawing attention, for example, to the reach of multinationals, or to intrusive surveillance technologies and the privatisation of public spaces. 'The practice of

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[40] Something similar is described by Robert Dessais when he talks about the art of essay writing: 'The essayist ... is a rambler - a flaneur ... - jotting down for the delectation of his unknown friend a trail of observations on whatever he passes ... My own sallies out into the world, if you'd like to know, are usually more like casual rendezvous than aimless strolls ... these sallies are not study tours ...' (Dessais, 2012, 52).

[41] Other psychogeographic interventions aimed at 'exploring the meaning of living in a city' and challenging 'authoritarian modes of policing public space', as discussed by Pinder (2005), included: an unauthorised musical parade, a tiny mobile kitchen serving free food and coffee, a game of chess played out by human pieces on the city grid, blank wall posters inviting passers-by to write on them, and walking via algorithmically determined routes.

walking and the reflection on urban walks contribute to a counter-discourse of the urban,' say Rossiter & Gibson (2002, 7), 'The poetics of walking permits encounters with city fragments and seemingly "unimportant" urban activities – the practices of urbanism that are not neatly folded into forceful stories of capitalist urbanization, social polarization, urban consolidation, and dead city syndrome'.

All of the forms of 'urban exploration' I have mentioned in this chapter have an element of subversion to them, ranging from the revealing of counter-hegemonic histories (flaneury and drifts) or the planning of revolutionary new urbanisms (dérives), to the challenging of controls on public space (interventionist performances), the breaching of off-limit sites (place hacking), or the redefining of 'art' (rojo kansatsu). I think that recording and interpreting pavement inscriptions can justifiably be considered as falling within this tradition of urban exploration. It even has a mild degree of subversiveness, since it sometimes involves recording for posterity vandalistic marks that local authorities would rather expunge permanently.[42]

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[42] In Australian states, strictly speaking unauthorised writing on pavements with any material (including chalk) is considered to be an act of vandalism and is therefore illegal. Prosecution, however, depends on the perpetrator being caught in the act. There have been a few instances in recent times where offenders have been warned or prosecuted. In a Melbourne suburb, for instance, council officers ordered a café owner to stop giving chalk to patrons' children for them to draw with on the footpath outside her premises (Nolan, 2011). In Brisbane a man was arrested by police and prosecuted for painting over what he considered to be an obscene piece of graffiti on the road near his house (Keim, 2011). His misfortune was to have been caught in the act, while the original penis-painter was not.

But however vigilant they are about graffiti on walls and other vertical surfaces, local authorities tend to overlook pavement graffiti. In the central business district of the City of Sydney, graffiti on footpaths is removed with scrubbing machines. In other parts of the City of Sydney and in my own nearby local government area, writing on footpaths and roadways is generally left to wear away of its own accord unless it is in a particularly prominent place or is part of a widespread guerrilla advertising campaign, or if someone complains about its offensiveness (Mousley, 2008; Davis & O'Malley, 2001; Hornery, 2001; Hicks, 2009; Grierson, 2009).

Because my research involved 'the direct investigation of any illegal behaviour' or had 'the potential to elicit information about illegal behaviour' (in other words, there was a slight possibility that my photographs would expose someone to the risk of legal proceedings), I submitted a Human Ethics Application to the Ethics Review Committee (Human Research) at Macquarie University. Approval for the project was subsequently granted (Reference no. HE28AUG2009-D00089). Conditions of the approval included my undertaking that I would seek permission before taking photographs of people making inscriptions on the pavement; provide any such people with information about the project and my contact details; take

It is, perhaps, urban exploration for the mild mannered. Of the various theories and practices of urban walking discussed, it probably comes closest to Sinclair's psychogeographic excursions, 'recording and retrieving the messages on walls, lampposts, doorjambs: the spites and spasms of an increasingly deranged populace' (Sinclair, 1997, 1).

It also accords with Bridge's (2004, 123) description of the flaneur, in the sense of one who 'moved freely through the streets … observing the lives of others in a passive but acquisitive way: adding the myriad of urban stories to his own sense of growing cosmopolitan experience'.

**Beyond the limits**

In chapters to come I will expand on the themes of 'acquisitiveness' and 'story gathering' but before moving on I need to address two deficiencies in the genealogy I have drawn up for pavement exploration as a topic for scholarly enquiry. These deficiencies mean that nothing in the literature I have consulted accounts for the potential scope of a pavement-scanning expedition which, as I suggested in the opening paragraph of this chapter, 'can begin as soon as you step out the door, whether ducking down to the 7-Eleven for a carton of milk, or setting out on a campervan trip round the country'.

The first of these problems is that the flaneurs, situationists and psychogeographers I have cited do not go far enough.  As they set out to find new meanings in everyday environments, they have confined their excursions to the city.

But rather than concentrating on 'the city' I have chosen to study 'the built environment', in which the pavement exists as a vast series of interlinking structures. My project may be limited, in that it concentrates solely on paved thoroughfares, but

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photographs of them in such a way that they could not be identified visually; and use pseudonyms or no names at all in any published text relating to makers of pavement inscriptions.

In reality, it is only rarely that I ever find out who the writer of a piece of pavement graffiti might have been, and more rarely still that I have the lucky opportunity to photograph someone in the act.

it is also unlimited, in that it acknowledges that the pavement in its monumentality extends beyond the urban, beyond the suburban even, and into the countryside. And, as a glance at my on-line collection of photographs will show, pavement graffiti follows the pavement. By ignoring any dichotomy between urban and non-urban I have discovered all sorts of pavement inscription, not only on the city streets where I live, but on suburban kerbs, beachside pathways and outback highways.

The second problem is that the classic urban explorers and even the neo-psychgeographers and recent scholarly commentators privilege walking as the 'best way to explore and exploit the city'. Most would probably agree with philosopher and ambler David Macauley when he states that 'auto culture tends to change or curtail contact with our surroundings, encouraging a kind of self-absorbed "sleep walking"'(Macauley, 2000, 4). But I maintain that this does not have to be so. When Helen Liggett proposes that her book is 'written for people who read on the way to work instead of looking at the city around them' (Liggett, 2003, vii) I choose to believe she recognises the potential for people to engage in urban encounters simply by lifting their heads from the newspaper (or iPod) and looking out the window.

In the city, wheeled *flânerie* is possible; in the bush it is necessary, since the kilometres involved would suit only the most committed swagman.[43] Both in the bush and in the city there are opportunities for driver or rider to make a fresh acquaintanceship with an otherwise tediously familiar route. The truth is that, to

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[43] Iain Sinclair does, in fact, venture out of London. His book *Lights out for the territory* (1997), subtitled *Nine excursions in the secret history of London*, turned out to be the first in a kind of trilogy. The second book, *London orbital* (2002), is an account of Sinclair and his colleagues' 130-mile psychogeographical circuit of London, walking the route of the M25. *Edge of the orison* (2005) is the third. This time Sinclair and others walk some 120 miles up the M11 north-west from London to Northamptonshire over the course of several days. As MacFarlane (2005, 3) notes, Sinclair's trilogy 'has progressed by terrain: from interior, to edgeland, to outback … from inner city, to commuter belt, to Middle'.

Exploring for pavement graffiti is not psychogeography but resembles it in some respects. Sinclair the psychogeographer is interested in *everything*, 'linking apparently trivial details into compelling patterns' (MacFarlane, 2005, 3). Had Sinclair been only looking for pavement graffiti on this Northamptonshire trek he would certainly have found some here and there, but he may have questioned whether it was worth walking all that way, rather than driving or riding.

paraphrase Iain Sinclair, walking is not the only way to explore and exploit the built environment; purposeful drifts may be undertaken when travelling anywhere across asphalted earth by bus, bicycle, car or truck, as long as the traveller remains alert to the possibilities of discovery. Some of my most interesting graffiti finds have been made from the passenger's or the driver's seat.

I do not want to make too much of this. Most of my graffiti discoveries were made on foot, and for those that weren't, sooner or later it was necessary to get out of the vehicle to photograph them. Similarly, in the essays that make up the 'storytelling' section of this thesis, the city predominates, if only because that is where I spend most of my time and because that is where pavement graffiti is most prolific. But whether urban or non-urban, my graffiti-spotting excursions, like the explorations of the writers I have cited, have all been attempts to engage critically with the familiar in the hope of gaining fresh insights into the complexities of human life.

# Chapter 3

# Capturing graffiti

# Chapter 3.   Capturing graffiti

> Most of what photography recorded *was* trivial. Nevertheless, once the pictures were made a curious thing happened: By the very fact of being transfixed these trivial things were somehow elevated, and became part of formal history and tradition.
>
> - John Szarkowski, *Looking at photographs* (1973)

## Plunder

Photographing pavement graffiti is a fairly simple matter. Complications may arise if the day is glary, for instance, and there is too much reflection from the sparkling inclusions in asphalt and concrete; or if there are dappled shadows that obscure what is written; or if the pavement in question is an eight-lane expressway of roaring traffic. But in general it is not hard to take a snapshot of a two-dimensional subject that does not move. What does take practice, however, is adopting the habit of looking for inscriptions all the time; and maintaining an enquiring mind that sees those inscriptions, not as inanimate objects, but rather as traces of life.

It is through this quest to find markers of other people's passage that the recorder of graffiti (whether it is horizontal or vertical graffiti) comes to resemble one of Bridge's (2004, 123) flaneurs who 'moved through the streets observing the lives of others in a passive but acquisitive way'. It was perhaps Susan Sontag in her essay from the 1970s, *Melancholy objects*, who first drew a comparison between street photographer and flaneur:

> … photography first comes into its own as an extension of the eye of the middle-class *flâneur* […] The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker, reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the *flâneur* finds the world "picturesque" (Sontag, 1979, 55).

The photographer is not simply a 'voyeur', however, but a collector. A sense of acquisitiveness is part of the experience of urban exploration, with Iain Sinclair, for example, describing as 'plunder' his own jottings and snapshots and photographer Marc Atkins's contact sheets accumulated on their walks together around London (Atkins and Sinclair, 1999, 8). The explorer's spoils will later be arranged in a cabinet of curiosities, where the cabinet may take the form of a book of essays, an album of photographs or, as in the case of this present project, a website of images.

**Preservation**

Graffiti is superfluous to the *real* or legitimate built landscape and so is at constant risk of being removed, painted over, or worn away. This is reason enough to record its existence whenever it is found. Recording graffiti in text or images not only preserves the otherwise ephemeral, but also documents the recurring cycle of life in the city.[44]

But despite its reputation for transience, there are instances of graffiti that, through inaccessibility, inertia or obstinacy of art materials, survive to become part of the permanent landscape. These lodge in people's imaginations as distinguishing features of particular locations. 'My most vivid memory of the world outside my own', wrote author Rosemary Cresswell, 'was the graffiti in white paint on the entrance to the harbour bridge tram tunnel which said FREE SHARKEY. It would have been in the early 1950s, when I was thirteen or fourteen and allowed to catch the tram to the city – or "to town" as we said' (Cresswell, 1989, 158).[45]

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[44] When author Barbara Brooks moved from the country to the inner city as a young adult, she missed the evidence of life's slow rhythms, writing that 'it seems unnatural not to be able to step outside and put my feet on the ground and watch something growing'. But eventually she came to realise that the city has its own recurring cycle of life and that graffiti contributed to this constant renewal of the urban landscape: 'Maybe the inner city has always been under pressure, always breaking down, crystallising out and reforming – and I've always been somewhere else, on the edges of it all. The positive side of this is the way people move in and rebuild – rooms, communities, ideas. The street life, the graffiti, the coffee shops, tropical landscapes in the backyards of DMR squats' (Brooks, 1989, 32, 33).

[45] Lawrence Louis (Lance) Sharkey was a radical trade unionist in Sydney during the mid-20th century. According to the Australian Dictionary of Biography, in 1949 Sharkey, at the time the general secretary of the Australian Communist Party, was tried for sedition and gaoled (http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sharkey-lawrence-louis-11664 ).

Long-lasting graffiti can contribute to the identity of a locality, and there have been instances in Australia where claims for the cultural heritage value of graffiti items have led to their recognition, documentation and, in some cases, deliberate preservation. 'A nostalgia for direct political action and unmediated sentiment that attaches to graffiti in general', for example, led to a proposal for heritage protection for a 1950s slogan on a Melbourne factory wall reading 'Keon Traitor to ALP'.[46] Although this application failed because of the repurposing and partial demolition of the building, two other public murals from the 1980-1990s in Melbourne's Fitzroy have been listed on the Victorian Heritage Register (MacDowall, 2006, 474-477). And if 'heritage' graffiti cannot be preserved in fact, it may be preserved in film or facsimile. Recently a documentary was made about *I have a dream*, an unauthorised mural which has survived in Sydney's Newtown for twenty years. The movie also included footage of other murals painted by the same artists around 1991, but which have since fallen victim to gentrification. In a gesture of approbation Marrickville Council sponsored free screenings of the film at a Newtown cinema in 2012 (vectorpunk, 2012; McKenny, 2012, 3). The same council funded a 2009 coffee-table book, *Street art of Sydney's inner west* by Melinda Vassallo.

There is even an example of *pavement* graffiti that has been memorialised much more elaborately than any of these. *Eternity*, the single-word chalk sermon of Christian convert Arthur Stace, inscribed by him in copperplate writing on Sydney streets for thirty years, has become a product of popular culture. Largely because of artist Martin Sharp's 1970s obsession with the word, Stace's *Eternity* – or Sharp's version of it – has been incorporated into spin-off merchandise, reproduced on posters, postcards and T-shirts, sold on coffee mugs and key-chains at the National Museum of Australia, emblazoned in fireworks on the Sydney Harbour Bridge, trade-marked by the City of

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[46] Standish Michael (Stan) Keon was a 20th century trade union official and politician in Melbourne. In 1955, when he was a Federal parliamentarian, he defected from the Australian Labor Party [ALP] to the newly formed Australian Labor Party (Anti-Communist), which was later to become the Democratic Labor Party (http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/keon-standish-michael-stan-12734 ).

Sydney and recreated by the council in stainless steel on a city plaza (Hicks, 2006, 142, 143; Hicks, 2009c, 461).[47]

**Recognition**

Graffiti has not always received this sort of recognition and it was not until the mid-20th century that contemporary graffiti was even considered a subject worth studying or recording. In this chapter, I will examine some of the 'cabinets of curiosities' where graffiti has been exhibited and studied, in order to strengthen the scholarly lineage of my present project.[48]

The term 'graffiti' was originally understood to mean the kind of casual wall writing that had survived at archaeological sites in Italy, Egypt and Syria, for example, or on churches and other public buildings in Europe from the Middle Ages, and it was not used in the English language to refer to contemporary inscriptions in public places until 1851 (David & Wilson, 2002, 42; Fleming, 2001, 39-40). In this sense it remained an infrequently-used term until the mid-twentieth century. However, having published two little books of modern graffiti transcribed from toilet walls in the 1960s, American academic Robert Reisner claimed to have popularised the word to the point where it was included in the Reader's Digest 'It pays to increase your word power' monthly vocabulary list, and to have been the first person ever to teach a college course about it (Reisner, 1971, xiii).[49]

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[47] See also John McDonald's (2010) article on Martin Sharp where he observes that, 'The way Sharp brought new life to one infinitely suggestive word represents his most spectacular success from many forays into appropriated imagery'.

[48] My investigation of previous and current graffiti studies has gone no further than westernized parts of the world. The number of both serious and popular publications on graffiti has grown immensely in recent years, and no doubt it is augmented by research being published in languages other than English that recognizes the role of graffiti, particularly, for example, in war zones and places of civil unrest.

[49] Reisner acknowledges a book titled *Lexical evidence from folk epigraphy in the English vocabulary* by Allen Walker Read, printed privately in Paris in 1933, but it is possible that he was not aware of the work of American folklorist Alan Dundes, who published an article, *Here I sit – a study of American latrinalia*, in Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers in 1965, in which he coined the term 'latrinalia' for toilet graffiti.

By this time the history of graffiti in the twentieth century was being documented in photographs, though not always deliberately. Streetscapes taken for other purposes sometimes captured graffiti for posterity. A series of photographs of city buildings slated for demolition in Sydney in the early 1900s, for example, shows wall writing which, although mostly indecipherable, includes 'VOTE NO' painted on a house in 1918 and humanoid figures chalked on a building site the same year. A cityscape from 1964 features 'Stomp out Menzies' and 'Fling out Ming' in large letters on the Iron Bridge in Ultimo.[50]

But in addition to such 'accidental' archiving, in the first half of last century there were people who had begun to seek out contemporary graffiti to photograph. Art photographers, in particular, were capturing the shabby aesthetics of run-down areas in great cities, although it seems that books based on their images were sometimes only published decades later.

In Paris in the 1930s, for example, photographer Brassaï became interested in the faces and figures gouged out of plaster walls on the streets of working class areas. An exhibition of his pictures eventually toured internationally in 1960, accompanied by a book titled *Graffiti*. Brassaï's photographs transformed an unrecognised form of creative expression into what he called 'prestigious works of art' that had a strong influence on members of the French avant-garde including, for example, Picasso and Dubuffet. 'More than any other form of artistic endeavour', he wrote, 'graffiti are dependent on photography' (Brassaï, 2002, quoted by MacDowall, 2008a, 134-135[51]).

In 1940s New York, Helen Levitt photographed children engaged in the common pastime of drawing and writing with chalk on walls and pavements. Although her

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[50] City of Sydney Archives: 'Vote No' on a house in Woolloomooloo in 1918 (CRS 51, Demolition books, File 000\000922); humanoid figures chalked on the interior wall of a building site in Kent Street in 1918 (CRS 51, Demolition books, 004\004142); 'Stomp out Menzies' and 'Fling out Ming' on the Iron Bridge in Ultimo in 1964 (SRC10009, 036\036411 and 036\036412). At the time Robert Menzies, nicknamed 'Ming', had been Prime Minister of Australia since 1949.

[51] Brassaï, *Graffiti*, 2002, translated by D. Radzinowicz. Paris: Flammarion. This appears to be the first English language version of Brassaï's book and is a translation of a French edition published in 1993.

photographs were exhibited in the 1940s, a book – with an introductory essay by Robert Coles – was not published until 1965.[52]

To the inhabitants of the 14th arrondissement of Paris or of New York's Spanish Harlem, the naïve and unselfconscious pictures on walls and pavements were probably an unremarkable part of their everyday world. These graffiti were not 'dependent on photography' as Brassaï claimed. But it is likely that the people who attended Brassaï and Levitt's exhibitions had never ventured into those slums nor, if they had, would they have found the locality 'picturesque'. It was for such gallery-goers that Brassaï and Levitt's photographs transformed the ordinary into strange and exotic curios.

**Documentation**

By the 1960s another kind of localised graffiti had begun to appear when youths started 'bombing' parts of Philadelphia and New York, repetitively spraying or painting their names – or rather, pseudonyms – on publicly visible property.[53] New York-style 'writing' would eventually become a phenomenon that changed the appearance of the urban landscape worldwide.

Although perceptions of graffiti have since been transformed by the dominance of this new form, 'old fashioned' graffiti was not entirely swamped. Rude messages and crude pictures were still being written in public toilet stalls; romantic declarations on trees; witty comments on walls; and political slogans on fences.[54] In fact, at the same

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[52] Helen Levitt & Robert Coles, *In the street: chalk drawings and messages New York City 1938-1948*, 1965.

[53] To some it might come as a surprise to read that this kind of graffiti began as early as the 1960s. However, as Sacha Jenkins writes in an introductory essay for John Naar's *The birth of graffiti* (2007), 'The first wave of snot-nosed knuckleheads who were willing to bleed for fame called the sport "writing." These were the inner-city toughs of the late 1960s who played stickball and touch football on New York City's sticky-tar streets [...] Julio 204 is one such "writer" or, ahem, "athlete," or, ahem, "evangelist," who many say was spreading his personal gospel 'round the grande Apple town as early as 1968 (it must be noted that Philadelphia writers like Corn Bread and Cool Earl were tearing up the City of Brotherly Love years before cats like Julio)' (Jenkins, 2007, 11).

[54] And all manner of inscriptions on pavements, as later chapters will show.

time as the birth of New York-style graffiti, 'old fashioned' graffiti, particularly political graffiti, suddenly increased in abundance and conspicuousness:

> Graffiti began to change drastically during the early '60s as a result of the Civil Rights movement, the protests on the campuses against fascism, the growing military involvement in Vietnam […] Because of a better informed public, a greater social awareness on the part of the students, and the instant dissemination of news by the mass media, graffiti became more literate, more self-conscious, more concerned with political and social issues (D'Angelo, 1976, 102-103).

This kind of increased graffiti activity encouraged more photographers although, like mine, their photographs tended to be simple documentary snapshots that lacked the luminous artistry of a Brassaï or a Levitt. Their grainy black and white images were published in books with varying ratios of text to image. An early example was produced by Richard Freeman in 1966. His book, titled *Graffiti*, included photographs taken in London along with what Reisner (1971, xii) called 'a strange potpourri of literary essays, poems, and various excerpts bearing obliquely or directly on the theme of wall writing'.

A slim anthology of Australian graffiti was compiled by Rennie Ellis and Ian Turner in 1975, and expanded for a new edition in 1979. Ellis's photographs – laid out in a glorious jumble of main streets, back lanes, railway stations and public toilets – were a sample of what they called 'the great graffiti renaissance' of the mid-1970s. Historian Turner, recalling his own experiences for 'political paintups' in the 1950s, claimed that 'graffiti provide one of the few remaining contributions to a living folklore' (Ellis & Turner, 1975; Ellis & Turner, 1979, unpaginated).

Jill Posener's book of London graffiti published in 1982 was similar to Ellis & Turner's in that it mostly captured graffiti written by wits or by activists engaged in pro-feminist, anti-war, anti-landlords, anti-nuclear or anti-tobacco struggles. Just as D'Angelo (1976) had done, Posener noticed – and was recording – the change in graffiti that made it more likely to be committed to some kind of social reform, complementing other actions such as demonstrations and campaigns (Posener, 1982).

Published as quirky reads for the popular market, the books by Freeman, Ellis & Turner, and Posener – and to some extent Reisner's somewhat more academic *Graffiti: two thousand years of wall writing* (1971), which included a small selection of photographs he had taken himself – had the advantage over works that were to follow in that graffiti was not simply transcribed for analysis, but was displayed in photographs that gave it a physical and temporal context. Their assemblages of images brought together examples of graffiti that, despite Turner's claims of a 'great graffiti renaissance', usually only occurred in isolated clusters. It would be a more than a decade before people who had previously never seen or noticed graffiti would be confronted with it on a daily basis.[55]

**Study**

By the 1970s, not only was graffiti being photographed deliberately, but serious writers had begun to pay attention to it. 'Despite its underground connotations', declared Rennie Ellis, 'the study or use of graffiti has achieved a certain respectability' (Ellis & Turner, 1975, unpaginated). Scholars scratched at the meaning and significance of graffti from the point of view of their own disciplines, some analysing what was written in public toilets and other liminal places,[56] others finding that graffiti in more accessible places was the most creative. Most were concerned with analysing its content, whether for its linguistic and literary value (D'Angelo, 1976); as raw data for studying ethnic group relations (Blake, 1981) and power relations between marginalized groups (Rodriguez & Clair, 1999); or as a manifestation of values that are proscribed or taboo in the graffitists' ordinary circle of social life (Gonos, Mulkern & Poushinsky, 1976).

Content was also the primary concern of Reisner in his 1971 history of graffiti and his 1980 encyclopaedia of graffiti, both compendiums of transcribed graffiti with some attempt at sociological and linguistic explanations. Reisner dismissed the 'recent

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[55] New York-style graffiti began to appear in Sydney and Melbourne in the early 1980s (Cubrilo, Harvey & Stamer, 2009; Lachlan MacDowall *in* Trembath, 2009; Heathcote, 2000).

[56] Blake (1981, 95-96) defined liminal places as settings where 'persons shed their roles and statuses and emerge as whole persons, warts and all, behaving in ways that are unusually pleasureful, painful, shameful, nonsensical, or downright grotesque'.

phenomenon of the spray-can artist', declaring that 'when graffiti becomes self-conscious, is produced without spontaneity, it loses both its strength and its quirky, madcap quality […] content becomes relatively unimportant and defiance and lawlessness and peer competition are the main purpose of the exercise. The art itself becomes the message' (Reisner & Wechsler, 1980, xi).

**Decipherment**

Reisner was correct in recognising that with New York-style 'spray-can' graffiti the art itself becomes the message, but mistaken in disregarding it because of its perceived lack of spontaneity.[57] But back then, as Jenkins (2007, 14) asks, 'who knew that the style-ized signatures of the inner city kids would go on to have such a monumental impact on popular culture?' What began as plain letters and numerals, evolved to complex and esoteric 'tags' and then large coloured wall pieces, still based on 'the name' but indecipherable to all but the individuals or crews involved in writing them. 'Graffiti went from being words to being pictures of words, and then being the simultaneous incredible elaboration and tearing apart of words' (Sartwell, 2004).[58]

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[57] To declare that any kind of graffiti is spontaneous or, conversely, lacks spontaneity, is something of a presumption. It is likely that many of the graffiti messages transcribed into Reisner's various books – including political and racist slogans, literary quotes and parodies, traditional witticisms and even grotesque obscenities – were written with aforethought.

[58] New York ghetto graffiti was the prototype and paradigm for the new style of 'name' graffiti that proliferated around the world but there have been many influences on the development of its various styles, including local factors in the places where it has spread. However, for the purposes of this present project I refer to graffiti that can trace its lineage to 1960s Philadelphia and New York as **'New York-style'** graffiti. Other writers sometimes use the terms 'New York subway graffiti', 'Hip hop graffiti' or 'writing'.

The graffiti phenomenon has evolved to the point where wall pieces have become 'street art' of sometimes astonishing virtuosity, which can include not only painting with spray-cans, brushes or rollers, but also reverse painting with bleaches and cleaners. In common parlance the term 'graffiti' refers to all of these forms of street inscription, although practitioners maintain their work belongs to various separate categories, such as 'writing', 'getting up', 'tags' and 'tagging', 'throw ups', 'graff', 'pieces' and 'piecing', 'street art', 'aerosol art', 'murals' and 'permission graff' (see Jenkins, 2007; Woodward, 1999; Lunn, 2006). In addition, since the 1990s other forms, such as stencils, stickers, paste-ups, posters and sculptural works, have challenged the hegemony of New York-style graffiti (MacDowall, 2006). The tag has continued to be pervasive but is reviled by almost everyone except taggers.

By the 1980s the pervasive new form of graffiti had become a highly visible worldwide phenomenon that caught the attention of other academic departments. By the 1990s any significant studies of graffiti were focussed on New York-style graffiti with scholarly works beginning to emerge from disciplines such as sociology, semiotics, visual studies, urban geography and cultural studies. In explorations of the new graffiti landscape the actual content of inscriptions was seldom a consideration, but it could hardly have been otherwise because, as Baudrillard (1993, 80) pointed out, 'New York […] graffiti has no content and no message'.[59]

Lack of legibility, however, does not mean lack of meaning. Authors would begin using graffiti in order to investigate broader urban processes and, as Dickens (2008) notes, as a conceptual tool for reading, writing and re-imagining the city.  And just as forms of graffiti continued to evolve, so did approaches to its study. Depending on the focus of their enquiries researchers might address the act or performance of making graffiti, the particularities of its form, or its conscious or unconscious interaction with its physical, social or cultural context.

Studies like these are indicators of the range of possibilities for investigating pavement graffiti as well, and I will be referencing some of these researchers in later chapters.

**Capture**

With words not transcribable and graphics not describable photography became even more important for the transfixing and scrutiny of graffiti. Jon Naar's book, *The Faith of Graffiti*, published in 1974, was to change the focus of graffiti picture books.

Naar had been photographing 'the palimpsest of writing and marks on walls' – the torn posters, billboards, signs, window displays and graffiti – since 1955 before he was

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Terms that authors have used to embrace all of the new forms of graffiti include 'contemporary graffiti'. Neef (2007, 423) calls them 'post-modern urban graffiti'. Dickens (2008, 489) uses the term 'urban inscription' to 'include all forms of writing, drawing, marking, sculpting and performing that are produced on or with the physical spaces and surfaces of the city'.

[59] Jean Baudrillard made this observation in the 1970s, but his *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, was not translated into English until 1993, when is was published as *Symbolic Exchange and Death*.

commissioned to photograph 'the graffiti phenomenon that was exploding all around me at the time', that is, the new type of 'name' graffiti in New York City (Naar, 2007, 15-18).

> Naar knew nothing about the subculture. He roamed the streets of New York City, armed with the eye of a combat photographer. Naar would step through the war zone wide-awake; he would take no prisoners except on film, but those captives speak volumes (Jenkins, 2007, 12).

A selection from the 3000 colour images that Naar took over a twelve day period in 1972-73 was published in that book, *The Faith of Graffiti*. Not only was it the first book to systematically record  this kind of graffiti, catching it 'at the transitional stage between tagging and piecing', but it was also to have an immediate and long lasting impact on the movement of 'writing' itself by contributing to the spread of New York street culture across the world (Jenkins, 2007, 12-13).[60]

**Commodification**

Keeping photographic records of pieces before they are removed or superseded has since become part of the graffiti culture. Even before the use of digital cameras became widespread in the late 1990s, graffitists would accumulate photographic archives of their own work.[61] And increasingly there are onlookers, both amateur and professional, who publish photographic anthologies of graffiti and street art. Whole shelves of libraries and bookshops are filled with these and they range from sub-culture zines to large coffee table books, often with little analysis or commentary.[62]

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[60] Another book, featuring more of Naar's 1972-73 photographs was published 33 years later in 2007 as 'The Birth of Graffiti'. Naar was credited as the author of the 2007 book and of the original 1974 book, 'The faith of graffiti'. But in 2009 the original book was augmented and re-published with the same title, 'The faith of graffiti', but this time with authors given as Norman Mailer and Jon Naar, the late Norman Mailer having been elevated from centrepiece writer in the 1974 edition, to principal author in the 2009 edition.

[61] Such shoebox archives, since they contained incriminating evidence, might be stored in places inaccessible to the police – in a friend's house under the mother's bed, for example, as I can attest.

[62] A search on Amazon for 'graffiti books' in February 2012 yielded 2,648 results.

Countless websites document graffiti from around the world. As MacDowall (2006, 483) notes, graffiti memorializes its own heritage in the virtual spaces of the Internet and game worlds, and the 'relentless and unregulated proliferation of digital images of graffiti forms a perfect analogue of the actual proliferation of graffiti in city spaces'.

There is a circularity to this photo documentation in that the instant and instantly accessible archiving of street art provides a resource for others, not only to admire, but to emulate or outdo. Digital technologies have enabled the self-compounding proliferation of a form that was, and still is, based on manual craft. A corollary of this phenomenon is that graffiti has not only transformed the appearance of cities around the world but many of its features, such as stylised lettering and the intertextures of spray cans and stencils, have become part of the visual language of contemporary culture, with mutual appropriation between graffiti and, for example, fine art, graphic design, illustration, fashion, advertising and architecture.[63] The photographing of graffiti extends to its use as a backdrop that adds edginess to fashion shoots, wedding-day photography sessions and tourist snapshots.[64]

Graffiti – or at least street writing and art ultimately derived from New York-style graffiti – is an exchangeable product within consumer culture.[65] Arthur Stace's religious inscription, *Eternity,* became a localised commodity thanks to its revival in

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[63] See a discussion of the influences of and on graffiti style in, for example, MacDowall, 2007b; Klausner, 2011.

[64] Examples in Plater, 2006; Crafti, 2009.

[65] A discussion of the commodification of graffiti or 'wall art' through its movement from the street to the art dealer's is beyond the scope of this present project, but it is a topic addressed by a number of authors. Geographer Tim Cresswell (1992), for example, uses the concept of 'place' in his analysis, referring to 'the crucial "where" of graffiti', to describe how the reactions of the media and the art establishment both worked to re-establish a geography of normality in New York City by relocating graffiti from the streets and subways to Manhattan art galleries and finding a place for it in traditional art histories. Dickens (2008) discusses intersections between the practices of art and evolving forms of 'urban inscription' in what he calls 'an emergent "post-graffiti" aesthetic practice', using as an example the peregrinations of a trivial item called 'Peckham Rock' subversively installed in a number of UK art galleries by 'self-proclaimed "art terrorist", Banksy'. The quasi-documentary film *Exit through the gift shop* made by Banksy himself is a commentary on the nexus between 'graffiti art' and commercially exchangeable fine art.

the artwork of Martin Sharp; the subversive practice of New York-style graffiti has become an international commodity thanks to photography and digital technologies.

**Diversity**

Does this mean that the photographer-as-flaneur no longer has any place in the recording of graffiti? Is graffiti so conspicuous that it no longer needs to be reconnoitred, stalked, revealed? The answer is no, especially if the person with the camera is not completely dazzled by the brilliance of large-scale wall pieces. Christine Dew is such a person. Dew has produced a comprehensive survey of Australian graffiti – its sociology, history and aesthetic values – and, although at first glance her book might appear to concentrate solely on New York-style graffiti and the more recent forms of stencil art, she has also captured 'scratched and hand-drawn messages [that] predate and survive contemporary graffiti preferences for spray-can art' (Dew, 2008, 4)[66].

The same author has also written in another publication about 'joyous encounters of the everyday' in her own neighbourhood. On her walks near home she takes her camera, collecting graffiti stories because it is possible to

> '... build a picture of the irrepressible life-force of our city by attending to the ephemeral, incidental and "low" art of the lanes, waterways and railway lines [where] the disenfranchised engage in public debate [...] make political comments without the backing of political parties, public art without the blessing of the art establishment, and send messages without the contrivances of advertising' (Dew, 2004, 50-51).

This mix of neighbourhood inscriptions photographed by Dew owes as much to the 'political paintups' of the 1950s or the old-fashioned love-heart carved on a tree, as it does to the spray-can and stencil graffiti that grabs most of the attention these days. And it approaches in its breadth the range of graffiti lying on pavements waiting to be found and photographed.

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[66] Christine Dew, *Uncommissioned art: an A-Z of Australian graffiti*, first published 2007.

**Obsession**

The camera is no longer an optional accessory but a necessity on an exploration of the built landscape. Nor is taking photographs simply a way of conveying to others what the explorer has seen. Many writers have noted how the camera has the power to affect what photographers themselves see - how it gives them the impulse to keep on looking (Atkinson, 1951, 248); how it teaches them to see the ordinary (David Bailey quoted by Parsons, 1984, 68); how it becomes a tool of engagement that encourages reflection (Liggett, 2003, xiv).

Certainly, accumulating photographs of a neglected form of urban trivia – such as pavement graffiti – can become an obsession, but it really is only stamp collecting unless it is a *scholarly* obsession.[67] Seeking meanings and reflecting on what the camera reveals make it a scholarly pursuit. The example of previous scholars and photographers reassures me that photographing graffiti can be a worthwhile undertaking.

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[67] I have borrowed the term 'scholarly obsession' from Allan Sekula's (1994) essay about the Melnicks' photographic collection: Mimi Melnick & Robert A. Melnick, *Manhole covers,* 1994.

# Chapter 4

## Looking down

# Chapter 4.   Looking down

Your gaze happens to drop to your feet, and you observe that which you had always missed: where you put your feet, on what pavement, on what textures, materials and forms you are walking when strolling down the street … Are we in a different universe altogether, or at least on the edge of one?

- Rolando Bellini, *The view beneath one's feet* (2001)

## Confronting presumptions

Some years ago I was driving up the mighty Hume Highway between Gundagai and Yass in New South Wales when I spotted a large notice, hand-sprayed across one lane of the highway: *DANGER TWISTERS 5 KM*. I kept driving, half expecting to come to an area where high winds or willy-willies swirled across the road but instead, exactly five kilometres on, there was an array of large coloured circles painted on the concrete roadway. Turning back to photograph these two examples of pavement graffiti added many kilometres and a degree of danger to my trip, but it was not until after I'd had the photographs developed that I realised that the coloured circles formed a giant Twister game, and that the warning notice and the 'game' had each been signed by the artist-cum-jokester.

I never found out anything more about this two-part artwork, but it did serve to demonstrate that daring graffitists are not necessarily confined to cities, and that readers of pavement graffiti do not necessarily have to travel by foot. This large-scale highway graffiti was a good joke, albeit one that took me a while to get. Taking the photographs meant that I have since been able to share it with others.

Searching for pavement inscriptions to photograph and creating opportunities to share them with others are the preoccupations of this project. The point of these pursuits is to find new ways of interacting with both familiar and unfamiliar places and to encourage others to do the same. As photographer Helen Liggett puts it,

> Photographs can function as sites of participatory reading that provoke urban encounters, first, in the relationship between the photographer and the city and, second, in the relationships between viewers and the city images (Liggett, 2003, 118).

Liggett spends a chapter of her book *Urban Encounters* exploring photography as an instrument that engages the city directly. The keynote for her chapter is set by a quote from John Szarkowski, which begins: 'Photography, if practiced with high seriousness, is a contest between a photographer and the presumptions of approximate and habitual seeing'.[68] For my project, the challenge has been to confront my own and other people's presumptions born of 'approximate and habitual seeing' in both the urban and non-urban built environment, and in doing so 'become an heir to the storyteller' through images and text.

This present chapter serves as a prelude to my attempts at storytelling. I point out writing that is easy to see on the ground, and introduce some authors who have already noticed it. I also review the work of others who, although they have missed opportunities to examine what is beneath their feet, nevertheless offer ideas that can be extended to the business of reading the pavement.

**A new world**

Rolando Bellini, whose reaction I have quoted at the head of this chapter, underwent a challenge to *his* presumptions when asked to write an introduction to a book of photographs of manhole covers by Pavesi and Pietrobelli (2001). The book, he suggested, was 'a vade-mecum of images for the new explorers of the new millennium' and the authors were guides leading us into 'a new world, which requires new perceptive parameters' (Bellini, 2001).

Artist Akasegawa Genpei was similarly overwhelmed when invited to review a photographic book of Japanese manhole covers by Hayashi Jooji. He admitted that even though he had occasionally looked at these things on his street explorations, he

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[68] John Szarkowski, *Looking at photographs: 100 pictures from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (1973, 192), quoted by Liggett (2003, 117).

'hadn't had the inspiration to pursue it so that the world opened such as it had in that book' (Akasegawa, [1986]).

Manhole covers are among the very few types of pavement inscription that have ever been given any serious attention. In fact, admiration of them became a popular pastime in the 1990s.  Mimi and Robert Melnick's 1974 *Manhole covers of Los Angeles* has become a collectors item, but their 1994 book *Manhole covers* and Jacopo Pavesi and Roberta Pietrobelli's 2001 book *Street covers* brought cast-iron style to the coffee table.[69] An earlier book, *Coalhole rubbings: the story of an artefact in our streets,* anticipated the interest in manhole covers. A reconnaissance walk of England's urban environments looking for now-obsolete coalhole covers brings new awareness and appreciation to familiar and often ignored sights, declares the author, pre-empting later writers' enthusiasm for manhole covers as doorways to new worlds (Goddard, 1979, 10).[70]

Burnished cast iron patterns have their aesthetic qualities but there is certainly more to a manhole cover than that.  It is also 'part of that family of objects that characterise and render meaningful the urban landscape. Its presence announces the existence of those services which improve the quality of life', by which Todeschini (2003), in his introduction to the *Street covers* book,  means the sewers, water pipes, powerlines and communication cables that run through tunnels on the underside of the pavement.

**The scriptorial landscape**

Whatever practical function the pavement fulfils in conveying foot and vehicular traffic, it also serves as a graphic field where textual messages are conveyed to

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[69] The minor mania for service covers culminated in book titles ranging from *Designs underfoot: the art of manhole covers in New York City* (Stuart, 2003) to *Quilting with manhole covers: a treasure trove of unique designs from the streets of Japan* (MacGregor, 1999).

[70] Goddard's *Coalhole rubbings* is in a similar vein to later books that encourage the use of patterns on manhole covers as the basis for craft works. Goddard gives instructions on how to make rubbings of coalhole covers and then how to translate the motifs into, for example, lino prints, fabric appliqué and embroidery.

passers-by.[71] Those manholes, coalholes and other ground-level pieces of cast-iron furniture, for example, can themselves be read as indicators that the pavement has an extra role as the roof on a busy world of underground services.[72] In addition, company names or logos are often worked into their embossed patterns. This branding is a kind of subtle advertisement for the foundries where the covers were made or for the organisations that provide the underground services. Many of these companies have long since folded and the embossed names act as an archive, deserving the kind of nostalgia that is felt for the remnants of much more prominent street advertisements – the faded and crumbling signs for products like 'Bushells Tea' or 'Dr Morse's Indian Root Pills' on the side walls of old shops and sheds.

Large vertical advertisements are regularly superseded as new commodities come on the market and new signage technologies are developed. It is hard to imagine a time when words and pictures were not overwhelming elements of the urban environment and yet this is a phenomenon that only began to appear in the late 19th century, in the form of business names, information signage (such as street names), traffic signs and, particularly, outdoor advertising.[73]

In the literature there are frequent references to the relationship between advertising and graffiti in the urban textual landscape, characterising graffiti as a form of

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[71] I have borrowed the term 'graphic field' from Irving Lavin (1990) who refers to 'the wall as a graphic field' in his discussion of ancient graffiti as an antecedent to early modern caricature.

[72] See my blog posts about this underground world at
http://www.meganix.net/pavement/2010/04/27/manhole-covers-2/ ,
http://www.meganix.net/pavement/2010/10/01/manhole-covers-3/ ,
http://www.meganix.net/pavement/2010/10/19/sous-les-paves/ and
http://www.meganix.net/pavement/2011/04/09/windows/ .

Cast iron pavement furniture, in addition to manhole and coalhole covers, can include grates, drain covers, shutters on cellars and flaps for hidden valves and underground storage tanks.

[73] For his discussion of signage as a communicator of national identity, geographer Daniel Gade (2003) coined the term 'scriptorial landscape' for 'the visible landscape that is scriptorial in character: the signs, banners, graffiti and inscriptions in public view'. Paula Geyh (2006, 413) refers to the 'hypertextualized postmodern city' where 'signs have arguably become the dominant constituent of phenomenal urban space' and architectural spaces are 'awash in texts and images'.

resistance to consumerism. Cresswell (1999, 275), for example, discusses billboard banditry, a type of culture jamming involving the witty alteration of billboards. 'Billboard banditry engages in a subversive dialogue by saying new things and pointing towards what the pre-existent advertisements are really saying … [It] relies on a complicated interplay between the pre-existent space of the billboard ad and the message which is added'.

Cresswell's culture-jamming graffitists consciously and directly address advertising, but other commentators point out that an oppositional relationship is not always so blatant. Some posit graffiti as an alternative to advertising, as in this often-quoted passage by UK graffitist Banksy:

> The people who truly deface our neighbourhood are the companies that scrawl giant slogans across buildings and buses trying to make us feel inadequate unless we buy their stuff. They expect to be able to shout their message in your face from every available surface but you're never allowed to answer back. Well, they started the fight and the wall is the weapon of choice to hit them back. Some people become cops because they want to make the world a better place. Some people become vandals because they want to make the world a better looking place (Banksy, 2006, 8).[74]

Anne M. Cronin offers a more nuanced interpretation, suggesting that because capitalism is always under construction, cities and spaces are always in process, and there are shifts in the relationship between hegemony and resistance. Outdoor advertising and graffiti present alternative readings for the viewer – advertising can be a turn-off that offers the possibility of a world that is not so intensely consumption orientated; graffiti represents changes in notions of property and entitlement and is a mark of marginality that speaks to mild or inarticulate public dissatisfactions. Consequently, both graffiti and advertising can 'belong to the city as its "elsewhere" or

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[74] Nor does Banksy only vandalise walls. Sometimes his works overrun the walls and deface the pavements as well.

set of "wish images" which articulate a dream of how urban life could be otherwise'
(Cronin, 2008, 77).

Given that there are many forms of graffiti, and not just the flamboyant works that
culture jammers or wall artists paint, there must be different kinds of relationship
between graffiti and advertising. And in fact, as an alternative example, my story
*Horizontal billboards* investigates connections between advertising and graffiti on the
pavement. But whatever the differing relationships might be, there is one constant – it
is that hand-made graffiti proliferates where commercial and official signage is a
commonplace feature of the environment.

**Home and away**

Just as there are different types of graffiti, there are differing public attitudes to
graffiti. One person's vandalism is another's beautification; one person's eyesore,
another's enchantment. 'Street art' is tolerated by property owners in some areas and
is allocated 'legal walls' in others; graffiti lanes have become tourist attractions and
photogenic locations for wedding and fashion shoots. But despite these pockets of
acceptance, many upright citizens have not become reconciled to the existence of
graffiti, particularly New York-style graffiti and tags, and millions of dollars out of local
government and transit authority budgets around the world are spent on 'graffiti
programs' aimed at preventing or removing graffiti and prosecuting or distracting its
perpetrators.[75] Politicians stake their claims as upholders of law and order on the
control of graffiti, creating dissention within electorates divided over just how
iniquitous graffiti really is.[76]

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[75] There are many references, academic, popular and bureaucratic that deal with the
criminalisation of graffiti. A detailed example is Ferrell's (1996) case study of the war against
graffiti – with its coordinated corporate and political campaigns – in the city of Denver, USA.
MacDowall (2006) documents the effects of changes in attitude to graffiti in local government
areas in Melbourne, which have ranged from 'graffiti as crime' to 'graffiti as cultural heritage'
and back.

[76] From my store of recent press clippings I have chosen a small sample from Sydney
newspapers that exemplify varying attitudes to graffiti:
 Plater, Diana. 2006. Stencil art. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 December 2006, 3 – "Melbourne is
        recognised globally for its street art ... Before this year's Commonwealth Games there

The transgressive power of graffiti is seen by scholars as deriving largely from its being 'out of place'. Stewart (1991, 216) writes that, in the perception of city authorities, 'graffiti becomes dirt once we consider … that dirt is something in the wrong place or the wrong time'. It thus becomes a permanent soiling of the environment and so is considered a threat not only to the surface upon which it is applied, but also to the

was some controversy as the Victorian Government tried to clean up the city and get rid of the illegal works ... the laneways have even become popular for just-married couples who hope to get some inner-city grunge into the background of their wedding shots."

Crafti, Stephen. 2009. Calling the shots. *The Sun-Herald*, 11 October 2009, 5 – To accompany an article about her work, there is an image of fashion photographer Robyn Beeche standing in a graffiti-covered laneway.

Wroe, David. 2008. Backs to the wall. *The Sun-Herald*, 14 September 2008, 42-43 – "In a city where graffiti once symbolised Western freedom, it can now mean two years in jail as gentrifying neighbourhoods turn on the spray-paint gangs ... in Berlin."

Malkin, Bonnie, and Melanie Andreazza. 2006. Graffiti policy just doesn't wash, councils say. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21-22 January 2006, 13 – "Sydney's councils are spending millions of dollars each year ridding the streets of graffiti but say the State Government is not playing its part in the fight against the spray can. / One of the worst-hit councils, the City of Sydney, spends $3 million each year removing graffiti from black spots ... "

Sumegi, Joseph. 2006. Graffiti scourge revealed. *Inner West Courier*, 26 September 2006, 1 – "Marrickville is plagued with a whopping 27,889 square metres of graffiti ... an audit commissioned by Marrickville Council has found ... 'The report says that if we remove it completely now it will cost over $1 million ... But if we just do nothing for another few years it could cost much, much more.' "

Hamilton, Julian. 2010. Deface first (letter to the editor). *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 2010, 12 – "Marrickville Council is considering introducing a regular graffiti removal service. Can I suggest a yuppie removal service might be a more effective way of tidying up the inner west?"

Jacobsen, Geesche. 2011. Spray and pay: repeat graffiti offenders face jail, says A-G. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 2011, 1 – "Young people repeatedly convicted of graffiti offences and property damage should be given jail terms as a reminder that graffiti is a 'serious offence', the new state Attorney-General, Greg Smith, has said ..."

Orchison, Kay. 2009. Writing on the wall for enforcer Rees (letter to the editor). *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 November 2009, 14 – "As ugly and annoying as graffiti tags are, I would rather live with every flat surface on the planet covered in them than see a single child imprisoned for six months."

McGrath, Michael. 2010. Parents tarred with the same brush (letter to the editor). *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 November 2010, 18 – "If the state parliamentary enquiry really wants to nip anti-social graffiti in the bud, why not focus on the parents of these delinquents?"

Finke, Jesse. 2010. A city of grey walls (letter to the editor). *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 November 2008, 16 – "In my neighbourhood, someone has turned a nondescript overpass into a canvas for his or her art, which happens to be sticking foam cups into a wire mesh fence … To see them when walking home late at night is a little bit of Sydney magic."

entire system of meanings by which such surfaces acquire value, integrity, and significance'. Similarly Cresswell (1996) argues that people, things and practices are often strongly linked to particular places and that when this link was broken - when people acted 'out of place' - they were deemed to have committed a 'transgression'.

But authorities and members of the general public may change their opinion of graffiti when they see it in a different light. That 'different light' might be shining in an art gallery,[77] at a holiday destination far from home, or on the budget books of a local council financially dependent on tourism. And of course, as this present project has set out to show, photographs can shed new light on what are otherwise ordinary sights. In *Noticing* I allude to such changes of perspective, keeping my eye on the pavement, as I always do. The examples of graffiti mentioned in that story were all photographed in coastal locations many kilometres from any city.

Apart from the occasional photograph in albums like Ellis & Turner's *Australian graffiti* and Dew's *Uncommissioned art: an A-Z of Australian graffiti*, I have found practically no acknowledgment that graffiti occurs in non-urban as well as urban settings. A recent article by Katherine Wright (2010), however, shows that rural graffiti is not necessarily a mere imitation of urban forms, but can have its own significance and meanings. Wright reflects on graffiti at a very particular site – Thunderbolt's Rock, an isolated outcrop of granite beside the New England Highway in New South Wales (Australia), and 'a mnemonic site' of colonial bushranger mythology in that locality. The scrawls that cover the rock are banal, 'an aerosol collage of prosaic statements and signings that one could expect to find at a bus stop'. And yet in them Wright sees a playful, anarchic protest against hegemonic ordering of history and place, a form of dialectic collaboration with the myth that serves as a reminder that colonial memory is still very much contested terrain.

The scriptorial landscape extends beyond the city limits and, although in the country they may be more sparse, there are still the same shop signs in town and the same

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[77] Cresswell (1992), in his discussion of 'the crucial "where" of graffiti', describes how the reactions of the media and the art establishment both worked to re-establish a geography of normality in New York City by relocating graffiti from the streets and subways to Manhattan art galleries and finding a place for it in traditional art histories.

real estate notices beside the road, as well as billboards, traffic instructions and destination signs much larger in size than those in the city. The erectors of rural signs operate on the assumption that both travellers and locals are literate and thus able to read. Wright's article demonstrates that they are also able to write, even if they have sometimes adopted that peculiar anti-literate style of writing known as tagging.

**Icons**

With the intensifying saturation of the urban and non-urban landscape with signs, it should not be surprising that some text might spill over from the walls and onto the ground. And indeed it has. Nor is it only in the form of manhole covers, because for every kind of graphic on vertical surfaces there is an equivalent on the pavement – advertising, branding, public notices, instructions, information, graffiti – the lot.

The presence of a horizontal signscape is most apparent in the traffic symbols and official instructions applied to the pavement. These on the one hand represent order, civilization and safety. On the other, they represent repression and regimentation of people's behaviour. They are at the heart of my story *Signs of a struggle*.

Few other people write about them except traffic engineers and the compilers of driving manuals, but there is one artist who has raised them to what has been deemed 'iconic status'.[78] Traffic marks recur frequently in Jeffrey Smart's precisionist pictures of the built landscape, their sharp outlines and piercing colours marshalling into order the compositions of tarmacs, car-parks and autobahns that he is driven to paint. In his works, says Ledbury (2011, 14), 'we see not a gloomy reaction to oppressive urban modernity, but a celebration … of the road marking as a painterly object'.

Smart is quoted as saying that he is happy if the public is stimulated by his work, 'and if they see Jeffrey Smart paintings everywhere in the urban landscape, it means I've helped educate their eyes, so I've done them a favour' (Hawley, 1989, 17). It may seem odd that the ordinary road sign should have been elevated  from the prosaic to

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[78] For example, Wikipedia states: 'Smart is one of Australia's best known artists with his almost iconic and unique imagery …' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey_Smart, accessed 9 February 2013).

the iconic, but Patrick Hutchings points out that Smart has a concern with 'the enigma of things' not invented by the artist but encountered in the everyday life of the modern world (Pearce, 2005, 189[79]). It is a concern that Smart cannot, or will not, explain but it touches a chord with art connoisseurs and general punters alike.[80]

Smart has brought recognition to the generic road sign; different kinds of circumstance can bring elevated status to more particular specimens. A zebra crossing in London, for example, has been listed by English Heritage for its 'cultural and historical importance'. It is the crossing featured on the cover of the Beatle's 1969 LP *Abbey Road*. Photographed by thousands of fans and tourists emulating the Fab Four crossing the road near their recording studio in single file, this 'modest structure' (to quote an official of English Heritage) was eventually given a Grade II  listing some forty years after the original cover shot was taken (*Beatles' Abbey Road zebra crossing*, 2010). Road markings bear witness to the paradox that art like Smart's uncanny landscapes offers people the opportunity to view familiar dioramas in different ways, while popular culture encourages them to recreate the same familiar tableaux over and over again.

Formal signs are not the only markings on the pavement to achieve the status of icons; there are informal marks as well – generic and particular – that have gained universal recognition. Scott McCloud (1994, 58) remarked that:

> Ours is an increasingly symbol-oriented culture. As the twenty-first century approaches, visual iconography may finally help us realize a form of universal communication. Society is inventing new symbols regularly, just as comics artists do.

McCloud might have added that just as new symbols are invented, so are old symbols continually modified, re-invented, and re-purposed. The chalked outline supposedly drawn around dead bodies at crime scenes is a case in point. Since its first appearance

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[79] Pearce is here referencing Hutchings (1975, 118).

[80] A Smart retrospective at the Art Gallery of NSW in 1999 'turned out to be one of the Gallery's most popular Australian exhibitions of all time' (Pearce, 2005, 197).

in a detective novel, apparently in the 1940s,[81] the body outline has become a recognizable symbol, used not only in murder stories and television shows, but adaptively reused in illustrations alluding to all sorts of crime or fatality. I speculate on why this might be so in my story *Empty shells*.

The children's game of hopscotch is another pavement symbol that is forever recycled. Search the web and you will find 'Hopscotch' registered as a name for companies selling children's clothes and dress-ups, girls' magazines, furniture for kids, educational books, educational digital technology, theatre for schools, childcare, and creative toys.

The name has also been appropriated by companies offering swing dance classes, holiday accommodation, records, film distribution, website design, and public relations. Hopscotch is a game played to a set of formal rules and, unlike children's spontaneous pavement drawings, a hopscotch court is a recognizable and formulaic shape that is purposely simple to reproduce.  It has been easy for companies to lift it off the ground and relocate it into their logos when, ironically, they want their products to project an image of childlike creativity or imagination.[82]

**The walker as writer**

'Iconic status' has also been granted to yet another hand-drawn pavement mark, albeit in a more local context. As the Dictionary of Sydney puts it, 'the word Eternity, in copperplate script, has become an icon of Sydney's popular culture, as well as its

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[81] According to Wikipedia, the *Perry Mason* television series, written by Erle Stanley Gardner, set a precedent for future mystery series in being the first detective show to feature either a tape or chalk outline to mark the spot where the murder victim's body had been found. This first appeared in the episode 'The case of the perjured parrot'. However, as the same article points out, Gardner used this idea in a much earlier book, 'Double or quits' (1941) written under his pen name of A. A. Fair (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perry_Mason_(TV_series), accessed 9 February 2013).

[82] In Hicks (2006, 141) I suggest that, although children still play hopscotch, it is no longer often seen chalked in the streets. 'Hopscotch courts are permanently painted in school playgrounds, and toy shops sell lurid vinyl playmates with the game printed on them. In a local park I once found a hopscotch too small and too crooked to play on. I imagined that a child had drawn it as if acting out some expected role of children with bits of chalk in their pocket.'

religious life' (Fitzgerald, 2008[83]). The single word *Eternity* was chalked by silent evangelist Arthur Stace for thirty years on the footpaths of Sydney, between the 1930s and the 1960s. Since then there have been artworks, poetry, histories, films, museum exhibitions, an opera and even fireworks displays based on that copperplate word and its writer. It makes an appearance in several of the stories in this submission: *Horizontal billboards*, *City of epitaphs* and *Surface reflections*.[84]

In the academic milieu, Kirkpatrick (1997) has discussed the literary implications of graffiti in general by focussing on Stace's chalked *Eternity* in particular. Kirkpatrick argues that graffiti is a form of writing, 'not only in the sense of an inscription (most graffiti is of course written), but in the sense of memorialising certain "speech" acts of pedestrianism' (Kirkpatrick, 1997, 67).

Kirkpatrick is here drawing on de Certeau's proposition in *The practice of everyday life* that walkers, by improvising their own routes through the city, are following the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' that they write without being able to read it (de Certeau, 1988, 93). Kirkpatrick further suggests that graffiti, as a mark of the writer's presence and passage, becomes literature by forming 'a spatial narrative of being' (Kirkpatrick, 1997, 67). De Certeau's account of city walkers as writers has gained a great deal of traction since he first presented it in the 1970s, its influence owing much to its rejection of a city planner's all-seeing 'view from on high' in favour of 'claims to know the city within partial perspectives offered by movements though the streets' (Pinder, 2005, 402). But it is Kirkpatrick who reflexively extends this account by proposing that the invisible or metaphorical text that de Certeau's walkers write is materialized in the form of graffiti like the inscription that Stace chalked on his purposeful wanderings.

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[83] See http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/artefact/eternity, accessed 9 February 2013.

[84] An unexpected development in the writing of this present project was the intrusion of Arthur Stace, 'The Eternity Man'. Although I have taken photographs of pavement graffiti in other parts of the world, the project is firmly based in Sydney where I live, and so it was inevitable that it should make reference to one of Sydney's most famous 20th century eccentrics. I had worked him into an essay about chalk writing several years ago and I thought that would be sufficient (Hicks, 2006, 'The eternal city', *Meanjin* 65 (2), 139-146). But Stace was to become a strong presence, helping me to explain to other people what my project was about and then, without any prior intentions on my part, turning up in several sections of the thesis.

**The walker as reader**

Just as the idea of the walker-as-writer has resonated with many scholars, so has the image of the walker-(or traveller)-as-reader captured the imagination of others. Solnit (2002, 71-72),  for example, finds roads, trails and paths unique as built structures because they 'unfold in time as one travels along them, just as a story does as one reads or listens'.[85] In this context it is interesting to examine Paul Carter's account of the making of his installation *Nearamnew*, itself an elaborate, collaborative piece of pavement graffiti featuring poetic text inscribed into the sandstone plaza of Federation Square in Melbourne. Carter is not concerned that the scuff of shoes might erode the letters, but instead he conflates reader and writer by punningly making a request to visitors: 'Treading/reading here, remember. Mark in passing: YOU ARE HERE'. He reasons that 'in this way visitors write themselves into the future history of the place' (Carter, 2003, 13). Carter perhaps did not foresee that these treading/reading/writing visitors might quite literally write themselves into the place, but they have. On a visit to Melbourne in 2005 I found the words 'No war' scratched deeply into one of the plaza's cobbles.[86]

As I survey the pavements with my camera I am reminded of the words of self-confessed 'streetwalker' George Watson: 'To walk across a city … is to open an anthology. There is a theme; but the theme is varied, and the interest of its items is highly unequal and readily attuned to mood' (Watson, 1992, 717). Of course, in my view, the 'anthology' is quite literally a collection of written works and, unlike Watson, I do not think it is necessary to walk – a drive in the city or country reveals an

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[85] In his book about walking, *The songlines*, Bruce Chatwin recalls his Aunt Ruth who used to read aloud to him: 'My aunt would bring an anthology of verse especially chosen for travellers, called *The Open Road* […] One day, Aunt Ruth told me our surname had once been 'Chettewynde', which meant 'the winding path' in Anglo-Saxon; and the suggestion took root in my head that poetry, my own name and the road were, all three, mysteriously interconnected' (Chatwin, 1998, 8-9).

[86] See my 'No war' blog post of 21 August 2009
http://www.meganix.net/pavement/2009/08/21/no-war/

extension of this same anthology.[87]  However, I do think the stories available to read are highly unequal and are attuned, not only to the mood, but to the perspicacity of the reader.

Studies of vertical kinds of graffiti by other authors demonstrate that there is the potential for drawing out meanings and implications from *pavement* graffiti as well, for reading its obvious and its encoded messages, for studying its appearance, and for exploring its context. And when meanings are uncovered in this way it transpires that there are short stories and long ones on the ground, simple and complicated, overlapping and contradictory.  The anthology I am trying to decipher has no symmetry and is never complete. It is a montage of disparities.

**Pavement scrutiny**

If few urban readers have sampled the horizontal anthology, it is probably because writing that is underneath the feet is regarded – mistakenly, in my opinion – as beneath contempt. So lowly is the pavement that John Wilcock's fictional graffitist, the Chronic Footnote-Writer, apologises when discovered on his knees in Sheridan Square chalking 'Stamp out mental health': '"I'm sorry you caught me doing this," he said ruefully. "It's so far below my usual standards, but these days one has to make a mark in any way one can"' (Wilcock, 1963, 53).[88] And even while making a case for the legality of chalked pavement protests under the First Amendment, USA lawyer Failinger (2012) belittles them:

> ... it is difficult to imagine a worse place to make an argument for aesthetic harm than a public sidewalk. Traditionally, vandalism or graffiti cases have involved aesthetic "marring" of buildings […] An owner or passerby cannot avoid seeing the aesthetic change to a building, even if she immediately averts

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[87] Thrift (2004) argues that that de Certeau's work on everyday life needs to be reworked to take into account the rise of automobility, the car having become a common feature of everyday life itself with consequent changes in how space is ordered.

[88] Wilcock's (1963) Chronic Footnote-Writer in New York is a representation of all the people whose hand-lettered graffiti subverts the city, like cranky margin notes in library books, letters scratched from official signs to change the meaning, witty additions to elevator notices and smart rejoinders on public posters.

her eyes.  By contrast, the sidewalk is quite literally "beneath notice:" people walk on it and may not even notice a chalk drawing, unless it is a large or arresting installation.

Pavement graffiti makes occasional unremarked appearances in photograph albums like those of Naar (1974 and 2007), Ellis & Turner (1975 and 1979), Posener (1982) and Vassallo (2009),[89] but Freeman's *Graffiti* (1966) is the only one of the early graffiti books to have recognised its legitimacy. Amongst his 'potpourri of literary essays, poems, and various excerpts' is an anecdote, whether true or fictional it is hard to say, about a young Ron Cockroft whose chalk lines drawn all the way from his school in Oldham to his home in Chadderton were 'amongst the longest graffiti recorded in the British Isles' (Freeman, 1966, 27-28).

Melbourne historian Christine Dew is the author of *Uncommissioned art: an A-Z of Australian graffiti*. Although her attention is mainly drawn to wall graffiti, she is one of the few people to have occasionally noticed that there are things to read on the footpaths as well. On walks round her neighbourhood she has found, for example, a classic piece of 'hip-hop' style graffiti that has been added to by others since the original graffitist made his mark. Camera in hand, when Dew carefully scrutinizes the spray-painted name she realises that its different augmentations are a series of conversational responses. They are indications that 'the neighbourhood is talking' and that some locals like graffiti while others do not (Dew, 2004, 53). Just as other photographers – like Helen Liggett and Anne Cronin – have done, Dew has discovered that using a camera heightens the experience of urban observation.

**Guide books**

It is localised stories like Dew's that I relay in some of the posts on my *Pavement graffiti* blog.[90] I also use them as stepping off points in some of the stories in this submission: at the centre of *Hard feelings*, for example, is an anecdote that was told

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[89] Despite its recent proliferation, the only examples of horizontal graffiti in Vassallo's *Street art of the [Sydney's] inner west* (2009) are several installations by mould-maker Will Coles (aka Numb).

[90] *Pavement graffiti*  http://www.meganix.net/pavement

to me, and *Noticing* is autobiographical. But mainly I am looking for overarching stories that transcend particular locations and individual instances of graffiti.  I have sifted and resifted through my accumulation of photographs looking for patterns, connections, understandings. The photographs do not always yield up insights on their own but, in the light of local knowledge and research from other sources, stories emerge that reveal new perspectives on the experience of living in the built environment.[91]

 I am no longer simply capturing graffiti, but engaging with it. I have become the storyteller that Liggett challenges the photographer of everyday life to become. I write guides for people who don't notice the pavement, or who *think* they don't notice the pavement.

Describing how museums have evolved over the decades in their approach to presenting the 'wonders of the world', Ross Gibson observes that,

> … exhibition strategies have wavered between the reliance on a singular signposted journey which a visitor is expected to follow without question and, at the other extreme a profuse tableau where myriad possible runs of connection are visible all at once […] We could say that the first curatorial strategy offers a 'tour' while the second prefers to supply a 'map' that entices the traveller to explore (Gibson, 2005, 57). [92]

My 'wonders' are the photographs I have taken. I am the curator of the cabinet of curiosities in which this booty is displayed. In the following section of this submission and in the website *Pavement appreciation*, I offer my souvenirs, my traveller's tales, my guide books and map, in the hope of enticing other travellers, not necessarily to

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[91] Similarly, sociologist Anne Cronin does not claim that photographs on their own yield up stories. After walking with her camera through the city to examine the spatial practices of outdoor advertising, Cronin writes, 'Reflecting on the photographs—as an oblique sort of research diary—I realize that my experience of seeing the spaces was shaped by what I knew of the industry's practices, but also that the process of taking photos shaped my own analysis of the industry and urban spaces' (Cronin, 2011, 366).

[92] Gibson's essay, *Wonders of the world on show*, is specifically addressing the history of the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney.

follow in my footsteps, but to explore for themselves the everyday but exotic world of asphalt and concrete underfoot.

# Chapter 5

# The traveller's tales

## 5.1   Noticing

## 5.1    Noticing[93]

> If we are always arriving and departing, it is also true that we are eternally anchored.  One's destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things.
>
> -    Henry Miller, *Big Sur and the oranges of Hieronymous Bosch* (1957).

March

We are spending a few days up the coast with friends from Brisbane, reminiscing about long-ago family holidays.  Nambucca Heads is a holiday town that has not yet been overdeveloped. The patrolled surf beach still nestles at the foot of a shrubby hill, not at the doorstep of resort-style towers. There are new blocks of holiday units throughout the town, but there are also camping areas and holiday houses to rent, some of them tiny 1940s bungalows still neatly kept and not overshadowed by 'designer shacks'. There are quiet sandy beaches along the river and plenty of fish to catch. There are also many more restaurants and clubs, cafes and take-aways than we remember.

We discover that Nambucca Heads is now one of the few places in Australia that claim graffiti as a tourist attraction. It is not the clever stencil art of Melbourne's lanes, or the brilliant wall pieces of Newtown, or the irritating tags of just about everywhere. Instead, at Nambucca, it is mum-and-dad-and-the-kids kind of graffiti, painstakingly applied in house paint to the twin breakwater at the mouth of the river called the 'Vee-Wall'.

The colourful shock of it rivals the exuberant municipal sea-life mosaic that dominates the cross roads up in the centre of town. It covers the breakwater rocks and concrete pathway like hundreds and thousands on a birthday cake, spelling out a cheerful greeting on the glistening waters of Nambucca River. Photographs of the Vee-Wall are

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[93] An earlier version of this piece was originally published as a visual essay, 'Perceptions: Graffiti rocks' in *Scan* (Journal of media arts culture), http://scan.net.au/scan/magazine/display.php?journal_id=60 (2010).

featured on postcards and tourist brochures. Graffiti has become an object of civic pride.

We are staying in riverside units in the between-season. We nod to retirees doing the early morning walk on the breakwater, cluck admiringly at their little dogs, and share comments on the pictures and messages on the rocks. Even these oldies appreciate the folk art on display. At least, most of them do, but some don't like graffiti of any sort, including our friend Frank, who harrumphs about the vandalism. He is particularly pleased with one rock where the family name Logan, in one of the few apparent instances of tampering, has been changed to Bogan. 'That just about says it all!' he crows. He doesn't like the spoiling of natural rocks – natural rocks, mind you, that have been carted from who-knows-where and cemented together to form a totally artificial structure.

The next morning I bring my camera to record some of the paintings.[94] We find stories of people who have enjoyed their holiday at Nambucca and want others to know it. Honeymooners who have returned to find they still love the place (and each other). Families who come back year after year, adding the names of new babies to the family rock. Overseas tourists who want to leave their mark – legitimately – on Australia. Teenagers who reveal their current crushes. Names, dates, tributes to Nambucca and thanks to God are here. Some are decorated with drawings of family members or the fish they caught. We notice one young woman from Tokyo who is painting a floral remembrance of her visit while her Australian friends hold the paint cans. It would take many morning strolls to read all the messages here.

On our last day we agree that we should stay here again. Next time we will all bring our fishing rods. I don't think Frank would be impressed if I suggested we bring a few tins of paint as well.

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[94] As with all the 'stories' in this section of the thesis, photographs of any of the contemporary pavement inscriptions mentioned are available on the *Pavement Appreciation* website, http://www.pavementappreciation.meganix.net.

November

We have heard that Seal Rocks is isolated but the scenery is spectacular. We decide to drive out and look at the lighthouse there. The tourist maps list this as one of the local 'things to see and do'. The day is bright and hot but there are still some morning clouds in the sky. We have left the main road and are on our way towards the coastline when we come across words painted in large, faint letters across the roadway, perhaps 100 metres apart. As we pass each one I read it aloud and we realise that they must spell out a sentence.

I want to take photographs, so we turn around and drive back to find the beginning. After I photograph each word John drives me to the next one. While I am trying to get the best angle I must listen out for cars that occasionally come roaring down the road. The lettering is even and careful like an official sign, but done in paint, not that thick kind of road-sign coating. The sentence is meant to read   PUT   IT   IN   THE   BIN.

This road passes through Myall Lakes National Park and I wonder whether it was Park staff who painted the sign. Was it worth the effort? I am always on the lookout for unusual messages on the bitumen, but wonder whether other people would notice this one as they speed towards the beach. My question is answered when I notice that someone has stopped to tamper with the last word. The alteration is rough but legible: PUT   IT   IN   THE   BUM.

I am tremendously pleased about discovering this addition to my graffiti collection. The morning has started well and now I can look forward to the proper business of the day's excursion, which is meant to be about sea and sky and a historic edifice. But some distance further on we drive over more large words written across the road. I should not have to say anything: after all these years John knows that I will want to stop but I am forced to ask anyway. I tell him I must go back and record them all now. With the sky slightly hazy at the moment they are easier to photograph.  This afternoon on the way back, the sun will probably be blazing down and the dappled shadows of the trees will make the words difficult to make out.

We turn back to the first one and repeat the process. I photograph a word then hop in the car and he drives me to the next one. But now I am torn. The tall forest on either side of the road is full of birds making unfamiliar calls. I want to stay and try to spot them. I want to dive into the car for my binoculars and scan the bush for them. In fact one of them seems to be following me through the fringe of trees as I trudge along the roadside. But I can't push John's patience too far. I must concentrate on what's beneath my feet, not what is above my head. By now he is parked some distance away, waiting at the bottom of a dip, not far from where the bitumen ends and the road becomes gravel.

As I walk down the hill I am surprised to see a small group of people emerge from the forest. They cross the road down near our car and disappear into the bush on the other side. A crocodile of another 20 or 30 people follows them. They are wearing hats and small back-packs and I guess that maybe they are some sort of bushwalking group.

It is getting hotter. The birds are still calling but I turn my attention back to the graffiti. Most of it is less carefully painted than the first lot. The lettering is not square and even, the spelling is dubious. For some words the road is not wide enough and the last letters curve down towards the dirt edges to fit them in. They read PEACE   LOVE INSENCE   SMILE.

By the time I reach the bottom of the hill I can see that the bushwalkers have climbed into two vehicles parked in a clearing – a minivan and a 4-wheel drive with a university logo on the door. The minivan is about to pull onto the road and I call out to the driver, "What was the best bird you saw?" He gestures that he can't hear and I call louder. He replies something about not being able to hear above the chatter in the bus, so now I am committed to this silly conversation and must cross the road to stand by his window, my eyes level with the steamy, heavy-rimmed glasses on his perspiring face. He explains that they have been looking at plants, not birds: "We bring students here to study environmental ecology." In return I tell him I am photographing graffiti for a postgraduate project but am tempted to look at the birds as well.

"The graffiti is about locals not wanting the road to be sealed", he says. "They don't want more traffic to Seal Rocks. And they don't want a surf school to be built back up the road there.  They're just for backpackers who come here to learn to surf – learn to drown, more like it – and drink too much and vomit everywhere." Already my mind is turning on the repetitious curiosity of protesters using a sealed road to write complaints about plans for extending the sealed road all the way to Seal Rocks. "Good luck to you darling", waves the lecturer cheerfully as he drives off. "I'd have to say pelicans are my favourites." I think what an oddly commonplace choice for someone who teaches ecology and tramps through forests full of uncommon birds.

The last piece of graffiti is written twice so it can be read from either direction. I take photos of it and get back into the car, where John has managed to find a radio station to listen to. "What does it say?" he asks.  As we set off again I tell him, "It says SAVE SEAL ROCKS. It's a seal of disapproval". I realise that I was so enthralled by the runnels on the lecturer's pink face that I didn't think to ask him who actually wrote the graffiti. Was it locals or university students? He probably would have hedged around the answer anyway. "Is that what 'No names, no pack drill' means?" I ask John.

I hope that on the way back in the afternoon we might see the minibus again. But by the time we return the writing is almost invisible amongst the shadows on the road and we do not come across the minibus.


January

I invite a friend to read my blog post about the Nambucca Vee-Wall. I don't think she has ever looked at a blog before. She answers that she has seen similar painted rocks at Port Macquarie. "At first I thought this the most ghastly graffiti (particularly since the rocks appear to be painted with house paint)", she says, "but having now walked along the breakwall numerous times I have to admit it is a fascinating social document".

By the time I read her reply I am already composing the next post. It's about another large sign hand-painted on a coastal back road. We had driven over it on the way to

Forster. It says 'Tim P. is gay'. I am wondering whether 'gay' is the worst insult Tim P's antagonist can think of, or whether Tim really is gay and, by publishing a photograph of the notice on-line, I am colluding in his outing.

## 5.2   Signs of a struggle

## 5.2    Signs of a struggle[95]

> The "above the road" is a man-made membrane. It's a film. And the residues of human activity of people struggling through the world take a number of built-up forms, that are exposed onto this film ... In the artificial above the road it's nature expressed through the mediums of concrete, glass and metal – through intersections, stairways and yellow-striped cross-walks.
>
> -    Akasegawa Genpei, *Above the roads* [1986]

**Territorial claims**

Pavement inscriptions are a familiar feature of the built environment. The most conspicuous are the signs that regulate usage of the pavement itself – centre lines and right-turn arrows, pedestrian crossings and disabled parking spaces, speed limits writ large, and warnings to Mind Your Step, Mind The Gap, Look Right, and Stand Back. The ubiquitous road (and footpath) traffic signs are significant examples of the visible forms of regulation for which Canadian social scientists Joe Hermer and Alan Hunt have coined the term 'official graffiti of the everyday'.[96]

But regulations are not the only inscriptions on the ground. Although perhaps less glaringly obvious, there are many other kinds of pavement graffiti and many kinds of pavement scribe. With a layout of painted lettering, wet-cement scratchings, chalked scrawls and spray-painted stencils, the pavement is like a giant open-air newspaper carrying news items, opinion pieces, illustrations, personal columns, comics and

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[95] This essay is adapted from illustrated talks given at the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts and the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Sections of it have also been published in various forms: a video/slide show titled 'Street writing', in *Interdisciplinary Themes Journal*, 1(1), http://www.interdisciplinarythemes.org/journal/index.php/itj/article/view/43 (2010); and two entries in the on-line *Dictionary of Sydney*: 'Reading the roads', http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/reading_the_roads (2008), and 'The decorated footpath', http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/the_decorated_footpath (2010).

[96] Hermer & Hunt (1996, 455-456).

obituaries, all interspersed with public notices and advertisements for products, services and events.

From the different stories that can be read from this pavement newspaper, one overarching theme emerges: pavement marks are evidence of an ongoing territorial contest. The pavement is a contested space and every sign, symbol, graphic and graffiti can be read as a claim for territory.

To understand this it is helpful to review the story of pavements and pavement inscriptions over the past century in cities like Sydney.

**Smooth footways**

These days city streets are divided up in specific ways. The roadways are meant for vehicles; the sidewalks are meant for pedestrians going somewhere; business and people's personal lives are meant to be conducted off the street, indoors. This might seem to be an obvious arrangement, but it was not always so. City streets used to hum with social interactions and commercial transactions. The roadway was used by people going somewhere by foot, horse-drawn vehicle or bicycle; by people with something to sell, something to spruik, or something to preach; and by people promenading, socialising or just hanging about. Historian Peter Norton, referring to American cities in the early 20th century, writes that most city people believed that children at play belonged in the streets and 'regarded the city street as a public space, open to anyone who did not endanger or obstruct other users'.[97]

The situation was similar in cities in other parts of the world but by the late 19th century things had already started to change.  Pedestrians – or 'foot passengers' as they were known at the time – were being segregated from vehicles as technologies for building footways improved.[98] In cities like Sydney many of the footpaths were paved long before the carriageways were surfaced. People needed to be able to walk

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[97] Norton (2007, 331).

[98]  See Brown-May (1995, 18-20).

about without falling on rough or boggy surfaces, and the well-off did not want their shoes and clothes to be ruined by the mud and dust of the street.

These new, paved footways were essentially an extension of the indoors. They functioned as a 'welcome mat' for customers coming in off the dirty street and, before the advent of plate-glass windows, they were a place where store owners could display their wares. Although Sydney Council installed kerbs and gutters, owners of new buildings were obliged to pave the footway outside their premises, or pay the Council to do it. Flagging was the usual method, the flagstones often coming to Sydney as ballast on ships from overseas.

For city businesses, the appearance of the adjacent paving was as important as its utility. In 1873, prominent architect J Horbury Hunt wrote to the Lord Mayor with a request about the laying of kerb and guttering in front of Messrs Farmer and Company's new emporium. He explained that the company was going to very great expense to make the new buildings an ornament to the city, with an arcade extending the length of the block. To complete the design, the city council should make the kerb and guttering out of the same high quality bluestone from Melbourne as the flagging of the arcade.[99]

The very first inscriptions on Sydney pavements were signs of proprietorship, with businesses embedding the company's name in brass or marble flush with the flagging of the footpath outside their premises.[100]

By the late 19th century the flagstones of Sydney footpaths were being replaced by new materials, usually versions of asphalt and later, concrete. Paving stones might have a certain charm, but their cracked and uneven surfaces were expensive to

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[99] City of Sydney Archives,  Letter, J. Horbury Hunt, 26/123/930 (1873). Other references to flagging and kerbstones include: City of Sydney Archives, Letter, J.B. Rundle request re kerbing, 26/12/0929 (1854); Letter from Brierly Dean & Co, offering granite curbing stone and Yorkshire flagstone, 26/14/052 (1855); Fitzgerald (1992, 54).

[100] For example, in 1884 the owners of a company in George Street asked Sydney Council for permission to construct the words Market Chambers, in brass, marble or some other material across the foot path and flush with the flagging. Permission was given, on the grounds that similar requests from other companies had already been granted (City of Sydney Archives, Letters received, 26/195/148, 1884). See also Brown-May (1998, 51).

maintain and a hazard for pedestrians. Smooth asphalt surfaces were considered to be modern and progressive.[101]

**Sealed carriageways**

It took longer for the carriageways to be paved. Some of the busiest streets of Sydney had been 'macadamised' by compressing layers of interlocking stones, some were 'metalled' with a top-dressing of crushed stone, but the state of even these was still intolerably dangerous, dirty and unhealthy. There were potholes like chasms, inches of mud in wet weather, and in dry weather inches of dust, much of it consisting of powdered horse manure.[102]

After repeated complaints from the public and the press, and a great deal of wrangling between different levels of government, wood-blocking of Sydney streets began in 1880 in a process that involved hammering tarred hardwood bricks into place and top dressing them with tar. At around the same time, other cities of the world were asphalting their streets. Sydney's woodblocks would eventually be replaced by asphalt or concrete, but there were still woodblocks streets in evidence in the 1930s.[103]

Whatever materials were used, the paving of sidewalks and roadways in modern cities like Sydney meant that the streets now had hard grey surfaces, lying like empty slates waiting to be written on.

**The motor car**

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[101] For reference to the paving of footpaths, see: *Local government: Concrete versus asphalt* (1925); Shepherd (1948, 40-43); Woollahra Municipal Council (1999); Jackson-Stepowski (2003). In USA: Ehrenfeucht & Loukaitou-Sideris (2007).

[102] For the dust problem and other deficiencies in Sydney roads, see: Chubb (1912); Glassop (1912); *The roadmakers* (1976); Fitzgerald (1992, 52ff). In London: Chadwick (1871).

[103] For road making, maintenance and surfacing in Sydney and other parts of Australia, see: Chubb (1912); Glassop (1912); Coane & Coane (1915); Bremner (1948); *Grey roads* (1948); Shepherd (1948); Sherrard (1965); Baglin & Austin (1976, 66ff); *The roadmakers* (1976); McShane (1979); Howard (1984); Lay (1984); NAASRA (1987); Underwood (1989); Fitzgerald (1992, 52 ff); Brown-May (1995); Broomham (2001). In London: Chadwick (1971); Corfield (1990); Otter (2004). In USA: McShane (1979); McShane (1994); Holley (2003). Elsewhere around the world: Lay (1993); Summers (2012).

Although civic desires for orderliness, cleanliness and the separation of social classes drove the spatial reorganisation of streets in the 19th century, it was the advent of the motor car that hastened this process. Motorised vehicles were rich people's novelties when they first appeared in Australian cities around 1900 but it took only a few years for them to catch on. Melbourne historian Andrew Brown-May writes that,

> By the 1920s, the motor car had radically and incontestably changed the physical landscape and geometry of the street, had altered its aesthetic experience as smoke, noise and speed began to replace the sound, pace and odour of the horse-drawn age … Traffic lights, pedestrian crossings, new street signs and safety zones would replace the horse trough and hitching post to become the hallmarks of city streets.[104]

In Sydney between 1900 and 1930 the number of motorised vehicles on the streets increased dramatically. Their speed and manoeuvrability were conducive to reckless driving and motorists became a danger to themselves and to horse-drawn vehicles and other users of the road. There was a great deal of acrimony between pedestrians – who clung to the belief that the road was for everyone – and motorists, who maintained that pedestrians should just stay on the sidewalk out of the way.[105]

**Traffic signs**

For safety's sake new rules had to be introduced. Since by this time most streets had been sealed, the authorities, as well as erecting warning signposts, were able to spell out regulations on the roadway itself.

In the early days the most common markers were centre lines to keep vehicles to their own side of the road. These were initially painted by hand, but in 1938 the New South Wales Department of Main Roads purchased a motorised 'line striping machine' from

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[104] Brown-May (1995, 2).

[105] For references to antagonism between motorists and other street users, see for example: McShane (1979); Fitzgerald (1992, 242); McShane (1994); Norton (2007).

the California State Highway Department.[106] Lines were also used to bring order to the free-for-all at intersections. Early trials took place in King and Market Streets in Sydney, where the Police Department painted white lines in 1928 in an attempt to deal with congestion.

But given that it was motorised traffic that created the need for traffic rules, it is ironic that some of the most noticeable pavement signs were intended to marshal pedestrians. For their own safety, walkers were meant to cross in herds at designated places. William Phelps Eno, sometimes known as the 'father of traffic safety' is credited with introducing the cross-walk and pedestrian safety islands, among other innovations, to New York streets. Cities in Australia followed suit. As early as 1912 at Circular Quay – a busy pedestrian precinct – Sydney City Council painted lines on the road from footpath to footpath to provide a safe crossing area.  A few years later designated pedestrian crossings in the rest of the city were being marked out with metal studs or pairs of white lines.

By the 1940s, in addition to centre lines and lines across intersections, roadways – not only in cities but in suburban and rural areas as well – were dotted with such embellishments as metal studs, rubber pegs, and illuminated and reflective traffic domes. The new paving materials of asphalt and concrete had made the marking of roadways possible and motorised vehicles had made it necessary.[107]

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[106] This machine was used mainly on rural highways but, in addition, in less than a year after its purchase, 171 miles (275 km) of main roads in the Sydney metropolitan area had been marked with a centre line (*Line marking machine*, 1938, 135-136).

[107] Striped zebra crossings were introduced in the 1950s. For references to the marking of traffic regulations on the roads in Australia and elsewhere, see for example: McConaghie (1922); *Writing on the roads* (1925); *Line marking machine* (1938); *Safety furnishings on rural highways* (1938); *Traffic lines* (1939); *Segregation of traffic* (1939); *Highway engineering and road safety* (1948); *New system of marking centre lines on roads* (1948); Sherrard (1965); Shepherd (1948); Sessions (1971); *The roadmakers* (1976); Lay (1984); Underwood (1989); Lay (1993); McShane (1994); Brown-May (1995); Broomham (2001); (Rothstein, 2010).

In the USA a prominent citizen complained in 1922:

> Beginning at the borders of the town, the motorist will find running comments and instructions in words and in symbols accompanying almost every foot of the way ... In fact, the whole countryside will have become one continuous road map containing all the familiar hieroglyphics which every motorist recognizes and only the occasional expert understands.[108]

**Crowd control**

Despite such complaints, regulatory marks applied to roadways proved to be such a good idea that sometimes they were used on footpaths as well. Since the 1870s, Sydney letter writers and newspaper columnists have fumed over window shoppers and social chatterers blocking the footpath at busy times in the central business district, likening city crowds to flocks of sheep going in different directions or cattle caught in a barn.  The solution has been for traffic authorities to paint lines on the pavement to assist in herding pedestrians and corralling bus queuers. A centre line has appeared and disappeared on footpaths over the decades, sometimes accompanied by a stencil that warned 'Keep left'. Such measures go in and out of fashion.[109]

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[108] Sessions (1971, 106), quoting James R. McConaghie.

[109] The last time the centre line was applied in George Street, Sydney, seems to have been the 1980s. During periods when it has been absent, letter writers have waxed nostalgic over its regulatory powers. In 1974, for instance, a citizen from Belfield wrote to the Lord Mayor: 'Please bring back the "YELLOW LINE" that adorned Sydney City footpaths a decade ago, so that at least the poor employees in the city area (like myself) get a bit of a "fair go" at all times' (City of Sydney Archives, Letter from JR Byott, 268/60, 1974).

Other references in the City of Sydney Archives to painted directions for pedestrians include: (images) 033\033443 'Showing traffic markings and men and women walking in crosswalk' (1929); 034\034938 'View of men and women using pedestrian crossing' (1931); 034\034213 'Traffic mark at intersection' (1929); (correspondence files) 1902/0068 'Geo. Richards. (Regulating Pedestrian traffic' (1902); 1908/0367 'Sydney Harbour Trust - Town Clerk. To provide crossings for foot traffic' (1908); 1909/2569 'Marine Board Hobart - Town Clerk. Various styles of foot crossings' (1909); 1083/14/100 'Circular Quay. Mr T W Keele's proposal for relieving foot passengers' (1911); 268/60 'Footways in inner city area' (1960). Also: Huxley (2003); White (1999, 53, 81).

**The lexicon**

As the populations of cities have grown, the interplay between road users and authorities has driven a massive increase in the variety and quantity of regulatory marks. People are not necessarily resigned to this ordering of their movements, and while some are left feeling bewildered, others are moved to rebel against such oppression. That the vast majority of the signs on the road are directed at motorists, however, clearly indicates that *motorised vehicles only* is the default setting for roadways.[110]

Reminders of the dominance and danger of motorised vehicles can also be read in collections of another kind of official but esoteric mark on the streets. These are the onsite records methodically spray-painted by police at the scene of serious traffic accidents. Crash investigators returning to the site later use these patterns of angles and arrows to decipher the causes of the event. The diagrams remain long after the debris has been cleared away, serving as semi-permanent markers of 'black spots' on the road and as memorials to sometimes tragic events.

Nevertheless, recent additions to the lexicon of traffic directions are evidence of a social engineering project that challenges – theoretically if not actually – the dominance of the motor car. I am referring to designated bus lanes and cycle lanes, marked with colour-coded coatings, whose intent is to encourage citizens to conserve fossil fuels through commuting by bus or bicycle. And while pedestrians have long been relegated to the footpaths, now, in a further imposition, walkers in streets and parks have more recently come under pressure from speeding cyclists wherever there are footways stencilled 'Shared path'.

**Unofficial signs**

In a project like mine, whose main focus is graffiti, it might seem unnecessary to concentrate at length on the evolution of official roadway and footpath signs, but the point is that these signs mark out the principal ordering of the paved landscape. And it

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[110] Motorists still write complaining letters to the newspapers about such things as 'a bewildering set of painted lines and signs' at a local intersection (Wiseham, 2010, 21).

is backwards and forwards over this same ordered terrain that many other territorial skirmishes are waged. These too leave evidence in the form of imitative *unofficial* signs.

The boldest of these unofficial signs are the handmade 'No parking' signs where residents defend patches of kerbside pavement that provide the only access to their garages and driveways. The battle over this territory is greatest, and the handmade signs are largest, where local attractions bring hordes of day (or night) trippers in their cars from outside the area.

But as well as parking signs, people also paint their own 'Stop' signs on the road at intersections with a history of crashes; wobbly zebra crossings at places where they think there ought to be one; 'No dogs' on busy jogging routes; and 'No poofters' on pathways to gay beats. They admonish other pavement users by chalking rings around dog droppings and writing 'Filthy dog owners'. And they defy authorities by leaving hot rubber on concrete roundabouts or by defacing official stencils. Painting an extra zero on a '100' roadway speed limit sign, or adding an elephant to a pictogram line-up of 'shared pathway' users might look like fun jokes, but they are also indicators of dissatisfaction with official regulation of the pavement.

**Extended claims**

This jostling for territory between and among users and authorities has not stopped with arguments over who should – or should not – drive, cycle, walk, run, or park where. There are others whose claims for space extend to activities for which the pavement was never intended. Such people use the pavement to make marks that have nothing to do with travelling, other than that it is travellers who form the audience for their inscriptions.

Pavement artists and beggars were among the first to avail themselves of stone flagging and asphalt paving, because its gritty surfaces were highly amenable to chalk inscription. An early practitioner in Sydney was a Mr Henry Grant, who was arrested in

1855 for being a vagrant after he had 'resorted to the device of soliciting alms by writing on the pavement of Pitt-street a petition for contributions to his exchequer'.[111]

For children, urban streets and laneways were their playgrounds and once these were paved they became drawing boards as well. Marble circles and hopscotch games, previously scratched in the dirt with sticks, could now be marked out with bits of plaster or fibro. Arrow chases replaced the countryside game of Hare and Hounds. Those lucky enough to find stubs of chalk had the space to express themselves with extravagant but ephemeral, large-scale pictures.[112]

Advertisers and political sloganeers were quick to recognise the possibilities of the horizontal noticeboard. Local government and newspaper archives in Australia show that people were already stencilling and chalking advertisements on the pavements in the late 19th century. A cartoon in an 1871 issue of *Sydney Punch*, for instance, shows men stencilling the flagstones with an advertisement that reads 'Agricultural Society's exhibition'.[113]

By the mid-20th century pavement writing had become prevalent. In 1931 the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported:

> It would appear that in spite of the depression the chalk vendor is doing quite
> a brisk business. All over the suburbs there are notices chalked on the footpath

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[111] *Central Police Court: Friday* (1855, 4). Other references to pavement artists in Australia include: *The pavement artist. A pioneer in chalks* (1908); *The pavement artist* (1916); *Fewer beggars in Sydney's streets* (1936); *Pavement artist - Sydney, NSW* [photograph] (1939). Elsewhere: *"Pickings" from Punch. The mendicity market* (1843); Collins (1861); Orwell (1933); Benedetta (1946); Schellenberger (1987: 211-212).

[112] Children playing in the street are sometimes captured in photographs taken for quite another purpose. For example there is a little girl drawing on the road in the background of a police crime scene photograph taken in Darlinghurst c.1942, and published in Doyle and Williams (2005, 61); children are gathered round a hopscotch game on the road in one of a series of photographs of resumed properties taken in Erskineville in 1937, and published in Sharpe (1999, 69) and Hicks (2003, 8) [Resumed property of Erskineville (photograph), State Records NSW, CGS 4481, GPO1-28059 (1937)]. See also: Levitt & Coles (1987); Shave (2006).

[113] In fact, the satirical drawing shows Mr Joubert, the Secretary of the Agricultural Society, and his cronies being disturbed painting the stencil by the Mayor who, 'indignant at the mode of pavement-advertising', is hosing them down (*A damper for Joubert* [cartoon], 1871).

about evictions, public meetings, rallies, and speeches. Enterprising shopkeepers have also taken up the idea that footpath advertising is cheap and easily obtainable.[114]

The 'Town Talk' column of Broken Hill's *Barrier Miner* noted in 1953 that, 'something new in foot path and wall writing blossomed at the intersection of Market and George Streets in Sydney recently. Someone had gone to a great deal of trouble to type out a message, put glue on it, and take it down to stick on a post there'.[115] What is interesting about this newspaper item is not so much that 'paste-up' graffiti had already been invented by the 1950s, but that the columnist casually refers to 'foot path writing' as if it were a common phenomenon occurring as frequently as 'wall writing'.

However the history of such unofficial marks on the pavement, if traced through newspapers, is a history of crimes and misdemeanours since most mentions are reports in the 'Court appearances' columns.[116] A notable case took place in Melbourne

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[114] *Local government: The writing on the footpath* (1931).

[115] *Town Talk: New idea* (1953). The typed message on the post read: 'Ted Mortimer leant here while thinking about life'.

[116] Many instances of pavement writing can be found by searching digitised newspapers on the National Library of Australia's *Trove* website. But there is no point in searching with the term 'graffiti'. Until the late 1960s the word 'graffiti' does not appear in Australian newspapers except in occasional news items about archaeological discoveries.

Examples of pavement writing found include: Idle taxi drivers writing things on the pavement with chalk (*Municipal Council, Broken Hill*, 1896); chalk electioneering (*City Police Court*, 1899); whitewash advertisements for 'Joe Gardiner's boots' ( City of Sydney Archives correspondence files, 1904/0592); notices about meetings opposing national service (*The pavement artist*, 1916); painted signs about a strike (*Pavement writing: "General Strike for May 1"*, 1930); march in Broken Hill protesting the conviction of a man for writing propaganda on a footpath (*Barrier unemployed: Take possession of Town Hall*, 1931; also reported in: *The unemployed: Demonstration today outside Town Hall*, 1931; *Council must authorise use of Town Hall: Decision of aldermen*, 1931); police request a new by-law (*Writing on footpaths: Fremantle Council's action*, 1931); a sign about an anti-war demonstration (*Writing on footpaths: Communists go to gaol*, 1931); an appeal to waterside workers to support Swedish strikers (*Police courts: Writing on pavement*, 1932); disfiguring footpaths in Perth (*Charge of writing on footpaths*, 1932); whitewash advertisement for the picture 'Sally' (*Gordonvale Summons Court: A notable case*, 1932); political notice (*Writing on footpath: Communist propagandist fined*, 1932); notice of a working women's meeting (*Police Courts: Perth*, 1932); diatribes against people profiteering from charities (*A timely protest*, 1932); advertisement for a May

in 1934, where legal minds argued over whether 'chalk-writing on a footpath' (in this case a notice for a Communist meeting) could be described as 'a thing' within the terms of a by-law that made it an offence to place any 'placard, board, or any other thing' on any footway in the form of an advertisement. Although one magistrate accepted the defence lawyer's argument that 'chalk-writing could not be described as a tangible "thing"', three other justices on the bench disagreed and the offender was fined £3 with costs.[117]

Political notices seem to have been more numerous than other kinds of pavement inscription reported in the newspapers, but this may well have been because police generally only bothered to arrest pavement writers if their messages were subversive.[118] In 1951 one creative character in Melbourne was arrested for offensive behaviour after writing pro-Communist slogans on the pavement with the gravy from his meat pie.[119]

There seems to have been something of a fad for writing on footpaths in 1950s Sydney if newspaper columnists can be believed, the kinds of messages ranging from commercial to political, from practical (a new milkman chalking his customers' orders

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Day meeting (*Breaches of by-laws: Prosecutions in Fremantle*, 1933); notice about a 'dole strike' (*New sustenance rates: Acceptance by workless*, 1933); chalk writing (*Police Court news: Prosecutions at Hobart: Writing on pavement*, 1934); announcement about an anti-war league meeting (*Police news: Footpath advertisement*, 1934); 'unprintable remarks' about Constable Frank 'Bumper' Farrell at Sydney Cricket Ground (*Policeman on mat*, 1945); a 'Hands off Indonesia' sign (*Fined for pavement writing*, 1947); chalking of the words 'Atom Bomb Menzies, warmonger' in Sydney (*Fined for writing on pavement*, 1949); painted sign 'Homes before Balts. Defend democratic liberty [etc]' outside Parliament House (*Writing on road at Canberra*, 1949); anti-Prime Minister Menzies notice (Propaganda notice on footpath, 1950).

[117] *Magistrate overruled: Justices decide legal point* (1934).

[118] Something similar seems to have been the case for pavement artists, or 'screevers' in Britain. During his down and out days in London in the 1920s, George Orwell befriended Bozo, a screever whose pitch was on the Embankment near Waterloo Bridge, and whose specialty was cartoons commenting on politics and current events. Bozo tells Orwell, 'You can have cartoons about any of the parties, but you mustn't put anything in favour of Socialism, because the police won't stand it ... The copper's got the right to move you on for loitering, and it's no good giving them a back answer' (Orwell, 1940, 164).

[119] *Red meat was in his pie* (1951).

on the footpath outside their houses) to the whimsical. Gilbert Mant wrote in his *Sun-Herald* column in 1954:

> Here's a shaggy story about the current writing-on-pavements craze, which is getting as idiotic as chain-letters. Written in white chalk, on a pavement in Manly are these baffling words: "This notice has been written with chalk".[120]

**A continuing campaign**

Pavement graffiti is clearly not some recent phenomenon, but I am on a self-imposed mission to photograph *current* inscriptions on roads and footpaths. These days, when people place these 'things' – or 'not-things' – on the pavement, the whimsical examples tend to outnumber the political and the commercial.  So, for example, among the advertisements and protest slogans there are artworks – not astonishingly colourful and complex pieces like those made on walls, but sly little stencils or hastily painted outlines.

There are poems and epitaphs. There are drip and splash signatures, romantic messages, and penises of all sizes. But I have come to realise that, whatever the ostensible intention of these inscriptions, their writers are all engaged in the same campaign. They are appropriating public space for their own purposes. Authorities and offended citizens retaliate by overpainting the marks or attempting to pressure-hose them off. [121]

The impressions that remain – the symbols, messages, graphics and buff marks – are all testimony to a territorial struggle that is waged daily on the paved landscape.

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[120] The milkman was reported in Golding (1953, 1); the shaggy story in Mant (1954, 54).

[121] Iveson (2012) discusses the aesthetics of graffiti removal in general, describing 'urban swatchwork' (attempts to paint over graffiti) and 'ghost graffiti' (marks left when removal has not been entirely successful) as visible indicators of the desperation of authorities to assert their authority.

**Reclamation**

Reclaim the Streets (RTS) is a loose international collective that shares the ideal of community ownership of public spaces. It is a protest movement that opposes globalised corporate forces and resists the domination of the street by cars.[122]

In Sydney, the last big traffic-stopping day-long annual RTS street party was held in November 1999, coincidentally the same year that I began photographing pavement inscriptions. In inner-city Newtown I sometimes re-photograph the fading remnants of the street painting that took place that day amongst all the dancers, acrobats and picnickers who had commandeered the roadway.

Since then the movement seems to have fizzled out, in Australia at least. A few annual rallies subsequently took place, but these were restricted by the authorities to city parks rather than streets. In 2010 there was an attempted revival with a Reclaim the Lanes party, which was more a celebration of wheelie-bin sound systems and Newtown's famous back-lane wall art, than a usurpation of traffic-filled streets.[123]

Nevertheless, every day and everywhere there are people – individuals, groups and organisations – making claims and counter-claims on the streets and footways with their stencils, spray-cans, paintbrushes and chalks. And as I pore over my photographs it occurs to me that all these different kinds of graffiti are the counterparts of the sorts of activity that used to be a normal part of street life a hundred or more years ago.

Back then there were hawkers, orators, touts, singers, vendors, loiterers, newsboys, beggars, and children playing, all spread out across the width of the street amongst horse-drawn vehicles and bicycles. At different times of the day or week, merchants displayed their wares on the pavement, businessmen conducted transactions,

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[122] The movement was founded in London in 1991. It later spread to other parts of the world, beginning with Helsinki and Sydney, both in 1997 ('Reclaim the Streets', *Wikipedia* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reclaim_the_Streets, accessed 27 May 2012; Luckman, 2001).

[123] See my 'Reclaim the Lanes' blog post of 14 February 2010 http://www.meganix.net/pavement/2010/02/14/reclaim-the-lanes/

acquaintances caught up on gossip, and families and couples promenaded in their finery. The streets were a focus for social life that could be both vibrant and squalid.[124]

Since then such activities have become more compartmentalised, restricted to the roadway *or* the sidewalk *or* off the street altogether. But I wonder if perhaps the people who dare mark the pavement with graffiti – sometimes charming, sometimes ugly – are unwittingly evoking the past. It is as if – in these graffiti – the pavements still carry traces of the sort of busy social life that used to be played out when the street belonged to everyone.

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[124] See Brown-May (1998, xv-xxvi).

## 5.3   Horizontal billboards

## 5.3    Horizontal billboards[125]

> What, in the end, makes advertisements so superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon sign says – but the fiery pool reflecting it in the asphalt.
>
> - Walter Benjamin, *One-way street* (1955)

**Inscribed terrain**

In the hypertextualized postmodern city as described by Geyh (2006, 413), 'signs have arguably become the dominant constituent of phenomenal urban space' where architectural spaces are 'awash in texts and images'. And, as Geyh and others have emphasised, it is the proliferation of advertising that has largely been responsible for the transformation of urban signscapes since the early 20th century.[126]

The pavement is rarely mentioned in the literature when outdoor signage is discussed, but streets and sidewalks, far from simply conveying a moving audience past the phantasmagoria of signs, are themselves components of Geyh's hypertextualized architectural spaces.

The pavement is a readable document on which are impressed, not only the official signs that provide instructions for its use (centre lines and speed limits, for example), but a wealth of less conspicuous unofficial inscriptions. Writing on pavements is a traditional form of public expression and a perusal of streets in any city will reveal whimsical artworks, political slogans, personal messages and commercial advertisements executed in a variety of materials, from felt-tipped pen to house paint.

Traversing this inscribed terrain I have noticed an evolution in the forms of advertisement there, even in the past twelve years.  It occurs to me to wonder when it was that commercial interests *first* perceived the possibilities of these most utilitarian

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[125] Versions of this article were presented at the Cultural Studies Association of Australia's 'Futures' conference in 2008, and published as 'Horizontal billboards: the commercialisation of the pavement' in *Continuum*, 23 (6):765-780 (2009).

[126] See, for example, Crawford (2008) and Gade (2003).

of public surfaces. How have horizontal promotions changed since then, and what has influenced the changes? In this article I explore these questions before conjecturing on how advertisements might bring about further pavement transformations in the future.

**Identity trails**

Paved surfaces provide a background for markers of a person's passage. Hand-painted political slogans, jokes, symbols and romantic messages have long been a part of the pavement scene, especially since the introduction in the late 19th-century of amenably even and dark-coloured paving materials like asphalt.[127]  Another old-fashioned form of pavement inscription remains popular as well. The pleasures of writing in wet cement are not lost on young people, who utilize this medium to leave signs of their identity – footprints,  autographs, love tokens, and badges of allegiance  ('Bulldogs', 'Ford vs. Holden' and recently, I have noticed, the Aboriginal flag).

With the introduction of the aerosol can came that most insistent form of personal identification, the tag. As other writers before me have remarked, tagging is closely comparable with commercial branding, with its emphasis on the name and its method of broadcast by repetition (Stewart, 1991, 212). Tags are generally deployed on vertical backgrounds but, while I saw very few examples on the ground twelve years ago, these days they appear there more frequently and writers are using a variety of implements to make them, perhaps because of bans on the sale of spray cans to minors. As well as felt-tipped markers, white correction fluid is used for small tags, while other writers have adopted styles involving paint rollers, or the dripping, splashing or squirting of paint to make large tags that sometimes extend the full width of a traffic lane.

Yet further recent additions to the genres of graffiti are stencils, stickers and paper paste-ups. These forms have developed over the last fifteen years and, like tagging, they are a means of repetitive trail blazing. All of them are used on the ground as well

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[127] When pavements were made of stone, graffiti is more likely to have been scratched or scraped into the surface. Christian symbols have been found carved into the marble paving of the Roman city excavated at Ephesus in Turkey (see, for example, Wickham, 2013).

as walls, but generally it is stencils that are best suited for the pavement. Works stencilled on the ground range from large environmental pieces to finely detailed images covering just a few square centimetres.

**Chalking and repetition**

It is apparent that, since streets were first surfaced with asphalt or concrete, paved areas have been used as a canvas, not only for artistic works and children's games like hopscotch, but for asserting identity and affirming allegiances. Given these precedents it is not surprising that those with a product to sell or a cause to promote might also choose to exploit the possibilities of the pavement as a giant billboard.

The affinity of chalk and asphalt was discovered early on by shopkeepers. Lay (1984, 191) records – unfortunately without citing sources – that around 1910 in the USA 'it was quite common, but usually illegal, for small roadside businesses to advertise by chalking advertisements on the new asphalt road surfaces'. At around the same time in Sydney, and no doubt elsewhere in Australia, local traders were also taking liberties. It was too much for one citizen who wrote to the Town Clerk in 1904 to complain:

> Coming into town this morning I find that the footpaths of Crown and Oxford Streets are daubed with a white-wash advertisement of "Joe Gardiner's boots". On the asphalt at the Oxford St entrance to Hyde Park the advertisement covers almost all the available space, and the appearance of the place is anything but aesthetic (City of Sydney Archives, 1904).

This practice continues to the present, perhaps not in lime whitewash but certainly in chalk.  Café owners chalk their daily specials in the street, publicans announce pool competitions, people holding garage sales mark arrow chases to their front gates. Recently, in my neighbourhood of Newtown, there has been an ongoing jostling for attention by small businesses located in side streets. They constantly renew their chalked advertisements on the main shopping strip, and the owner of one new 'Baby and kids wear' shop has done blanket coverage of footpaths at busy nodes in neighbouring localities.

Repetition is pivotal to most advertising campaigns. It was the technique of Sydney's most famous mid-20th century chalk graffitist, whose message is not generally thought of as an advertisement – but of course it was. The story of 'Eternity Man' Arthur Stace is well-known to the point of mythologization and commercial exploitation (see, for example, Hicks, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 1997; Morris, 2001; Verghis 2005a). A former no-hoper who had been dramatically converted to Christianity in the early 1930s, Stace walked the city's streets for over 30 years, inscribing the copperplate word 'Eternity' on the footpaths over and over again.

What is perhaps not well known is that in 1959 the Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service had the idea of asking Stace to write 'Blood is life – Enrol' every time he wrote 'Eternity'. Stace told a newspaper reporter, 'My writing on the footy is the best-read advertisement in Sydney, they said'. In the event the arrangement fell through because the Lord Mayor would not permit it and Stace was relieved. 'I wasn't sorry in a sense because I thought it might have upset my own business' – the business, that is, of publicising the *after*life ('Eternity lasts twelve months', 1959[128]).

Chalk continues to be the medium of choice for some groups with a message to preach, often in the belief – not necessarily correct – that chalk does not contravene graffiti laws.[129] Graffiti is illegal in New South Wales. Damaging or defacing by chalk, paint, felt tip markers or other media is an offence, reported to the NSW Police as malicious damage. Local governments have the power, and therefore the responsibility, to remove graffiti (Lawlink NSW, 2009). The City of Sydney, in its Graffiti Management Policy adopted in 2004, takes the stance that rapid removal is a better deterrent than fines (City of Sydney, 2004). Nevertheless activists, wielding materials more permanent than chalk, still choose to flout rules and taunt governments with

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[128] I thank Peter Kirkpatrick for drawing attention to this newspaper article in his essay 'That shy mysterious poet Arthur Stace' (1997).

[129] In August 2005, for example, the 30A Network, an 'annonymous collective of streat theatre bandots' [sic], chalked slogans around railway stations and universities to publicize a demonstration outside the Annual Forbes Global CEO Conference at Sydney Opera House. But they were shocked when they were nabbed by transit police at Central Station and each fined $400 for vandalism (personal communication with members of the collective, September 2005).

gigantic slogans on roads ('No war'; 'Save the Tarkine'[130]) and elaborately painted installations on footpaths. Despite the Council's five day inspection and removal ambitions, two anti-Iraq War art installations in Newtown dating from 2003 managed to escape the pavement scrubbing machines for more than four years.

Promoters of dance parties and garage bands tend to opt for repetition rather than size. Some have chosen in the past to colonize official road marks – such as pedestrian crossings – with hand-painted 'brand' names, but generally the technological development of computer-aided stencil-making has eliminated much of the labour-intensiveness required by chalked and individually hand-painted signs. Stencils became prolific in Sydney towards the end of the 1990s.[131]

**Stencil ambience**

So far I have been describing the pavement promotional activities of individuals, protest groups, small businesses and fringe gigs. I would describe these as 'small-time advertisers'. But what about advertising agencies acting on behalf of corporates? Do they also utilize the horizontal billboard? The answer is yes, and very often they deliberately set out to mimic the forms used by the 'small-timers'.

After stencil graffiti became familiar on urban pavements in the late 1990s, small stencilled corporate logos began appearing on pavements as well, often introducing new products.[132] Distributors of the *Blair Witch Project* movie incorporated stencils into their ad campaign in 1999. At about the same time esoteric stencils of a 'professor's head' around universities vanguarded a campaign for a new energy product, Smart Drink.

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[130] The Tarkine is a wilderness area in Tasmania that was – and still is – threatened by logging and mining (see http://tarkine.org/ ).

[131] MacDowall (2006, 477ff) traces the rise of stencilling in Melbourne, where it had been prevalent since the 1970s but achieved new popularity in the late 1990s.

[132] One hundred years before this – Brown-May (1998, 51) tells us – stencilled advertisements were a popular form of footpath advertising in Melbourne, particularly in the more frequented stretches of Bourke Street, though the practice was seen by Melbourne Municipal Council as contrary to the spirit of advertising regulations.

Hundreds of green Microsoft Xbox crosses marked the spot on Sydney footpaths during a pre-launch publicity drive for that product in 2001. That same year journalist Andrew Mckenzie wrote that 'footpaths seem to have been hijacked rather than bought with sometimes esoteric ads hidden in stencils that might once have carried subversive political messages', citing campaigns in Sydney, Melbourne and other cities by Nike, Rebel Sport and IBM (Mckenzie, 2001). Many advertising agencies have followed in the footsteps of these early pioneers. Busy clubbing districts, like Oxford and Crown Streets in Sydney's Darlinghurst, and entrances to universities are among the favourite locations for stencil advertisers.

Addressing an advertising industry audience in 1997, American 'non-traditional media' exec Andrea MacDonald stated that ambient or out-of-home (OOH) advertising enables marketers to:

> … make a connection with consumers once they leave their homes … this can be accomplished through a staggering array of media vehicles – each of which is unique in its ability to deliver the message in an appropriate manner, to the appropriate target audience, at the appropriate time … we can use these vehicles either to provide mass coverage of the marketplace or to target key areas that contain the highest concentration of our best prospects (MacDonald,1997).

Stencils, one model of such OOH 'media vehicles',  are obviously directed at young people, who might be expected to notice this kind of graffiti having been conditioned by alerts on the ground to  club events and dance parties. They are also adept at decoding abbreviated and esoteric messages.  Nike recognized this when, in 1999, it 'ran a footpath-stencilling campaign in which it appealed to youth with the mysterious 6453 spraypainted around cities – spelling Nike on a touch phone' (Mckenzie, 2001).

Agencies also employ graffiti-like advertising  to appeal to young people because, like wild-posting of multiple ads on hoardings and walls in urban areas (which MacDonald mentions specifically),  it 'implies an attitude that says, "I'm on the cutting edge, I know how to have fun – and sometimes I step outside the rules"' (MacDonald, 1997).

Stepping outside the rules is the *modus operandi* of guerrilla advertisers. The concept of 'guerrilla marketing' was coined by Jay Conrad Levinson in 1984 in a book that encouraged small businesses to devise low-budget campaigns that relied for their success on time, energy and imagination rather than money (Levinson, 1984). These ideas have since been adopted by big business and the meaning of the term has changed. In its loosest sense it refers to novel, non-traditional media, but usually there is the added understanding that the media used are 'legally grey' (Mistilis, 2004, 17). Because of anti-graffiti legislation, most advertising on the pavement is illegal but, like other graffitists, advertisers rely on their stencils or chalkings to last at least for a while before being removed or painted over by local councils' graffiti squads – that is, if weather, wheels and feet don't obliterate them first.

Sometimes the legal greyness of guerrilla advertising is used to garner additional publicity. For instance, the Microsoft Xbox stencil campaign raised the ire of local councils and newspapers reported a South Sydney Council spokesman as fuming, 'Ratepayers and residents have already paid millions of dollars for new granite paving … it's not there for commercial exploitation' (Hornery, 2001). The next day there was a follow-up story reporting that the marketing firm responsible, Spin Communications, had hired cleaning contractors to 'urgently remove graffiti-style advertising from public footpaths' (Davis & O'Malley, 2001). Spin Communications had thereby attracted not one, but two days' free media coverage for Microsoft Xbox.

**Media multiplication**

Pavement advertising is generally just one element of a wider campaign that ranges over a variety of media. The overall Xbox marketing strategy in 2001-2002, for instance, involved television, print media and internet advertising. Stencil-readers were only one segment of the wide demographic that Microsoft was seeking to capture.

Even dance party stencils are often 'brand awareness' exercises that complement more detailed ads published, for example, in free entertainment newspapers, on stickers attached to traffic light buttons, or on fliers pasted to municipal litter bins. This scruffy kind of advertising was mimicked by the distributors of *The Blair Witch*

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*Project*, a 1999 horror movie from the USA, whose dramatic conceit was that it had been pieced together from footage taken by a group of students who had since disappeared. Its worldwide pre-publicity campaign was unusually long – lasting for several months before the movie was released – and captured the 'amateur doco' style of the movie itself. In the streets of Newtown the campaign began with apparently 'home-printed' missing person fliers sticky-taped to light poles, and these were followed by the pavement stencils I have already mentioned. Subsequent use of television and the internet built interest in the movie by creating debate about whether or not it was a real documentary. For corporates like movie distributors and Microsoft, pavement advertisements are guerrilla tactics that support multi-million dollar marketing campaigns waged on multiple fronts.[133]

The *Blair Witch Project* campaign is particularly interesting because it was probably the first movie to use the internet as a marketing tool. Those little stencils that were sprayed on footpaths carried not only the movie's straw doll icon, but the web address for a 'blairwitch' site that gave information about 'the project'. This was unusual because, back in the late 1990s, as the dot-com bubble expanded, it was generally only companies conducting their *primary* business via the internet who needed to publicize their web address. It was an exciting time for out-of-home advertising specialists like Andrea MacDonald (mentioned earlier), who found that 'the biggest boost in outdoors is coming from dot-com companies in a hurry to establish themselves as brands'. This was happening, MacDonald reported,  at the same time as the 'out-of-home media category itself has also expanded beyond billboards and transit [sic] to include everything from cinema ads, to postcards in bars and nightclubs, to stencils and laser light logos on the sidewalks' (MacDonald, 1999).

Since that time it has become the norm for companies and organizations, whether or not they conduct their primary business via the internet, to own a website where they can publicize their products and services. And if the *Blair Witch Project*  movie was a pioneer in broadcasting its web address on the pavement, then many other

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[133] It is impossible to escape the bellicose language of the advertising industry. Although much emphasis is given to 'building relationships' with consumers, the language often used suggests that advertisers are instead engaged in a war to break down the resistance of consumers.

organizations, large and small, commercial and government, were to follow. Marrickville Council, in Sydney's inner west, was a fairly early enthusiast. In 2002 the council underwent an image makeover to coincide with the launching of its website. To publicize this development, the council littered its own municipal footpaths with stencils in the new orange and purple livery announcing 'Anytime Online'.

Pavement-to-web advertising has reached new levels of inventiveness in the years since then. A novel example appeared on Sydney streets in October 2008. Large rectangular outlines, about 1.5 metres square, were stencilled at busy pedestrian locations with the wording 'Proposed bikestand site' together with a 'bikestand' web address where 'further information' was available. Given Sydney's increasing interest in bicycles as a form of commuter transport, an allocated site for a bike stand might be expected to catch the eye both of cyclists (or potential cyclists) and of pedestrians whose thoroughfare would be blocked by such a large structure in the middle of the footpath. If the interest of such people was sufficiently piqued for them to look up the website, they would have found themselves watching 'Welcome to bikestand',  a spoof video about 'how Absolut and a Swedish bike fanatic brought bikestand to Australia', ending with the slogan 'In an Absolut world/ Your vision comes true'.[134]

If people found the 'Bikestand' video sufficiently amusing it is likely that they passed it on to friends along the viral e-track. And it doesn't end there. Viewers of the video are invited to sign a petition that will help 'realise the vision' of free bike stands, thereby giving away their names and email addresses to the distributors of Absolut Vodka. In stunts like these, the pavement has been enlisted for an entertaining but stealthy guerrilla raid on consumers.

**Master artists**

Stealth marketing tactics typically involve product placement in TV shows and movies, but they have also infiltrated a traditional kind of pavement inscription that I have so

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[134] Absolut Vodka's bikestand stencils were scrubbed off the pavement at Circular Quay within a few days, but in King Street, Newtown – another precinct of the City of Sydney – they were still in place eight weeks later, though fading fast under the assault of many footsteps.

far not mentioned – one which has wide popular appeal.  Chalk art or street painting has a long European history, stretching at least from the itinerant madonnari of the 16th century, whose pictures decorated public squares during religious festivals, to pavement artists – often returned servicemen – in 19th and mid-20th century cities like London and Sydney, who eked out a living making chalk drawings on flagstones or asphalt (Collins, 1861, 210; 'The pavement artist: a pioneer in chalks', 1908; 'Pavement artist-Sydney, NSW', 1939; Benedetta, 1946; Schellenberger, 1987).

The madonnari tradition was deliberately revitalised around the 1970s through the introduction of international street painting competitions, and transformed in the 1980s when US virtuoso artist and architect Kurt Wenner began a trend of using a technique called 'anamorphism' to make horizontal pictures appear three-dimensional when seen (or photographed) from a particular viewpoint (Wenner, 2008). The pavement scenes created by Wenner and 3D artists that followed, like British Julian Beever and German Manfred Stader, are extraordinary – hidden cities are revealed through fissures in the concrete pavement, beautiful women dally in limpid pools, cascading waterfalls flow the length of streets.[135] Typically, master artists show off their skills at festivals where local government authorities temporarily waive their objections to pavement defacement in the name of 'culture' and 'tourism'.

Advertising by corporations became associated with pavement art in the late 1990s. This trend seems to have begun when Absolut Vodka commissioned Kurt Wenner to paint a 3D scene for a print advertisement in 1996 and used footage of him creating the work in a television advertisement.[136] These days Wenner's website promotes his paintings as having 'many popular applications for advertising', adding that 'his distinctive ability to weave a product, logo or campaign theme into a unique artistic environment makes for fantastic compositions when placed on the surface of the floor

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[135] Wenner (2008), Beever (2009) and Stader (2009) feature examples of their pavement art on their websites.

[136] Personal communication with Melanie Stimmel and with Tracy Stum, US street artists, August 2009.

or pavement'. His works can subsequently become 'an integral part of print advertising and collateral campaigns around the world' (Webber, 2008).

Julian Beever had trouble finding sponsors when he started out in the 1990s, but now sponsors contact *him*, and almost all of his astounding creations have artfully worked into them an image of the name, logo or product of sponsors such as Coca Cola, Sony and Virgin Bonds.[137] In a local example of product placement, the contribution by guest artist Anton Pulvirenti to Sydney's 2008 Chalk Urban Art Festival was a 3D advertisement for the computer game Spore, drawn on the pavement at Darling Harbour.

Corporates have embraced anamorphic artworks because of their potential for mediatization, the process described by Iveson (2007, 34) that 'allows the further circulation of texts beyond those who are physically present to witness them'. Because of the intriguing visual qualities of these pavement masterpieces, photographs and videos taken of them *in situ* appear, not only in paid print and electronic advertisements, but in magazine articles, videos, news broadcasts and podcasts. Importantly, they are also shared via mobile phones, email, blogs and social networking sites.

By paying 3D artists to create highly photogenic branding messages, advertisers can rely on the e-networking of onlookers to provide the multiplier effect.[138] Mediatization is further engineered by distributing press releases, engaging professional photographers and video makers to be on hand, and inviting particular audiences to watch the artist at work.

No longer confined to busking and festivals, pavement painters are now used by advertising agencies for corporate street happenings. In a recent promotion staged in Sydney's Martin Place, a pavement artist was engaged to draw a three-dimensional

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[137] Personal communication with Julian Beever, October 2008; and see also Beever's website.

[138] For example, over a period of years friends and acquaintances have been forwarding me and members of my family various versions of an email usually headed something like 'More chalk drawings from Julian Beever..... WOW !!'.

globe encircled by a Lufthansa banner 'representing Lufthansa's worldwide network'. The space was booked and a fee paid to the City of Sydney, to ensure that the event, including the marking of the pavement, was within legal guidelines.  A professional photographer took fun pictures of spectators – including invited travel agents – 'holding the world in their hands' or 'standing on top of the world' and each participant later had their photograph emailed to them ('Lufthansa brings the world', 2008).[139] In this way Lufthansa's advertising agency not only obtained photographs that they could distribute to travel industry publications, but they had deliberately set in train a process by which people could be expected to pass on photographs of themselves to family and e-colleagues – photographs, that is, of themselves incorporated into a Lufthansa advertisement.

Onlookers don't usually need this amount of assistance to spread the commercial word. Manfred Stader's blurb on his website states, 'The most popular variant of his art as a street painter are the interactive projects - interactive street art - where admirers pose in logical connection with the pavement art image to get photographed or filmed' (Stader, 2009). And when 'admirers' post these photos and films on their online diaries, the advertisements reach an ever-widening audience.

**Pavement futures**

At the beginning of this article I referred to the official pavement signs that regulate use of the pavement itself. Most of these signs are applied to roadways, rather than footpaths, their stripes and blocks of colour going only some of the way to breaking the grey monotony of driving surfaces. On the other hand, my subsequent discussion of advertising past and present has revealed that advertisements are usually applied to footpaths (or sidewalks) and pedestrian plazas.

Clearly road surfaces are underutilized – there are acres of concrete and asphalt still lying vacant on urban streets, motorways, highways and rural roads, waiting to be

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[139] The event was organised by Zest Events International Pty Ltd, the same company that runs Sydney's annual Chalk Urban Art Festival (personal communication with Andrea Mether, Event Producer, November 2008).

annexed as ambient advertising spaces.[140] The technologies and creative advertising minds are already available to bring about this transformation.

A Sydney man, Caleb Myers, has realised this. He has taken out a US Patent Application for RoadAds, 'a method of placing visible advertising on the upper surface of a road' and the details of his application indicate that he can counter any objection that might be raised against road advertising. A distraction to motorists? No more distracting than billboards. Confusion with traffic regulating signs? An exclusion zone would exist before and after traffic control signs where RoadAds could not be applied. The road surface would be made unsafe? No more dangerous than the huge traffic control signs and lane markers that already exist. Since 2006 Myers has been giving presentations to councils in New South Wales and Victoria, proposing that they can raise much needed revenue by selling advertising space on their local roads (Creagh, 2007; Myers, 2007). The RTA (Roads and Traffic Authority) is not enthusiastic, and so far only Bombala, in south-eastern NSW, appears to have engaged the RoadAds company. In that town there are two ads in slow traffic areas, one of them promoting the on-road advertising idea itself to sceptical locals and reading 'RoadAds helping fund community projects' in yellow lettering. The other is the logo of an advertiser, IT company AirData ('Our world first', 2007).

But if flat, painted logos seem tame, consider the possibilities of anamorphic advertisements. The company Grass Signs already paints 3D logos on sporting fields in Australia, creating illusory humps and signboards that, from the TV audience's viewpoint, make a football oval look like an obstacle course.[141] Perhaps something similar could be done on roads.  And for even more elaborate illusions, Kurt Wenner's website suggests that the 3D advertising images he creates at public events 'can then be reproduced as durable vinyl floor graphic stickers for use at additional installations' (Wenner, 2008) … including, perhaps,  on roadways? A motorists' organisation has

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[140] Not to mention empty roofs, paddocks and deserts. A proper discussion of modern geoglyphs and the exploitation of this form of horizontal inscription by advertisers aiming to appear on Google Maps would, however, require a separate paper.

[141] Personal communication with Adam McDonald, Operations Manager, Grass Signs, November 2008; and see also 'Grass Signs' (2008).

already approached an agency in Sydney about creating giant trompe l'oeil potholes to draw attention to government neglect of the State's roads. The agency declined the brief on the grounds that the fake potholes would have the potential to cause accidents as motorists swerved to avoid them.[142]

However it is worth remembering that continuing advances in automobile technology mean that cars are doing more of the driving and drivers are doing less. Already some luxury cars have computerized external cameras that have been programmed to recognise vertical speed limit signs (Dowling, 2008; Gray, 2008). As vehicles continue to make more of the driving decisions perhaps it will become safe to bring entertainment to the daily commute with optical illusions that, while tricking drivers into thinking they taking part in the Dakar Rally, do *not* fool the cars' electronic eyes.

Moreover, road advertisements that are particularly large, unusual, amusing, offensive or dangerous will reach an audience that is wider than the motorists who drive over them, in the same way that chalk artists' works are disseminated, via news broadcasts and social networking.

Other surprising or amusing pavement promotions could include projected images on the roadway, shadows cast by overhanging billboard-sized templates, slogans and pictures applied to pedestrian crossings and speed bumps, or monsters crawling from drains and manholes. In fact, all of these concepts have already been tried somewhere, either *in situ* or as internet spoofs. The possibilities may only be limited by advertising agencies' creativity as they escalate their attempts to make connections with resistant consumers. The resistance of traffic authorities like the RTA may fall away in the face of financial need. It is not only *local* government bodies that require funds for road maintenance and 'community projects'. State governments  could

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[142] Personal communication, November 2008. Actually, this idea appears to have already been used in India as an advertisement for a brand of automobile suspension, but the photograph on Ads of the World, showing a worker applying the 'pothole' decal to the road, might be a piece of digital mischief:
http://adsoftheworld.com/media/ambient/pioneer_suspensions_pothole?size=_original
(accessed 2 November 2008).

offset the cost of major road works such as motorways, tunnels and bridges by selling advertising space right there on the road itself.

**Conclusion**

Advertisers have taken to using the pavement because it is there and it is bare. In this respect it is no different from other vacant spaces that have been annexed in ambient advertising campaigns – pieces of fruit, toilet cubicle doors, the backs of shopper dockets, street furniture. What is different, though, is the quantity of space available. In its breadth the pavement offers an alternative to the already crowded vertical spaces of our hypertextualized postmodern cities, and provides opportunities to create branding messages either on a large scale, or repetitively on a small scale.

Initially it was only individuals or small organisations that publicized their beliefs, political causes or products on the pavement. Their materials and methods were simple and labour intensive. Such practices have continued to the present day and have been joined, but not superseded, by other forms of inscription that rely on newer technologies such as spray cans, computer-designed stencils and mass-produced stickers.  In recent times agencies acting for larger businesses have become adept in adopting forms initiated by others in order to capture particular market segments. Gritty stencils, for example, are meant to catch the attention of young urban types; dazzling pavement art is more family and adult orientated.

Importantly, the pavement inscription, a traditional form of public address, has been used by many advertisers as the set-up for a process of mediatization, in which branding messages are disseminated across a wide spectrum of additional media. Escalation in the use of technologies like digital cameras, mobile phones, personal and business websites, email and social networking services in the past ten years, coupled with advertisers' desperation to ambush ad-avoiders outdoors[143], has paradoxically meant that, far from becoming outmoded, the pavement advertisement has flourished.

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[143] 'Ad-avoiders' is a term used by advertising executive Karen Olsen to describe people 'adept at skipping advertisements in conventional media'. However, thanks to the 'opportunistic media [and] guerrilla marketing techniques' of companies like hers, 'there are moments in their lives when they cannot avoid commercial messages' (Olsen, 2007).

In the near future I predict we will see more advertisements on the ground. Some of them will still be legally dubious 'guerrilla' exercises, but many will be authorized and legal. Revenue-raising schemes by government departments and by private owners of 'public' spaces will see stretches of sidewalk, street and motorway leased out for commercial campaigns. Advertising agencies regard the grey dullness of the pavement as an invitation to be creative. In their continuing efforts to engage, amuse surprise, tease and otherwise disarm consumers, they will not only commercialize the pavement but invest it with a sense of fun. There are many dreary acres waiting ready to be transformed.

## 5.4   Empty shells

## 5.4    Empty shells[1]

> The coroner said, "I may have one." He opened a brief case, fumbled around, brought out a piece of chalk, and said, "All right, now mark there on the floor right where the body was lying. Make a little diagram. Mark the position of his head, of his feet, and of his arms." I marked out the outline on the cement floor.
>
> -    A.A. Fair [Erle Stanley Gardner], *Double or quits* (1941)

It looked as if there had been a massacre – the position of several corpses had been marked with outlines on the footpath near the railway station. It wasn't the first time this sort of thing had happened in the area. I had seen crime-scene outlines on Newtown pavements about fifteen years before. I have seen them intermittently since then and these days I photograph them to preserve some permanent record of their existence. Chalked bodies fade quickly under the assault of passing feet; spray-painted versions last longer, but eventually these disappear as well. Newtown being the sort of place it is, they are inevitably replaced by fresh ones sooner or later.

As it turned out, this latest batch of outlines was evidence of a series of homicides that had happened, not here in Sydney's inner west, but nearly 1000 km away. Recreated homicides, actually. The drawings were part of an outdoor marketing campaign for the 2008 television series *Underbelly* - a fictionalized memorial to Melbourne's 10 year 'gangland war'.[2]

On the other hand, those first body outlines I had seen in Newtown many years previously were commemorating a different kind of wartime event – the bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. Every year peace activists around the world observe Hiroshima Day by holding rallies, and sometimes they draw bodies on their local pavements. These are supposed to simulate the marks left when people were vapourised by the bomb's heat blast. Judging from the few photographs taken in Hiroshima that day, the real body shadows were blurred and formless, and yet it is the clichéd homicide silhouette that activists have chosen to use in their peace

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[1] A version of this article was published as 'Outlines (Watch this space)' in *Second Nature* 1 (1), 124-139, http://secondnature.rmit.edu.au/index.php/2ndnature (2009).

[2] *Underbelly [Uncut]* DVD, 2008.

demonstrations. The outlines make the street look like a crime scene, and for anti-war protesters that is the point.[3]

Newtown has a high rate of metaphorical crime. Body outlines are pressed into service for all sorts of causes.

In peace protests their manifestation is not limited to 6 August. There was, for example, a spray-paint installation that appeared in Goddard Street early in 2003, when Australia joined the war in Iraq. 'NO WAR', written in huge letters on the side wall of a café, was accompanied by a slew of life-size figures on the footpath. Their stark remains decorated the asphalt in that tiny side street for several years.

Around the corner, in the main street of Newtown, synthetic bluestone pavers are gradually replacing the asphalt footpaths, just as young professionals in renovated properties are gradually replacing the inner-city students, activists and artists living in what used to be cheap accommodation in the area. But despite the upward mobilization of Newtown, pockets of resistance still exist, from old leftie Bob Gould in his chaotic book arcade at one end of King Street, to young anarchists in crusty flats above the shops at the other.[4] And although the gritty monochrome of old asphalt was more suitable for inscriptions in chalk and paint, protesters still manage to use the footpaths of King Street as a billboard for their messages, defying the unfriendliness of the new pavers' neatly repetitive grooves and shiny mottled surfaces.

Take, for instance, the trail of crime-scene outlines that I photographed in September 2005. These marked the progress of a mobile street performance by students belonging to an anti-capitalist collective called 30A. Suited 'capitalists' had rolled a giant gold coin along the footpath in King Street, mowing down 'workers' as they went. Shapes were traced around the 'victims' and the space inside the outlines was filled with slogans like 'Howard kills jobs', and 'Work is death'. It was all pre-publicity for a mass protest to be held later that week, not in Newtown, but outside the Forbes Global CEO Conference at Sydney Opera House.[5]

Newtown often acts as outrider for demonstrations happening elsewhere.

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[3] Walker (2005); *Photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (2005).

[4] Bob Gould died in 2011, but his Book Arcade continues to trade in King Street, Newtown.

[5] Members of 30a (2005); *Sydney prepares for Forbes Conference* (2005).

This explains another outbreak of body outlines in King Street in February 2004 – it coincided with a riot in Redfern a few kilometres away. Anti-police violence had erupted after Aboriginal teenager TJ Hickey came off his bicycle and was fatally impaled on a metal fence. Redfern locals claimed a police car had been stalking the boy. While the aftershocks of the riot were still happening, crudely chalked bodies appeared on Newtown pavements, accompanied by slogans such as 'Stop racist police brutality'.

The grim form of a hastily circumscribed corpse is a crime fiction cliché. It is a recognizable image that has been appropriated, not only by social agitators, but by graphic artists everywhere who want to allude to crime or violent death in a metaphorical way. The pudgy, larger-than-life human form has become a regular symbol in our visual vocabulary, so familiar that it is available for parody. Newspaper artists exploit the image to illustrate feature articles. Cyber-crime? A chalked body holding a computer mouse. Car theft? The silhouette on the asphalt of a disappeared car. Advertisers have flogged it to death. Telstra MessageBank? A taped outline of a phone left off the hook by 'flatmates murdering messages'. iiNet broadband? A forensic investigator drawing round a computer thrown to the ground by its frustrated owner.[6]

The murder-scene outline has caught on as a pop-culture motif despite rarely being used in true police investigations. Old Sydney detectives are adamant that they never drew them, if only because the chalk dust would have contaminated evidence. Archival police photos seldom show them. The body outline is largely a construct of fiction thrillers and television dramas, but it has taken on a life of its own.[7]

Its featureless form captures the essence of the human body – the shell that remains after the soul has departed. It evokes the murderous act but lacks the ugly complications of a real corpse. It is an empty space that allows room for the imagination. A thought bubble where the violent event can be visualised. Or a speech balloon that radical students can fill with slogans.

Although homicide detectives do not draw body outlines, police at motor vehicle accidents do, or at least they used to until fairly recently. Hardy crash investigators joke about the

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[6] Tremain (2003); Jones (2001); Telstra (1999); iiNet (2008).

[7] Adams (2001); Campbell (2005); Gibson (2005).

'gingerbread men' spreadeagled at the scene of 'fatals', but admit that they were distracting to motorists and distressing for passers-by. These days they spray-paint the scene with esoteric patterns of lines and arrows instead.[8]

But it was their very potential to distress passers-by that prompted traffic authorities to resurrect body outlines for a series of pedestrian safety campaigns around Sydney in the late 1990s. The aim was to scare reckless road-crossers by stencilling a plague of flattened figures at danger spots on roadways. 'Step safely' warned the adjacent pavement signs, 'Think before you cross'.[9]

Newtown being the kind of place it is, it was not long before local culture jammers tampered with these spray-painted silhouettes. They were especially active during the annual Reclaim the Streets demonstration in 1999, when King Street was blocked to traffic and rebellious pedestrians commandeered the roadway. Challenging the safety campaign's insinuation that pedestrians are responsible for road fatalities, RTS activists reanimated the stencilled corpses with painted hair and eyes, with Mickey Mouse ears and tomahawks. And they filled the empty outlines with slogans like 'Cars kill'.

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[8] Jenkins (2005).

[9] South Sydney Council (1999).

## 5.5   Hard feelings

## 5.5    Hard feelings[1]

So what I said is what I said
And what you said is what you meant
And when you left my house in the morning
You wrote your message on the cement
You put the letters and the numbers under people's feet
You took all the dealings and feelings and wrote them on the street

-    Megan Washington, song *Cement* on album *I believe you, liar* (2010)[2]

Kylie done something not nice. I know this because two guys painted *Kylie is a dog* in big lettering not so long ago on the street where I live in Sydney. A few cars drove over the sign while it was wet so it got a bit messy but it was still readable. The neighbours were not happy about it. They called the local council who sent a graffiti-removal contractor out a week later. He washed it off the road with a high pressure spray and biodegradable chemicals.

I was lucky enough to photograph, not only the boys writing this message, but the man removing it. The pair of mates who painted it must have been around 20 years old. I spotted them in the act late one Sunday afternoon and I asked them why they were angry with Kylie. They told me, "She done something not nice to us", but they wouldn't elaborate. One of them let me photograph him down on his knees holding the paintbrush, but only with his back turned. He said, "I hope my dad doesn't find out I done this". I think his father owned a nearby boarding house. Perhaps Kylie lived there, but I don't know. I never found out who Kylie was so I didn't get to hear her version of the story.

I did hear the girl's version of another incident like this, though. A colleague where I work – I'll call her Toni – was walking to school in a Canberra suburb one day when she was confronted with a sign written the width of the roadway. It said, *Tell me Toni do you hate a bit?*

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[1] A version of this essay was published as 'Hard feelings' in *Antithesis* 19, 229-233 (2009).

The sign had been painted overnight and was on Toni's regular route to school (although it was round the wrong way, so she came upon it upside down). There were two boys watching from a nearby park when she discovered it. They were too far away for her to make out, but she presumes they were the ones who wrote it.

 "I realised what it was about, but I'm still guessing what the words meant." She had just broken up with her two-month boyfriend and gone out with someone else. "He must have told the first boy I had sex with him, which I didn't. It was about boys talking it up, getting upset, assuming I had put out." The writing lasted ten years and even after eighteen years there are still traces of it. The emotions she felt then still remain. "It scared the hell out of me. It felt invasive – using my name."

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In Australia, as in Britain, we live in what sociologists Longhurst, Bagnall and Savage call a performative society, where being part of an audience has become a pervasive feature of everyday life. These authors talk of a 'diffused audience' where both the social and the physical distance between performer and audience is eroded. Performance in the diffused audience situation, they say, may be either non-ceremonial or highly ceremonial. It can be both public and private, with a tendency to blur the distinction between these historically separated spheres of life. They point to the incidence of roadside shrines at accident sites and the practice of celebrating birthdays by hanging banners on the outside of houses.[3] Personal notices on the pavement would be another example.

I think painted messages like those about Kylie and Toni are dramas in several acts. Each act has its own audience and each act has meaning and importance for the perpetrator. First there is the planning and execution in the company of a mate, where the two boys are each other's urger and audience. The next stage is watching (or imagining) the girl's reaction. Then finding out what else happened (Toni brought her girlfriends from school to look), and being party to the escalating gossip amongst those in the know. Concurrently there is the shaming of the girl in front of the anonymous audience at large – neighbours, motorists and passers-by.  Driven by his own passion, the sign-maker means for the girl to be publicly humiliated but may never understand the personal violation he has committed in broadcasting her name in this way.

As a habitual reader of text on footpaths and roadways, I am part of the wider diffused audience for the pavement painters who turn private incidents into blaring headlines. That is how I found out, not only that *Kylie is a dog*, but also that *Britt is a ho*, *Trish is a slut* and *Lee is a moll*. It is always seems to be women who are the

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[3] Longhurst, Bagnall & Savage (2004, 106).

subject of this overblown pavement invective, but I have also learnt that some women are loved or missed. On inner-city streets I read *I love you Margaret* and *Tim 4 Jude* and *Nick loves Lena* and *Please come home! I love you*; on country roads, *Tim - Fredy* and *I ♥ U Bec*.

I have come to the conclusion that writing oversized personal declarations on the ground is a male activity. In fact, graffiti of all sorts is a 'gendered cultural practice', as Australian sociologist Kerry Carrington put it. Researching graffiti in the late 1980s, Carrington described how girls do romantic and personal graffiti that is commonly found on desks and chairs, on personal items, hands and arms, and especially on toilet walls. The public female toilet is a social space where girls can carry on a written discourse about friendships, allegiances and romance precisely because it is not a 'public' space in the way that the street is.

Boys, on the other hand, are less restricted by social taboos about how they should behave in public and can participate in 'highly public leisure activities' in streets, shopping centres, railway stations and other communal spaces. It is in these public spaces that they produce the male-dominated form of expression that Carrington calls 'rap graffiti', ranging from signatures or 'tags', to large murals or 'pieces'. This kind of graffiti is meaningful to the relationships between boys, who act not only as producers, but also as audience and admirers of each others' spray-painted feats. Carrington thought that boys might possibly write about who they love and who they hate on their bodies or on toilet walls but even if they did they would not, in contrast to their 'rap graffiti', attach any significant social meaning to this kind of writing. [4]

Carrington did not look at graffiti on horizontal surfaces in the street. If she had she would have found that this is where boys go public on the subject of love and sex. Admittedly, overt expressions of personal feelings do not occur very often on the pavement, but when they do it is boys who are wearing their hearts on the street.

It stands to reason. The street is a male domain and the roadway itself is an arena where men and boys act out competitive dramas in their vehicles, the mechanical extensions of their physical selves. The roadway is even the background for a predominantly male form of specialised graffiti – skidmarks, fishtails and donuts, executed in complex manoeuvres with hot wheels. [5] Similarly, the bold personal notice on the pavement is as much a physical gesture as a literary one, drawn in broad strokes either with the workmanlike materials of housepaint and brush or with the graffiti artist's tool, the spraycan.

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[4] Carrington (1989, 89-100).

[5] Linda Forrester explores the creative nature of graffiti, skateboarding and street machining in her thesis 'Youth generated cultures in Western Sydney' (University of Western Sydney, 1993). Her study is also discussed in Butler (1994, 52-54).

It is a private-public performance devised for an audience of one – the object of affection or disaffection – and an audience of many. It requires planning and a certain amount of skill and daring – choosing the appropriate materials and site; wielding the tools confidently; and defying the hazards of a busy street or highway. Besides all this, a boy who paints one of these signs demonstrates a recklessness, not only in exposing the girl to the public gaze, but in disregarding what the public might think of *him*. But evidently there are boys out there who love so much and hurt so hard that they just have to lay their feelings out in the open.

## 5.6 City of epitaphs

## 5.6    City of epitaphs[1]

> Nothing exists except by virtue of a disequilibrium, an injustice. All existence is a theft paid for by other existences; no life flowers except on a cemetery.
>
> -    Remy de Gourmont, *The dissociation of ideas* (1899)

**Green fields**

I am visiting a colleague who works at Macarthur, on the south-western fringes of Sydney.  At lunchtime we go for a walk. The landscape here is undulating and a grey concrete path links the university and the technical institute to the railway station. It curves across a wide, grassy recreation area that was once agricultural land established in the early days of the colony. Near the top of the rise – where the path becomes a footbridge over both the railway line and a creek-bed overgrown with saplings and bent shopping trolleys – neat inscriptions in black felt-tipped pen decorate the edges of the concrete. Alongside various jokes and romantic messages there are some dedicated to "Alex 1993-2008". They read "Rest in Peace … Your our angel … I miss u so much babe!".

On the opposite side of the station there is a shopping square, with a fountain, outdoor eating areas and café umbrellas. It is paved with synthetic granite tiles in geometric patterns, and set into these are long metal plaques carrying quotations cast in shining brass: "all the paspalum everywhere that would stick to your legs", they read, "driving home with the sun setting in your eyes", and "It was my father's, and my father's father's, before that".

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[1] A version of this essay was published as 'City of epitaphs' in *Culture Unbound*, 1 (Article 26), 453-467, http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/v1/a26/ .  It is dedicated to Noel Sanders, formerly of the University of Technology Sydney, who showed me how to see dead people.

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I take photographs of all these things because I am interested in footpaths and roadways, plazas and parking lots. I habitually study their surfaces; I record any writing I find there; I am looking for revelations about the city. Gradually I am learning how the role of the pavement transcends mere functionality. And here in Macarthur, this green-field-development-becoming-a-city, I find evidence of something I have already suspected.

Now I revisit my photographs of other inscriptions, taken in different places, and I search through them for confirmation. This is what I have discovered – that the pavement is an active participant in city rituals of sacrifice, mourning, remembrance and guilt.

**Death sentences**

To begin with, the pavement itself is an inscription, the script for a morbid ceremony performed at the formation of a city.  This is apparent on development estates like Macarthur, where roads, kerbs and gutters precede other construction works. The interlocking strokes and loops of streets and cul-de-sacs form giant characters imprinted on the otherwise bare land. Translated, this lettering spells out sentences like 'The pastures here have been flattened and the livestock removed. The orchards that once grew at this place have been felled. The woodland that covered these hills has been bulldozed'.

Two centuries ago, the formation of Sydney-town preceded any formal survey. Its layout was determined by the course of a little stream running into a cove of the harbour, around which the initial dwellings were clustered. But within a short time, the valley and its sandstone ledges would be branded by the same surveyor's gridiron that was to mark the site of Melbourne and of other frontier towns of the New World. A seal impressed on the living landscape, the grid signified civilisation's appropriation of wild regions.[2]

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[2] Brown-May (1998, xxiii, 1-3) refers to 'the gridiron pattern of the surveyor' that preceded Melbourne and other frontier towns, and discusses the symbolism of the grid. Johnson (2008, 28-31) describes how the plan for Sydney was a grid layout imbued with sephic symbolism, which had been pre-prepared in England and superimposed on the slopes of Sydney Cove.

**Burial**

As Sydney developed from a town into a city, the Tank Stream would be covered over, becoming a stormwater drain and sometime sewer, running below the streets. Sydney Cove would be filled in and a semi-circular quay would be built in its place. By the late 20th century civic embellishments would see the original shoreline of the cove commemorated by an irregular arc of decorative brass studs set into the paving surrounding the quay. The course of the stream would be marked by a series of glass and stainless steel pavement artworks, inscribed with quotations from the journal of First Fleeter, Captain Watkin Tench.[3]

On the streets themselves, footways would be paved with flagstones, and later the carriageways would be surfaced with woodblocks. Over time these materials would be replaced by asphalt, concrete and smart bluestone flagging. Beneath the paving lie sandy inlets, reclaimed marshes, hewn trees, trampled wildflowers, and the remains of exterminated animals. Beside these covered remains there also lie middens, rock carvings and other vestiges of the lives of Indigenous people, left behind as those people were driven away.[4] All sacrificed in the name of progress.

In the 1890s workmen repairing a city street would dig up a paving slab and find it to be the gravestone of Boatsman George Graves, who had been a crew member of the First Fleet ship the Sirius, and who had died in 1788 (Howard (1984, 12). In 1936 road works would uncover an ironbark pile from a bridge built over the Tank Stream in 1802.[5] These are just some of the archaeological relics revealed by repaving.

The making and maintenance of streets and footpaths in a city is a process of burial, disinterment and re-burial. The pavement is the ledger stone on a tomb.

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[3] *Tankstream - Into the head of the cove* by artist Lynne Roberts-Goodwin, described in City of Sydney (2005).

[4] Woodford (2008, 55-56) writes: 'Underneath your shoes, past the asphalt, concrete and ruins of buried colonial and twentieth century buildings lies a place called Weerong … From a few holes under one building have come a thousand stone artefacts. The implication is that under the whole of the central business district it is likely that a treasure trove of Sydney's prehistory is entombed'.

[5] This pile is now in the Powerhouse Museum collection in Sydney, catalogue number D10331.

**Civic monuments**

In graveyards we are accustomed to looking downwards to read because, among the standing headstones there are also horizontal slabs of stone or marble. We must bend over to study the life and death details inscribed on these ledger stones. It is the same in lawn cemeteries. As we walk the rows we bow our heads to read the plaques at our feet.

On city streets civic authorities, recognizing the tomb-like qualities of the pavement, have transposed the tradition of the funereal inscription from cemetery rows to cement sidewalks. So, although our eyes are generally drawn to shop windows, tall buildings and vertically mounted signs and advertisements, if we instead glance downwards we will find death notices beneath our feet. Memorial plaques and pavement installations in the city, whether miniature monuments, digests of historical information for tourists, or commissioned public artworks, are epitaphic. They have turned the pavement-as-ledger into a roll call of lost lives.

Let me offer some examples. Occasionally small memorial plaques are fixed to the pavement. These mark the association of a particular place with a local identity, a demolished building, a past event. Inconspicuously tucked against walls, they are probably only noticed by the most committed of pavement readers. Whatever the motivations and machinations that resulted in the production of any particular plaque, commemorative obligations are often discharged at the time of its laying.[6]

But not all memorial plaques are licenses to forget. One exception is located in Newtown, on the fashionable *inner* fringes of Sydney. Syd 'Black Santa' Cunningham was a philanthropist who used to sit outside the Woolworths supermarket collecting money and toys for rural children (Jopson, 1999, 35). After he died in 1999 a bronze plaque was installed at the spot where he used to set up his folding table, complete

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[6] Murray (2008, 150) mentions how understandings of cultural history can be enhanced by knowing the story behind the erection of particular official memorials. She also asks whether the commemorative process of installing a memorial or plaque becomes 'a self-fulfilling prophecy, externalising the memory so it can be forgotten'.

with a depiction of his plastic money bucket. Syd's plaque has since become the focal point for beggars who keep his memory alive by collecting for themselves.

The existence of such beggars is made more poignant by a set of five municipal footpath mosaics just around the corner in Church Street, all but one representing local churches in ceramic words and pictures. In essence, the four religious works memorialise the dead, whether victims of a shipwreck buried in St Stephen's churchyard, or Baptists who are "Buried with Christ" and "Risen with Christ". The incongruous fifth mosaic is a gaudy representation of two lizards in the style of 'Aboriginal art'. Intended as a gesture of inclusion, it is supposed to acknowledge the original inhabitants of the district. Instead, it further marginalises Aboriginal people by committing them to the ground amongst the dead memorialised on the other mosaics.

Unlike small memorial plaques, pavement installations commissioned by city authorities are intentionally conspicuous, but whether their ostensible purpose is to provoke reflection, historical awareness, congratulation or admiration, the ultimate effect is the same. Wittingly or unwittingly, they are all obituaries.

Such is the case with the Writers Walk on the promenade at Circular Quay, the tourist precinct where day trippers catch ferries across Sydney Harbour. The stated purpose of this series of plaques is to demonstrate the "evolutionary process [that] continues to channel the thoughts and perceptions, the hopes and the fears of writers who have known this great city and its people".[7] Perceptions of the lapidary beauty of the harbour recur on this trail of quotes from prominent authors past and present: "In Sydney Harbour … the yachts will be racing on the crushed diamond water under a sky the texture of powdered sapphires …".[8]

But there are also regrets for the loss of some imagined innocence of spirit from the early days and, not coincidentally, latter-day expressions of remorse for the treatment

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[7] *Writers Walk* plaque, Circular Quay East, Sydney.

[8] Clive James, *Unreliable memoirs* (1980), quoted on Writers Walk plaque, Circular Quay, Sydney.

of Indigenous people: "Sydney … was populated by leisured multitudes all in their short-sleeves and all picnicking all the day …", "I am born of the conquerors, you of the persecuted …", "… Until a treaty is agreed with the original inhabitants, I shall be homeless in the world"[9].

Here on the walkway at Circular Quay – and also in Kings Cross, where one hundred plaques eulogise that quarter of the city for its retrospective reputation as a bohemian and 'colourful' place – bereavement for lives lost or left behind is the underlying theme, and the literary quotation is the secular equivalent of a reading from the scriptures.[10]

In other pavement artworks, transcribed fragments of all-but-lost Indigenous Language substitute for the literary quote. There is such an installation beside the wall that separates Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens from the harbour. In it "figures from Sydney rock carvings – some of which no longer exist – are depicted in terrazzo and stained concrete … [and] along the kerb, the names of women, men, places, animals, tools and rituals from the many Indigenous clans in the Sydney area are etched in red".[11]

There is a comparable sculpture across the harbour at Manly Wharf, where the ferries from Circular Quay arrive. Radially arranged stainless steel plaques introduce seaside holiday-makers to Manly's municipal self-image, with references to decommissioned ferries and dead historical figures.[12] In a section of the sculpture that depicts now marginalised or invisible flora and fauna – the latter including "local clans (1788)" – rock-art motifs have once again been appropriated for public art. And once again,

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[9] Respectively: Rudyard Kipling, *Something of myself* (1937), Judith Wright, *Two dreamtimes* (1973), Germaine Greer, *Journal of the plague year* (1988), all quoted on Writers Walk plaques, Circular Quay, Sydney.

[10] For information about the plaques at Kings Cross see Fitzgerald (2007).

[11] *Wuganmagulya (Farm Cove)* by Aboriginal artist Brenda L. Croft, described in City of Sydney (2005).

[12] These plaques are associated with the mist sculpture *Shell* by Urban Art Projects, described in Manly Council Public Art Committee (2006).

these 'Aboriginal' pictures are accompanied by nouns salvaged from the debris of European contact.

**Mortality**

Sydney is not the only city where official decorations on the ground have an elegiac quality. Around the world, either deliberately or unconsciously, civic plazas, community mosaics, commemorative plaques, and interactive light installations mark the passing of previous existences. But in Sydney especially, the epitaph is a persistent feature of the pavement.

Reproduced on one of the 'Writers Walk' plaques at Circular Quay is the quote: "The majesties of nature and the monstrosities of man have a cheek by jowl evidence in Sydney more insistent, I think, than in any other city in the world".[13] Put bluntly, the beaches, the harbour, and the remnants of natural bush are conspicuously unavoidable reminders of what else has been destroyed by the city's spread. It is guilt that drives civic authorities and commercial interests to memorialise on the pavement what the pavement itself has obliterated. Often praised or condemned by more sober cities for the fun-loving or shallow-minded lifestyle of its citizens, Sydney is in fact haunted by death.

It is significant that this city should have adopted as its motto the one-word sermon of an eccentric evangelist who chalked his message on its footpaths for 30 years. That iconic word, 'Eternity', flashed on the Harbour Bridge in 2000 Olympic fireworks displays, and now preserved in stainless steel on the pavement of Town Hall Square, offers the hope of redemption but only by calling attention to the certainty of death.[14]

**Public mourning**

The role the pavement plays as tomb or cenotaph is continuous. The events commemorated on its surface may be distant in time or recent. In the city, public

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[13] George Johnston, *Clean straw for nothing* (1969), quoted on Writers Walk plaque, Circular Quay East, Sydney.

[14] For discussion of Arthur Stace and his 'Eternity' inscription see, for example, Kirkpatrick (1997) and Hicks (2006).

death is always a possibility and the pavement can be both witness and accomplice to fatality. We are reminded of this by the marks and stains that daily appear on the pavement's surface – stencilled body-outlines at danger spots warning pedestrians to 'Cross carefully', dreadful skid marks at intersections,  spray-painted symbols where police have marked out traffic accident sites, and perhaps even splashes of blood on footpaths in the rough areas of town.

These marks extend to death notices posted by mourners after someone has died unexpectedly. With spray cans, chalk and felt-tipped pens, their private anguish is made a matter of public announcement. It is evident that the pavement's epitaphic inscriptions are not only cast by commissioned artists – they are also scrawled by amateur graffitists. The grubby pavement might seem an odd, even disrespectful background for such inscriptions, but this choice of background is always a deliberate one.

For instance, a few years ago a temporary shrine for Edison Berrio appeared in Sydney's central business district close to the place where he had been shot twelve months earlier. Suspecting him of theft, police had surrounded and fired on him before he could get out of his car. Angry at official inaction, Edison's friends held a vigil on the anniversary of his death.[15] They tied flowers to a tree and wrote messages on the asphalt: "Rest in peace Edison", they chalked, "Cops kill … No justice!". For several days the incongruously large letters chalked across the footpath drew the attention of office workers, reminding them of the unresolved fatality that had happened so close to the district's legal offices and courthouses.

A different kind of graffiti memorial, but with similar political intent, was chalked on Newtown's shopping strip after teenager TJ Hickey was impaled on a fence in nearby Redfern as a police car followed his bicycle.[16] A protest riot broke out in Redfern, a largely Aboriginal suburb, and body outlines were drawn on Newtown footpaths,

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[15] *Woolloomooloo seeks justice* (2001) and articles in the Sydney Morning Herald and other Sydney newspapers, 2000 and 2001.

[16] *For TJ* (2004) and articles in the Sydney Morning Herald and other Sydney newspapers, February-March 2004.

where local social activists would see them. Slogans written beside the body shapes read "Stop racist police brutality … Cops kill children … To kill an Aboriginal is to kill history".[17]

Less ephemeral was an unofficial plaque fixed to the asphalt at another spot in Newtown's main street. It lasted some years until the footpath was resurfaced with synthetic granite pavers. Just two words were engraved on this small oval sign, "Alison Gooch". It marked the spot where Alison had been killed in the early hours one morning when a car mounted the kerb and struck her as she was walking by the shops.[18]

And again in Newtown, a district renowned for its wall art, one of the most enduring pieces of graffiti is a floral tribute, not on a wall but on a busy traffic island. The flowers were painted under the direction of Kathy Jones during a day-long 'Reclaim the streets' demonstration. Kathy was an artist and social activist who worked with disadvantaged people in the Newtown area. When she died a few months after the protest party her friends turned the island into a memorial, reasoning that she would have wanted local people to know why she wasn't around any more. They cleaned what remained of the pavement artwork and coated it with marine varnish, and they taped a notice with her photograph to a light pole.[19] Years later the flowers are only now beginning to seriously fade.

These are just a few examples of the death notices and spontaneous shrines that appear on the ground in different parts of the city.[20] To read them is to realise that when mourners use the pavement to publicize their grief it is not simply because asphalt is a conveniently blank slate to scribble on. They choose the pavement for

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[17] I speculate on the use of 'crime scene' body outlines in protest demonstrations in Chapter 5.4 'Empty shells' (also Hicks, 2009a).

[18] See *Killed on footpath* (1996) and *Police call for witnesses* (1996).

[19] Lisa Jackson Pulver and Mark Jackson Pulver, pers.comm. (2009).

[20] Santino (2005: 5ff) coined the term 'spontaneous shrines' for public memorials erected by mourners after a sudden or shocking death, and pointed out the political nature of these shrines.

their graffiti because of its active role in the fatality or its aftermath. It is the site of that very public death (a city street, a suburban footpath); it is the road that bore the vehicles involved (the cars, the bicycle, the police vehicles); it is the footway where members of a particular audience will pass by (the legal workers, the activists and street people); it was once significant to the person who has died (the contested ground over which Reclaim the Street protestors struggled).

Or it holds importance, not for the death event or the deceased, but for the mourners themselves. Those felt-tip farewells in the sub-city of Macarthur were for former local teenager Alex Wildman. Alex had moved with his family to a distant country town, but committed suicide after being bullied at his new school.[21] Denied the chance to attend his funeral so far away, his former classmates must have met on that footpath near the railway station to share their feelings. Judging from other graffiti on this pavement-over-a-paddock, it is a favourite place for teenagers to sit around and talk. It would have been natural for them to choose this spot to write their epitaphs for Alex.

**Passage**

Without the pavement there is no city. It both suppresses life and supports it. It is a durable slab that barely contains the dead, and its epitaphian inscriptions are a constant admonishment to the living.

Far from being a passive backdrop, the pavement is an active player in the drama that is the city. The symbolic importance of its role is appreciated by civic authorities who know that its appearance is a reflection of the city's self-image.

When Sydney was preparing for the 2000 Olympics, central city streets were resurfaced, kerbs rebuilt, asphalt footways replaced with bluestone flagging. A series of sculptures was commissioned, several of them embedded horizontally in the pedestrian precincts of the city, the airport and the Olympic site.[22] Reviewing this bloom of public installations, art analyst Susan Best noted her approval of those that

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[21] McDougall (2008, 4) and other articles in Sydney newspapers, July-August 2008 and since.

[22] For details of the Sculpture Walk see City of Sydney (2005).

engaged with the history of their site, remarking that "because many of the artists involved in these recent programs work with the space of installation itself, their work is most effective when it can enter into a dialogue with the surrounding space" (Best, 2000). Indeed. Except that, with pavement inscriptions, there is no 'when' or 'if'. The pavement and the tracings upon it, from commissioned art to spontaneous graffiti, *always* enter into a dialogue with the surrounding space. Nor is that dialogue only between the pavement and its locale – the people passing by are included in the dialogue as well.

The pavement, the place, and the people of the city are engaged in a conversation, and the overriding topic of that conversation is death.

## 5.7   Surface reflections

## 5.7 Surface reflections[1]

> Why set down such melancholy events? But I've begun again, I notice. I've taken up my black scrawl; it unwinds in a long dark thread of ink across the page, tangled but legible. Do I have some notion of leaving a signature, after all? After all I've done to avoid it, *Iris, her mark*, however truncated: initials chalked on the sidewalk, or a pirate's X on the map, revealing the beach where the treasure was buried.
>
> - Margaret Atwood, *The blind assassin* (2001)

**Introduction**

Sometimes it is difficult to explain to people why pavement graffiti might be a subject worth studying. 'But there isn't much there', they say, 'I never see it'. I tell them that once you start looking there are all sorts of messages to be found on the pavement. 'Like Eternity?' some ask. And that's when I know that they understand what I'm talking about.

During the mid-20th century Sydney was home to several public eccentrics whose visibility in the street is still remembered. There weren't many of them but, of this handful, three had a direct relationship with the pavement by literally writing themselves onto its surface. Bea Miles was a habitual tram-fare evader, taxi-cab hijacker and Shakespearean scholar. She charged for street recitals and wrote 'Lessons in Shakespeare given' on the footpath in George Street near Martin Place. Rosaleen Norton was the Witch of Kings Cross who laid out her lurid paintings of pagan gods and demons in William Street, with the prices chalked beside them on the pavement. Arthur Stace was an alcoholic no-hoper who was dramatically converted to

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[1] A version of this essay, titled 'Surface reflections: Personal graffiti on the pavement', was published in the *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture,* 1 (3), 365-382 (2011).

Christianity and afterwards walked the pre-dawn streets of the city for thirty years, chalking the single copperplate word 'Eternity' on the pavement.[2]

These people – even the stealthy Eternity Man who remained anonymous for twenty years before becoming a street preacher – were exhibitionists, revealing themselves and the forces that drove them by inscribing the street itself. And after their day's work was done and they had retired to their respective haunts, their marks remained on the pavement. They are now long since dead but their personalities have left a mark on the city's psyche.

Nowadays there are still people – perhaps more of them than ever before – who write themselves onto the pavement. Their behaviour may not be sufficiently flamboyant or obsessive to be labelled eccentric. In fact, they may simply be very ordinary people overcome by some momentary urge or temporary preoccupation.

In this essay I will be exploring the efforts of these poets, protesters, lovers, artists, humorists, preachers and autobiographers who – equipped with chalk, paint, spray cans and felt-tipped pens – express their personal beliefs and feelings on the horizontal. In the light of what other writers have had to say about graffiti and place, I will be searching for some understanding of the pavement inscription – a form of graffiti that is only sometimes noticed by passers by.

**Identity**

Most of the graffiti that we notice these days appears on vertical surfaces and while a good deal has been written about it, much of this discussion concentrates on the kind of wall pieces and tags that had their origins in Philadelphia and New York in the 1970s. Other kinds of graffiti existed long before the 1970s, of course, and these continue be made alongside the newer forms. Such inscriptions, which I think of as 'traditional' graffiti, range from the political slogan to a simple woz'ere, from

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[2] There is an entry for Rosaleen Norton in Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosaleen_Norton (accessed 14 August 2010). Fitzgerald (2009a, 2009b) and Dunstan (1979) are among the many authors who have written about Arthur Stace. Dunstan also includes Bea Miles in his book on Australian ratbags. Elaine Kaldy (pers.comm., 7 August 2010) told me her recollections of Bea Miles and Rosaleen Norton writing on the footpath.

vilification to witticism, joyous whoop to graphic doodle. Their writers, as historian Ian Turner remarked, 'seem to want either to communicate something to someone else, or to purge themselves of some inchoate fire which is burning in their bellies' (Ellis & Turner, 1975, 5). More recently Gade (2003, 430) has classified graffiti as a component of what he calls the 'scriptorial landscape … that pervasive phenomenon of the cultural landscape made up of signs, inscriptions, banners'. Within this scriptorial landscape, the purpose of graffiti is 'to define turf, shock bourgeois sensibilities, or record social or individual protest'.

Most graffiti is anonymous – except perhaps to the cognoscenti, as in the case of 'New York' style tags, where the graffiti writer seeks a kind of 'anonymous fame' (Mistery quoted by Iveson 2007, 144). Nevertheless, as writers like David & Wilson (2002, 42, 43) point out, 'inscriptions are not simply writings in place but the actions of people who write themselves into the landscape'. In other words, a basic characteristic of graffiti is that it 'represents an inscription of the self in various kinds of social spaces'. Whatever their form or content 'it is possible … to consider each of these different acts of writing on various surfaces as different autobiographical events', states Heddon (2002, par.2), who regards graffiti as 'a moment of identity performance in place [or] an instance of autobiography, a writing which marks and remarks landscape while simultaneously marking and remarking subjectivity' (par.4).

If graffiti is a declaration of identity, then the corollary is that graffiti is an assertion of the right to be heard (or read) in public. As David & Wilson (2002, 43) put it, 'In marking place, *ownership* is claimed over space and over the *right* to place. Graffiti, like all place marking, is a territorial concern'. [3]

In this regard, as assertion of identity and as claim over space, pavement graffiti is comparable to other kinds of graffiti on publicly visible surfaces, but it is also different *because* it is written on the pavement.

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[3] In Chapter 5.2 'Signs of a struggle' (or Hicks, 2010a) I explored the idea that all marks on pavements – including official and unofficial signs and regulations, burnouts, and advertisements, as well as personal graffiti of the sort being discussed in this present essay – are evidence of ongoing territorial conflict.

**Subversion**

Pavements, whether roads, motorways, footpaths, pedestrian malls, playgrounds or parking lots, present as grey, flat surfaces, grittily responsive to various marking materials, from chalk to spray paint. They are open and freely accessible, usually without the need to climb anything, crawl under anything or breach any barriers. They are reasonably uncluttered because, apart from regulatory instructions and the occasional stencilled advertisement, they have not yet been colonised by the advertising, signs and graffiti that crowd the vertical surfaces of the built environment.[4] But it would be simplistic to conclude that people choose to write personal messages on the pavement just because it is there and it is bare. In fact, its accessibility could be, paradoxically, one of the reasons why most people who have an urge to write graffiti do *not* choose the pavement.

Graffiti is a form of subversion. When people inscribe themselves on the landscape they are appropriating space that is not generally accepted as being theirs to appropriate:

> Graffiti confronts and contradicts the ordered and ordering space of institutionalised life … it threatens the status quo not just because of the words and images written, but by the fact that its execution in public places lies outside the control of existing social forces (David & Wilson, 2002, 43).

Whatever the message contained in the content of the inscription (or even when there is no apparent 'message') a statement is being made. And the more risk involved, the more forceful the statement. Tall industrial chimneys, railway carriages, the sides of shops and houses, prominent public buildings, sealed underground tunnels and drains – all of these pose difficulty of access, either because they are hard to reach physically, because they are locked or under surveillance, or because they are so exposed that it would be easy to nab the graffiti writer in the act.

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[4] For a longer discussion of pavement advertising, see Chapter 5.3 'Horizontal billboards' (or Hicks, 2009d).

Moreover they all represent property that is clearly 'owned' by some entity, whether private (householders and landlords), commercial (businesses, billboard companies and their clients), or government (public buildings, public transport). Violation of property and the degree of risk both add cachet to an item of graffiti, whether it is 'New York' style graffiti, or one of the more 'traditional' forms.[5]

But pavements are taken for granted surfaces in the built environment, so familiar that they are almost invisible. Their ownership is ambiguous. Certainly, their use is regulated by agents of the government (traffic authorities, the police, parking wardens, council rangers) but, in a sense that is understood but barely articulated, they belong to everyone and no-one.

This ambiguity of ownership, coupled with the ease of access, means that pavement graffiti tends to lack the sense of violation or transgression that other forms of graffiti aspire to. If there can be degrees of subversiveness, then pavement graffiti falls low on the scale. Often this means that pavement inscriptions are made by people who might never dare write on a wall.

**Added meaning**

Even though pavement graffiti lacks transgressive power, there are other reasons why people specifically choose to express themselves on the ground. The most fundamental reason is that the pavement itself has the potential to become an intrinsic element of the inscription. There are a number of ways in which this happens and they differ depending on the type of inscription.

The idea that there is interplay between a text and its substrate is not something new. Mitchell (2005, 9), for example, notes:

> Literary theorists sometimes speak of text as if it were disembodied, but of
> course it isn't; it always shows up attached to particular physical objects, in

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[5] For example, as explained by Woodward (1999) – himself a writer of 'New York style subway graffiti' – graffiti writers attribute aesthetic value to a piece in direct relation to the difficulty of painting the site.

particular spatial contexts, and those contexts – like the contexts of speech – furnish essential components of the meaning.

This is just as true for graffiti, and pavement graffiti in particular, as it is for other types of text. As Cresswell (1998, 275) has pointed out, 'the meaning of graffiti of all types is, in many ways, related to its temporary location'. This does not only mean that the physical context influences how the reader perceives and interprets a message. It also means that the background is included in the intentions of the graffitist, consciously or unconsciously. The road or sidewalk as an entity in itself, the location of a particular spot on the pavement, the ordinary use for which the pavement is intended, or the material from which it is made – all of these are factors that may be involved when the graffitist sets out to make an inscription, whether that inscription is done impetuously or after careful planning. For this present article I have chosen several examples that illustrate various relationships between medium and meaning.

### *Immortality*

The majority of wet concrete inscriptions are unambiguously a celebration of self and are rich in autobiography. Writers scratch their own names or initials, their romantic pairings (real or hoped for), and their tribal allegiances: *Ford v. Holdens*, *[Skateboard] rules*, an Aboriginal flag, *Pom power.*

Wet concrete is an invitation to the impetuous and there is an obvious relationship between its properties and a person's urge to write themselves into it. Poet Gloria B. Yates[6] knew about this:

> *All writers wait in patience for the chance*
> *to etch their names before the concrete sets*
> *they know that galaxies are speeding further*
> *apart, and faster: that deep space*
> *is overcrowded, that dark matter*
> *spills over into skies.*

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[6] Yates (2002, 12).

*Why take the trouble*

*to set down words a micron deep on paper?*

*What difference will another poem make*

*to trillions of stars?*

With wet concrete, the quest for immortality is coupled with the frisson of transgression. By defiling the smooth new surface of a public amenity, wet concrete writers are committing a knowing act of vandalism, adding an element of daring or defiance to the image they are projecting of themselves in that inscription. Clearly the meaning of the inscription involves an interconnection between the text, the act of writing it, and the medium upon which it is written.

### *Resistance*

When Cresswell (1998) stated that the meaning of graffiti is related to its temporary location he was writing about different types of subversive texts in the street. The main two examples he chose to illustrate the practice of culture jamming were billboard banditry (the witty alteration of advertising) and the confronting images projected onto monumental buildings by artist Krysztof Wodiczko. These works, Cresswell wrote, 'reinscribe the urban topography producing new meanings and messages – not by negating the dominant messages of monumentality and capitalist consumption … but by entering into a dialectical conversation with them' (p.277).

Such premeditated conversations take place on the horizontal as well as the vertical. For instance, during a Reclaim the Streets demonstration in Newtown (Sydney) in 1999, protestors defaced the body outlines that traffic authorities stencil on roads to warn pedestrians to 'Cross carefully' and 'Step safely'. Paintbrushes transformed the flattened outlines into jaunty whistlers or axe-wielding maniacs accompanied by captions like 'Cars kill'. The message was clear: pedestrians reject the implication that they themselves are to blame for pedestrian fatalities. The alteration of official signs on the asphalt challenged what the asphalt represents – the domination of streets by motor vehicles.

There are motorists, too, who resist domination.  Their argument is with traffic authorities who try to repress their enjoyment of their vehicles. Although not often recognised as such, tyre marks left by hot wheel burnouts, donuts and wheelies are a form of pavement graffiti. These are intentionally defiant signatures indicating not only the car owner's mastery of his vehicle, but his contempt for the rules of the road.[7]

Deliberate defiance is not always as obviously manifested as it is in these examples of pavement graffiti. But any unofficial mark on the pavement subverts the 'proper' purpose of the pavement as a conveyance for feet or wheels, and any defacement of an official sign is comment on officialdom and on the social conditions that prompted the placement of that sign. This is the case even when the graffiti appears – to either the reader or even the writer – to be a joke with no ulterior motive.

For example, on a Redfern street on the fringes of inner city Sydney, one of the painted lines that define kerbside parking spaces has been transformed with spray paint into a giant phallus, while a nearby 'bicycle' stencil that delineates a cycling lane has been given a rider, complete with large, erect penis. The traffic marks that have been defaced have only been in place since encroaching gentrification turned this ordinary working class street into both an official bicycle route and a parking lot for a nearby railway-workshop-turned-arts-centre.  Older established residents and their offspring may well feel resentful of the newcomers. The embellishment of the official signs expresses a local belief, possibly unconsciously, that the yuppie car parkers and cyclists are wankers.

*Control*

In the city, life is complicated and boundaries are indistinct. Because people's lives butt up against each other, behaviour is bound by rules of social etiquette. 'Following these usually implicit rules of conduct helps maintain social distance … This, however, entails a delicate balancing act since we risk losing ourselves, our individuality, in the crowd' (Smith & Davidson, 2008, 238). Feelings of loss and frustration are exacerbated

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[7] The perpetrators of tyre graffiti are almost exclusively male. See Chapter 5.5 'Hard feelings' (or Hicks, 2009b); also Forrester (1993) and Linda Forrester interviewed in Butler (1994).

when others overstep boundaries and fail to observe 'the rules'. When this happens, people look for ways to re-establish their individuality and we see examples of what Thrift (2003, 92) is talking about when he says, 'in everyday life, what is striking is how people are able to use events over which they often have very little control to open up little spaces in which they can assert themselves, however faintly'.

The lowly pavement – that shared space that belongs to everyone and no one – is sometimes co-opted by people attempting to assert themselves. Here they can manufacture some semblance of control by writing admonishments or instructions to other pavement users. The Redfern penises are examples of powerless attempts at control, but hand-painted parking signs can be more effective. When a person paints 'No parking' or 'Do not leave garbage bins here',  or marks a striped area outside the entrance to their house or business, they are warning off other users at the same time as they are protesting against the ineffectuality of authorities in policing the streets and enforcing parking regulations. Pedestrian crossings, amateurishly hand-painted by citizens where they think there *ought* to be a crossing, are similar attempts at both control and complaint.

The anonymous airing of petty grievances on and about the pavement is another satisfying way of alleviating feelings of powerlessness. People paint 'Bread is making birds sick' on areas where other people feed pigeons; they chalk circles around dog droppings and write 'Filthy dog owner'. Their notices are rather like the notes that are left in the kitchens and bathrooms of workplaces and share houses to 'Wash up after yourself' and 'Use the toilet brush'. Someone who 'breaks the rules' is rebuked, without the need for face-to-face confrontation. Pavement remonstrations are delivered and received with eyes lowered, and in this way public decorum is maintained.

### *Passion*

Footpaths and roadways can be the backdrop for emotional artworks and expressions of love, spite, disappointment and friendship. The kind of painted works I am referring to are not made with the opportunistic bravado of wet cement writers or the casual contemptuousness of taggers. Passionately motivated, they require planning,

preparation and sometimes teamwork. Despite my earlier comments about the easy accessibility of pavements,   physical risk is often involved. Size matters – the lettering is large. Placement is important. Usually, although a wider audience is meant to be included, these messages are directed principally to an audience of one, and so they are painted on the street where she lives, or on a route that he habitually takes.

Even though the message does not ostensibly comment on the pavement or its use (or abuse), the pavement is always present in the meaning, adding subtext to what has been written. This subtext can be blatant *('I have prostrated myself to tell you this')* but there are more subtle undertones as well. Consider these examples:

Across the exit driveway of a block of apartments: *I will always Love You* [and I worship the ground You drive over].

Outside a front door that opens directly onto the street: *TRISH IS A SLUT* [and I am so angry with her that I want her trampled underfoot].

At an angle on a narrow inner-city street of two-storey terrace houses*: PLEASE COME HOME! I LOVE YOU* [even though you look down on me].

In the middle of a suburban street: *KYLIE IS A DOG* [and she has hurt me so much that I want her name smeared up and down the street].

On a rise on a 100 kph section of highway: *DALE 4 SHELL* and *UM 4 JODEE* [and we would die 4 you on the road].

On a suburban thoroughfare: *(*indecipherable*) fuck the Pigs* [and run over the bastards].

Sometimes large pavement messages like these are not meant for a specific audience, but may instead be instances of self-expression that can range from joy to self-loathing.

Along a lane in an inner-city suburb, and accompanied by a painting of a syringe:  *I do love u Zeitgeist despite being Junky Scum* [and despite people thinking I deserve to be lying here in the gutter].

Whether consciously premeditated or not, the possibility that subtexts like these will emerge from an inscription influence the writer's choice of pavement as a canvas.

*Performance*

Whatever the motivation behind a piece of graffiti, whatever its intended audience, the act of making it is important to its meaning, and is sometimes more important than the finished product. Here are three examples:

Groups of political activists write large slogans like 'No War' on city thoroughfares. Their protests are conceived in conspiratorial moments of inspiration and executed amateurishly at night in house paint. The pale, narrow letters will probably be worn away without motorists even noticing them. But the planning, cooperative vandalism, and considered risk-taking on a busy road are acts of group cohesion that produce a sense of political achievement.

Teenage Romeos paint messages to the objects of their affection (or disappointment) on the asphalt. Their mates are in on the act, egging them on, standing lookout and, later, watching from some hidden vantage point to see the girl's reaction.[8] These acts of conspicuous heart-baring are carried out as much to titillate the mates as they are to impress or shock the girl.

Experienced graffiti artists or taggers try out new techniques on the pavement, perhaps in the company of others, perhaps as a solitary exercise. They explore the possibilities of the horizontal and capitalise on the opportunities forced on them by restrictions on the sale of spray cans. They manipulate paint rollers, they use line-marking paint or concrete cleaner, they drip, they splash. These experimental acts can produce semi-permanent tags, or new styles of writing, or innovative graphic forms, all created with the pavement as collaborator.

Whether the writer is a motivated tyro or a practiced graffitist, the act of creating a piece of graffiti, is what Heddon (2002, par.4) characterises as 'a moment of identity performance'. Either for the benefit of an audience of peers, or for solitary

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[8] See Chapter 5.5 'Hard feelings' (or Hicks, 2009b).

satisfaction, the writer acts out a public identity they have constructed for themselves – rebel, lover, hater, concerned citizen, activist, artist, joker. When the graffiti act is carried out on the pavement there is an added dimension to this performance that approaches something like what artist Jackson Pollock said about his own methods: 'On the floor I am more at ease, I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around in it, work from the four sides and be literally 'in' the painting'.[9] Making pavement graffiti involves an expressive dance, calibrated to the writer's body dimensions – a squat and shuffle, perhaps, for a wet cement inscription; repeated darts and dashes for a road-top protest; repetitive swaying and circling for a back-lane drip picture. The added value, then, is this dance, both metaphorical and physical, performed upon the background itself.

Few passers-by will notice the marks that remain after the act, fewer will take the trouble to try and read them. But if they do, a reciprocal performance will be required. Bodily motion – on feet or wheels – is usually necessary in order to appreciate pavement graffiti.  Moves might include any of the following: bend over and examine; walk around until a suitable angle is found; take a higher (or a lower) vantage point; decelerate and approach slowly; go back and repeat the previous move. Passively standing to gaze, as with a picture on a wall, is often impossible and seldom sufficient.

**Highways and byways**

To illustrate the different ways in which the pavement becomes an intrinsic element of any inscriptions upon it, I have offered above a number of examples. These examples are by no means exhaustive, nor is pavement graffiti found only in Australian cities.  I have seen, for instance, a giant hand-painted foetus lying on a narrow street in Paris, and a long, lovesick cry spilled out at the foot of the Reformers' Wall in Geneva. The cases I can cite are limited only by my travels. Various websites and blogs display the work of pavement artists and stencil graffitists – individual or commercial – but the more personal types of message on the ground are only

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[9] Jackson Pollock, 1947, quoted in *Jackson Pollock unauthorized: the story of Jack the Dripper,* http://www.jackson-pollock.com, accessed 8 January 2011.

occasionally recorded.  And yet, for the purposeful drifter and the alert commuter, they are available for viewing on many otherwise ordinary roadways and sidewalks.

Referring to a fox once sighted near her house in the centre of London, Elizabeth Wilson remarked: 'The fox – rural intruder in the city … reminds us that it is the unexpected, unplanned and incongruous that has lent city life so much of its delight, as well as, sometimes, its scariness' (Wilson, 1995, 160). Like the fleeting glimpse of an urban fox, the sight of an inscription emerging from among the cracks in the pavement can be a surprise – in this case one that catches the breath with its humour, or belligerence, absurdity, sentimentality, or even a kind of beauty.

Curiously, in her discussion of changing attitudes to urban space, Wilson was warning commentators against making a dichotomy of city/country, against romanticising city centres (either in their dystopian degeneration or their  museum-like preservation) and against disregarding the reality and the meaningfulness of lives in the diffuse outer sprawl of the present-day metropolis.  Yet her assertion that 'it was always the interstices of the city, the forgotten bits between, the corners of the city that somehow escaped, that constituted its charm' (p.160) does sound rather like romanticisation. City centres do not have a monopoly on charming surprises and Wilson's fox analogy is just as applicable in suburbia and rural areas as it is in an urban setting. The sight of a fox rummaging in a garbage bin, or skittering across a new development site, or sunning itself on a log in a paddock brings relief to the neatness of suburban streets, the messiness of metropolitan fringes, or the boredom of the long kilometres between rural towns and villages.

Similarly, pavement graffiti is not entirely an urban phenomenon and its occurrence anywhere is a bonus for the traveller. For every type of pavement inscription I have seen in the inner city there is a comparable example further away.  I have spotted *Alex 1993-2008 - Rest in Peace - Your our angel* on a footpath in an outer suburb; *Tim P. is gay* on a coastal byway; a 100 kph speed limit sign altered to *1000* on the road as I left a country town; *Shity Road* on the bitumen as I approached an outback town; a diatribe about Osama Bin Laden even further outback; a boastful phallus on the council carpark in a rural city; *I [heart] U Bec* on a remote minor highway; a gigantic

coloured Twister game on the mighty Hume Highway. Graffiti like these are a reminder to the traveller (and to locals as well) that unfamiliar suburbs and barely glimpsed towns have their own artists, their love-struck young people, their wags, their villifiers, their political activists, their daredevils and their flamboyant characters, just as cities do.

In fact, personal inscriptions can even temporarily relieve motorways of their designation as 'non-places of supermodernity'. According to Augé's definition of non-places, motorways – like supermarkets and airport lounges – create a solitary contractuality with their users through the mediation of texts. These 'instructions for use' take the form of words and ideograms, 'whose proponents are not individuals but "moral entities" or institutions' (Augé, 2008, 76-78). Augé did not specifically refer to pavement markings, but of course many of the 'instructions for use' on motorways are directly applied to the surface – lane lines, for instance, arrows, and stencilled orders to 'Reduce speed'[10]. Appearing incongruously amongst such motorway markings, a daringly hand-sprayed tag or message briefly creates a personal relationship between individuals – the graffiti writer and the traveller.

A few gestures can transform non-place into place just as, in Cy Twombly's works on paper, 'the graphic event is what permits the surface of the paper to exist, to signify, to take pleasure' (Barthes, 1985, 175) - never mind that in the cases I am interested in, the 'paper' is a kind of thick, rigid and coarse sandpaper.[11] The infrequency and ephemerality of graffiti, however, means that the status of a motorway as either a place or a non-place is always changing. As Augé admits, non-places are 'never totally completed' but are 'like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten' (p.64).

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[10] Traffic markings are themselves a kind of pavement graffiti and are examples of the visible forms of regulation for which Hermer & Hunt (1996: 455-456) coined the term 'official graffiti of the everyday', which 'manifests a distinctive form of hegemony that is exercised through the small, daily acts of everyday governance'.

[11] Concerning the surface texture of roads, the author of technical booklet *Grey roads* (1948) advises, 'tests and experience seem to prove that in general the best average non-skid surface under all weather conditions is what may be described a "coarse sandpaper" finish'.

**Reflections**

Although it is not always possible, I like to photograph graffiti on rainy days, when the inscriptions merge with the world that is reflected in the pavement's wet surface. Describing Sydney's William Street 'after a slick of rain had fallen on it', poet Kenneth Slessor[12] wrote:

> *The red globes of light, the liquor-green,*
>
> *The pulsing arrows and the running fire*
>
> *Spilt on the stones, go deeper than a stream*

But Slessor's neon advertisements, with their 'blazing arrows and alphabets of light', are not the only kind of landmark submerged beneath the surface of the street. The buildings are unsteady caves and canyons, the street lights are wavering flagpoles, traffic signals are pile drivers that fitfully penetrate the depths. Pavement reflections are not true replicas of the street but glimmering variations, at once familiar and strange.  And attached to people and their vehicles there are elongated keels – distorted versions of themselves that lead and trail them as they navigate this slippery other world.

Might this world be what society's 'concrete unconscious' is like? Might it be like Anne Cronin's 'elsewhere', where 'forms such as graffiti and advertising … come together to articulate a dream of how urban life could be otherwise', and where people have 'a right to imagine their lives and their cities in ways beyond the frame of hegemonic discourse' (Cronin, 2008, 77)?

The concept of a 'concrete unconscious', seems particularly apt in this present exploration of concrete and asphalt surfaces. Smith & Davidson (2008, 239-240), referencing Lefebvre, use the term to explain the apparent contradictions and competing cultures woven into the social fabric of the city:

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[12] Kenneth Slessor, *William Street*, reproduced in Sayer & Nowra (2000, 60).

This "concrete unconscious" is not just associated with politically, morally, and legally repressed realms like criminality, prostitution or political intrigue, but also with the expressive sources of artistic endeavours, dreams, and the creative processes by which we develop as different human individuals. It might also be said to provide the symbolism and images through which the everyday life of inhabitants can conflict with the social expectations of those wielding economic or political power, for example, in the graffiti inscribed on city walls.

But graffiti does not only occur on city walls, and Lefebvre does not posit that an unconscious might only exist in an urban setting. He wonders how it might be if 'it turned out that that every society, and particularly (for our purposes) the city, had an underground and repressed life, and hence, an "unconscious" of its own' – an unconscious that 'resembles an illusion with a *raison d'être* – a sort of mirage effect' (Lefebvre, 1991, 36, 240).

Extending this analogy, might pavement inscriptions float on the surface of this mirage – on the unstable membrane that separates the everyday world from the unconscious one – like marker buoys that signal the existence of dreams and memories, aspirations and anxieties submerged below?

Cresswell (1998, 277-278) has proposed that meanings arising from the dialectical conversations that night-time culture jammers enter into with 'the dominant messages of monumentality and capitalist consumption' are 'metaphorically, the establishment's nightmares and repressed memories coming back to haunt it'. To draw a similar conclusion about pavement graffiti might seem exaggerated. After all, inscriptions on the pavement are only mildly subversive. This is not the domain of the bold but of the temporarily emboldened or, as in the case of Eternity Man Arthur Stace, the doggedly persistent. And yet …

I have written elsewhere that it is significant that Sydney should have adopted the chalk inscription 'Eternity' as its motif, incorporating it into New Year's Eve firework displays, for example. This is a place where the beautiful harbour, beaches and remnants of bushland are so close to the centre of the city that they are constant

reminders of the original landscapes and Indigenous people's lives that were destroyed when the colony was established. Despite its reputation for superficiality, Sydney is subliminally riven by guilt and haunted by death. Stace's one-word sermon resonates with the city's unconscious by offering the hope of redemption.[13]

And if this is the case might not something similar be going on with other pavement inscriptions? Bea Miles was a staunch Australian and a vocal despiser of the British, but her chalked offer of 'Lessons in Shakespeare' might have been an expression of a colonial unwillingness to be separated from the language and culture of the 'mother country'. The prices of Rosaleen Norton's demonic paintings written on the ground might have appealed to respectable citizens' unfulfilled desires to indulge in wickedness. Might the scribblings of ordinary people similarly reveal fragments of an individual or collective unconscious?

It would be wrong to romanticise personal inscriptions on the pavement. Taken at face value, the words and pictures are seldom inspired or inspiring. If you bother to read them you will sometimes find pain and commitment, more often jokes and petty spites, self assertion without stridency, momentary outbursts of emotion. But it is here on lowly roadways and sidewalks that civil reticence sometimes gives way to public rhetoric. And if you look more deeply into these conjunctions of gesture and asphalt, you may catch glimpses of seething undercurrents beneath the surface.

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[13] See Chapter 5.6 'City of epitaphs' (or Hicks, 2009c, 461). Delia Falconer was later to write in her little book about Sydney: '… [Stace] conjured a profound sense of mortality that seemed to manifest itself on the footpaths, along with the threat of damnation. This was also a kind of poetry, a meditation, on the city's combination of the infinite and fragile' (Falconer, 2010, 53).

# Conclusion
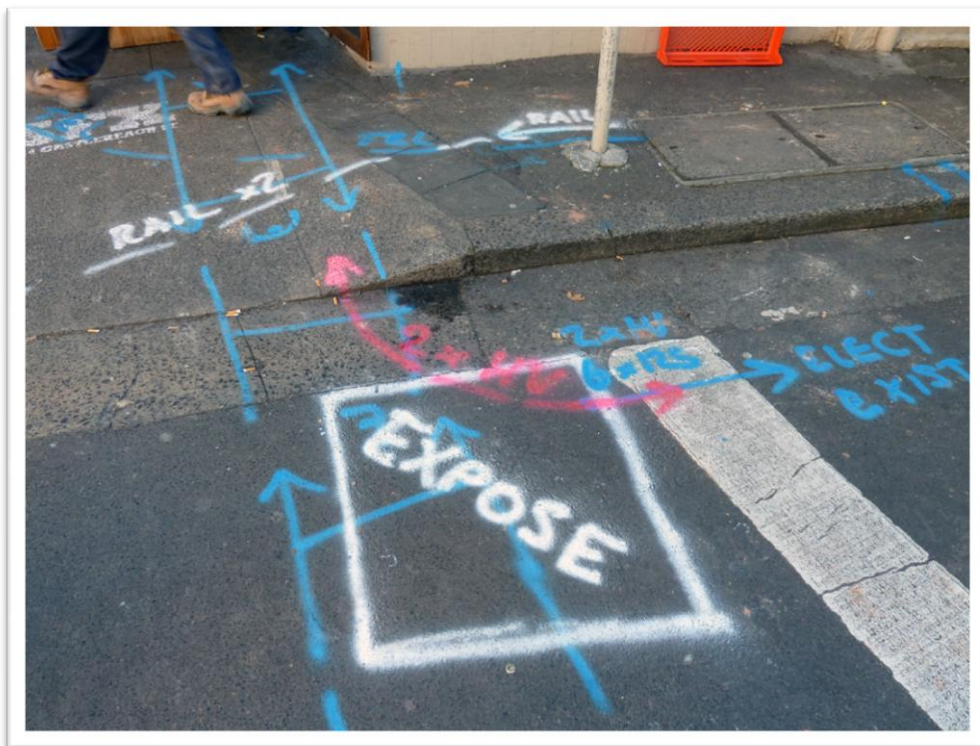
# Conclusion

> Thousands of people who, before I came along, had never dared travel, and others who had not been able to, and yet others who had never even dreamed of travelling, will be emboldened to do so by my example.
>
> - Xavier de Maistre, *A journey round my room* (1795)

## Anthology

Photographing pavement graffiti is a novel way of exploring the built environment. But although novel, it falls within the tradition of urban exploration charted by such 20th century luminaries of walking as Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord and Michel de Certeau, and carried on in the present by reinvented flaneurs, psychogeographers and place hackers. A camera has become an essential piece of equipment for urban explorers, bringing to their adventures a sense of acquisitiveness as they capture images of their discoveries.

Although such images may function as aide-mémoires that assist explorers to digest and discourse upon what they have seen, more importantly the act of photography itself is an instrument that encourages explorers to engage with the city and confront their own and their audience's assumptions about what it means to live in an urban environment.

The subject of such unsettling photographs might be as banal as reflections in a window display of shop dummies, or as eerie as the derelict interior of an abandoned industrial site. Explorer-photographers can extract meanings from fragments as trivial as weed gardens in footprints, as unnoticed as the service entrances of buildings better known for their magnificent facades, as commonplace as a set of billboards. Or they might concentrate on the ubiquitous phenomenon of graffiti, and draw conclusions about personal rebellion and social interaction by photographing and analysing anything from scribblings in toilet cubicles to masterpieces on public walls.

As a collector of pavement graffiti I have followed in the footsteps of these urban explorers and graffiti interpreters, except that in my case the camera is always pointed downwards and the hunt extends beyond the city to the suburbs, the countryside and rural towns – wherever there are paved roads and footways – and may be carried out when driving as well as walking. Taking snapshots adds a new dimension to such drives and walks; sorting through the accumulated collection of photos invites analysis.

For this project I set out to look for patterns, groupings and insights within the collection. I wanted to draw out meanings and stories from the pavement and find ways in which these stories might be relayed to audiences more accustomed to reading off the page or off the screen than off the asphalt. I was aiming to provide a model of how pavements might be read as texts, demonstrate the breadth of material available, and suggest a new perspective from which the built environment – and the people who live in it – might be viewed.

What I have found among the discovered instances of pavement graffiti is a disjointed and contradictory anthology of stories – traces of life lived both on the street (or highway) and off it, that transform the apparently inanimate asphalt into a social document. To relay some of these stories I chose to write essays for various publications. I also constructed an on-line exhibition of photographs in which I suggested ways of viewing the inscriptions from conceptual angles that might not at first seem obvious.

Although what I have presented is just a sample, my stories reveal the existence of a transitional zone, where the pavement is the border, both literal and metaphorical, between the 'wild' and the 'civilized'; where there is an intersection between conformity and imagination; where commercial advertisers appropriate the means and methods of exuberant youth; where expressions of personal identity, love, hate and sorrow are played out in public performances; where signs of life give way to marks of death; where the evolving edges of literacy appear and evanesce; and where there is an ongoing struggle for territory. In this transitional zone there is ample scope for further study.

It is difficult to write about the pavement without succumbing to puns and clichés. But that is the point – paved areas are so embedded in our lives and thoughts that many terms associated with them have crossed over into metaphor and intermingled with other expressions that predate the development of paving technologies. Capitulating to the inevitable, I will risk marring this Conclusion by noting that I have only scratched the surface.  By covering new ground I hope that I have paved the way for others to follow.

**Retracement**

Looking back over the thirteen years since I began paying attention to pavement inscriptions, and the five years since I began writing this thesis, I notice things have changed. A new kind of graffiti, for instance, now dominates the horizontal landscape. In those thirteen years it has spread like a rash, appearing in clusters at intersections, forming irregular tracks on footpaths, and breaking out in patches on otherwise unblemished plazas. It is like an eruption from beneath, disfiguring the surface with a disturbing reminder of what is going on below. And indeed this is the purpose of these multicoloured marks. They are made by utility company employees who, aided by technological advances in both remote sensing devices and fluoro spray-cans, are drawing maps of the underground. Their marks often cause me disappointment as I cross the road to examine something I think might be a rude or funny message, only to find it is a grid of arrows, circles and numbers.

But in their own way these survey marks are as fascinating as rude messages, the very esotericism of their symbols and half-words signalling, far less discreetly than any manhole cover could, the existence of the hidden underground world beneath the pavement. But how curious that the spray-can wielders, these engineers and technicians, these guardians of the complex infrastructure that supports our civilized life, should be allowed to show such blatant disregard for civic tidiness in the street. Their survey marks are an assault on the dignity of the pavement, not only because they mar its orderly greyness, but because they reveal the existence of its buried secrets.

**Enigma**

Another thing that has changed is my understanding of what it is I am looking for. What I considered a secondary aim in this project – to reveal the symbolic role the pavement plays in people's lives – became more prominent over the years. In the Introduction I casually mentioned that 'without being able to articulate why, I have, for a long time, considered the pavement to be a disturbing urban presence'. It now seems clear to me that much of my project has been an attempt to address the seat of this disturbance.

I began my exploration of pavement graffiti by investigating how people imagined the pavement itself. In that initial chapter I took my cue from Roland Barthes, reasoning that to understand pavement graffiti I first needed to know something about the canvas on which it is drawn:

> We know that what constitutes graffiti is in fact neither the inscription nor its message but the wall, the background, the surface (the desktop); it is because the background exists fully, as an object which has already lived, that such writing always comes to it as an enigmatic surplus (Barthes, 1985b, 167).

But on re-reading Barthes' essay on the works of artist Cy Twombly, I find that he later turns this thought upside down:

> Inverting the usual relation of classical production, we might say that the line, the hatching, the shape, in short the graphic event is what permits the surface or the sheet of paper to exist, to signify, to take pleasure (Barthes, 1985b, 175).

Barthes' paradox has helped me to see that the pavement is an intrinsic element of the graffiti written upon it, but also, conversely, that the graffiti affirms the existence of the pavement. Looking back over my 'stories', I have come to realise that my whole study has been as much about the pavement itself as it has been about pavement graffiti; that I have been just as preoccupied with the background as I have been with its 'enigmatic surplus'; and that by examining the graphic event I have been interrogating the existence of the surface upon which it is made. In short, I have been trying to resolve the enigma of the pavement.

**Monumentality**

I have not found an answer to this enigma, but in searching for one I continue to consult others for their insights – novelists, for example, essayists, artists and art critics. I keep returning to the artworks of Jeffrey Smart and philosopher Patrick Hutchings' interpretation of them. Smart's paintings, says Hutchings (1975, 122), 'are about daily oddnesses'. And what could be more quotidian or more odd than the pavement? This artificial crust – this 'man made lithosphere' as artist Pete McLean (2012b) calls it – that has been laid down deliberately to separate us from the natural surface of the earth?

If, as Hutchings (1975, 118) maintains, Smart's concerns are 'on the surface, with the enigma of things – with their surreal real-life oddness; and at the bottom with the being, simply, of things', then his painterly approach to dealing with these concerns is not strictly realist nor, Hutchings insists, is it surrealist. Hutchings does not use the word, but perhaps Smart's representations could be called 'idealistic'. His asphalted autobahns and bus terminals are smooth, even and unblemished, the road signs painted on them are bright, hard-edged and perfect.

This is Smart's way, but I think there is also scope for investigating the essence of the pavement, not via an idealised version of it, but through its imperfections. The real pavement is patched and crazed, marked out with fraying traffic signs, and scarred with tyre-tracks, scuff marks and scribbles. These defects are evidence that the pavement is in use and, as Barthes (1985b, 158) knows, 'The essence of an object has something to do with its destruction. It is not necessarily what remains after the object has been used, it's rather what is thrown away in use'.

Nevertheless, Smart's pictures highlight a property of the pavement that might otherwise be overlooked in detailed studies of its flawed surface. That property is something art critic John McDonald almost acknowledges when he observes,

> [Smart's] compositions strive for a sense of stillness and monumentality, while
> his subjects are almost wilfully ordinary. The very fact that Smart chooses to

portray everyday scenes in such a grand and simple style, means that his subjects take on a pantomime grandeur (McDonald, 2001, 4[193]).

I would argue that the qualities of 'monumentality' and 'grandeur' are not bestowed on the pavement by Smart, but rather that the strange artificiality of his depictions draws out what already exists. Prosaically functional though the pavement may be, it is at the same time monumental and grand.

That the pavement is an edifice of monumental proportions is something we don't generally recognise. Key to our blindness is a remark made by Rebecca Solnit in her history of walking: 'part of what makes roads, trails, and paths so unique as built structures is that they cannot be perceived as a whole all at once' (Solnit, 2002, 72).

We also overlook the pavement's grandeur, not only because it reaches horizontally rather than vertically, but because it is familiar. It was Robert Musil who noted that invisibility through familiarity is the fate of all monuments:

> Monuments are so conspicuously inconspicuous […] Anything that endures over time sacrifices its ability to make an impression. Anything that constitutes the walls of our life, the backdrop of our consciousness, so to speak, forfeits its capacity to play a role in that consciousness (Musil, 2011, 19-21).

**Enchantment**

It is at the intersection of the idea of timeless monumentality and the reality of the pavement's continual disfigurement that something of the enigma of the pavement emerges. I have already suggested that graffiti affirms the existence of the pavement. It does this by bringing the asphalt into focus. Flaws attract attention.[194] But there may be more to the power of graffiti than this. Anthropologist Michael Taussig argues that:

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[193] Quoted by Pearce (2005, 196).

[194] Perec (2010, 33-34) makes this same observation when he suggests that we don't notice when a driver parks a bus in one go, but when the driver only manages to do so after several minutes of laborious effort 'this provokes attention, irony, the participation of an audience: to see not just the rips, but the fabric'.

Defacement is like Enlightenment. It brings insides outside, unearthing knowledge, and revealing mystery ... [It] works on objects the way jokes work on language, bringing out their inherent magic nowhere more so than when those objects have become routinized and social (Taussig, 1999, 3, 5).

In the same vein, urban researcher Brian Morris (2001, 96) proposes that 'defacement produces a particular kind of magical, sacral discharge at monumental sites'. To Morris such unsettling magical power reveals a quintessentially rational, modern object as possessing irrational properties.

It seems to me that graffiti on the pavement highlights the absurdity of this vast artificial structure. It is not only the untidy maps made by utility workers that challenge its dignity; all other types of graffiti, whether making a silly joke or commemorating a fatality, diminish the pavement's authority and in doing so endow it with an element of charm.

The pavement is a product of mappers, planners and regulators, its purpose to order and organise movement. To draw or write on its surface is to overlay it with an element of irrationality, or even anarchy. Graffiti interferes with the official role of the pavement in a way that can be compared with James Donald's account of what happens when citizens – in their ordinary unruliness – subvert the intentions of city planners.  'Whenever modernisers have sought to impose the rationality of the 'concept city' on urban life', writes Donald (1999, 51), '*flâneurs*, artists and the rest of us have systematically re-enchanted their creations'.

In the case of the pavement, 'the rest of us' can include café proprietors with boxes of coloured chalk; stencillers paid by advertising agencies to spring guerrilla raids; schoolchildren mourning the death of a friend; greenie activists with a woodchip on their shoulder; disgruntled suburban ranters; and tragically jilted lovers. By challenging the orderliness, the rationality, the monumentality of the pavement with their scrawls, they confer a sort of magic that transforms the asphalt and brings a sparkle to pompous urban squares, neat suburban cul-de-sacs, and monotonous rural kilometres.

**Reflection**

The magic of graffiti emits a faint glow that is just bright enough for us to re-examine the role the pavement plays in our lives. As I return from this stage of my explorations I can see that my photographs and travel stories may not be paradigm-shifting, but hopefully they will stimulate moments of recognition. In the end, it may be that photographs of pavement graffiti serve as instruments of self-reflection, stirring us to enquire more about ourselves and the places we habitually move through.

I say this even though most of us have no affinity with unauthorised pavement graffiti – we do not write it ourselves and we do not know people who do (even though such writers are sometimes people who would never contemplate defacing a wall). We might even choose to ignore this kind of pavement inscription altogether, preferring instead to only take notice of official traffic signs on the road and municipal instructions regarding shared paths and drains that are just for rain.

But we do all have, whether we acknowledge it or not, an affinity with the pavement itself for, depending on who we are, it represents many things to each of us. Urban scholars Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (2000b, 13) suggest that monuments can act as crucial signifiers in people's self-actualizing imaginaries of the cities they live in, but that this might not hold in the less traditional, more complex diasporic city, where deliberately erected monuments may have no cultural meaning for many citizens. I suggest that the ordinary pavement, in its ubiquity, is a *transferable* cultural marker to which people can relate, not only through present associations, but through memories as well.

As a *horizontal* monument it cannot be said to loom over our lives, and yet an examination of our feelings about the pavement would tell us much about ourselves. For most of us it is as familiar as our own room. Its bland smoothness represents the order and certainty we depend on in our lives and it is the place where we perform such quotidian rituals as going shopping or driving to and from work. It may represent our expectations that there will be fun times too, presenting as it does opportunities for playful pastimes in the street or daring feats of driving skill or escapes to sunny holidays. On the other hand its oppressive greyness may remind us of dreaded

journeys to fulfil obligations that we would rather not have. Newly sealed roads may represent an encroachment on our cherished privacy or on bushland we think of as 'ours'. Our annoyance at unrepaired footpaths in the neighbourhood may typify our dissatisfaction with where we have ended up in life.

In this way the ever-present pavement produces an aural, visual and psychic hum that underpins our daily thoughts and activities.

So when unauthorised graffiti is drawn to our attention, it becomes an intrusion that upsets the familiar certainties of the pavement, and in doing so challenges our expectations and assumptions and niggles at our suppressed resentments. We may rarely heed the drone of the pavement, but the static crackle of graffiti makes us strain to hear that hum more clearly.

Crazily irrelevant though his behaviour might have seemed, Paul Auster's street scavenger Stillman was seeking the Tower of Babel, a structure that reached to heaven and housed a united humanity speaking a single language. My quest has been more down to earth. I claim to have found at our doorstep an edifice of monumental proportions that stretches horizontally, not vertically. And I maintain that by paying careful attention to this edifice it is possible to make out the babble of many *different and differing* voices.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1          Road-making materials

This thesis is not a treatise on the history of paving or the science of road-making, however there are a number of terms used by lay people, sometimes correctly, other times mistakenly, other times metonymically, when referring to roads and footways and the materials they are made of.  For the sake of clarity I have compiled definitions of some commonly used terms. These definitions are highly simplified, given that the best pavements are carefully engineered and layered structures whose methods of construction are specific to the location and conditions for which they are built.

**Tar** – tar (liquid) or pitch (more solid) is an organic substance made by distillation of pine wood, used for sealing and preserving wooden structures, and in disinfectants, medicines and food flavourings. The term 'tar' is also an abbreviation of '**coal tar**', a tar-like mineral substance produced as a by-product of coal gas and coke production. In road-making, coal tar has been used as a binder (see 'macadam' below) and as a sealer on roads and footways, but its use is being phased out as it is a known carcinogen.

**Gravel** – quarried loose rock fragments or deliberately crushed rock, used for surfacing roadways in rural areas where there is little traffic.

**Aggregate** – materials making up a paved road and held together by a binder. Such materials can include broken stone, gravel, sand, stone-dust, brick and rubber.

**Bitumen** – a naturally occurring or manufactured by-product of petroleum. Because of its adhesive properties it is used for a number of purposes. In the making of aggregate roads, its purpose is to bind particles of aggregate together, and sometimes to seal and waterproof the surface.

**Asphalt** – In American English, the term 'asphalt' means the same thing as 'bitumen'. Elsewhere 'asphalt' is an abbreviation for what, in American English, is called '**asphalt concrete**', a naturally occurring or manufactured mixture of bitumen and stone or some other aggregate. Different types of pre-made bituminous mixture are used to

suit different engineering requirements. Asphalt is strong and is generally used for urban and high-traffic roads, whereas aggregate roads bound with bitumen (see 'macadam' below) are less expensive and more likely to be used in low-traffic country areas.

**Blacktop** – a colloquial term for asphalt/asphalt concrete or other bituminous road surfaces.

**Macadam** – whereas earlier the paved roads, such as those of the ancient Roman Empire, were heavy and rigid, macadam was a revolutionary type of flexible road surfacing, devised by John Loudon McAdam in the 19th century, consisting of different sizes of broken stone which progressively lock together under the weight of traffic. Over time this model has been improved by the addition of a bitumen binder to hold the aggregate together. Prior to the use of bitumen, the first sealed roads used coal tar as the binder, hence the term '**tarmacadam**' or '**tarmac**' for this kind of paving.

**Cement** – an ingredient of concrete, made by heating limestone and clay and grinding the resulting 'clinker' into a fine powder rich in calcium silicates.

**Concrete** – a product of mixing aggregate, cement and water, which sets due to an irreversible chemical reaction between the cement and the water.

(Based on Bremner (1948), *Economic highways*; Pitt (2010), personal communication about rural Australian roads; Summers (2012), *The idiot's guide to highway maintenance*, http://www.highwaysmaintenance.com/index.htm; Coal tar, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coal_tar; Tar, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tar; Bitumen/ Asphalt http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bitumen; Gravel http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gravel )

## Appendix 2        The year in asphalt

The name of my blog site is *Pavement graffiti*. The entry titled 'The year in asphalt'
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## Appendix 3 List of images