



#### **On-Line Papers – Copyright**

This online paper may be cited or briefly quoted in line with the usual academic conventions. You may also download them for your own personal use. This paper must not be published elsewhere (e.g. to mailing lists, bulletin boards etc.) without the author's explicit permission.

Please note that if you copy this paper you must:

- include this copyright note
- not use the paper for commercial purposes or gain in any way
- you should observe the conventions of academic citation in a version of the following form:  
Anne M. Cronin, 'Urban space and entrepreneurial property relations: resistance and the vernacular of outdoor advertising and graffiti',  
published by the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YL, UK  
at <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Cronin-advertisingandgraffiti.pdf>

#### **Publication Details**

This web page was last revised on 1st June, 2006

## **'Urban space and entrepreneurial property relations: resistance and the vernacular of outdoor advertising and graffiti'**

Anne M. Cronin

'People are taking the piss out of you every day. They butt into your life, take a cheap shot at you and then disappear. They leer at you from tall buildings and make you feel small. They make flippant comments from buses that imply you're not sexy enough and the fun is happening somewhere else. .... They are Advertisers and they are laughing at you'.

Street artist Banksy (2005: 160)

'A city is a memory and a promise which are never confused with the totality of what is *presently* visible, presentable, constructed, habitable'.

Derrida (1998: 17)



Any set of discourses and discursive practices render legible certain aspects of the social terrain and this chapter explores how the phenomena of graffiti and outdoor advertising, framed by the developing discourses of urban entrepreneurialism, perform just such a manifestation. Most studies of urban entrepreneurialism take governance as their focus (e.g. Hall and Hubbard 1998). They examine how new urban economies are rooted in tourism, sport, culture and entertainment (e.g. Fainstein 1998; Judd and Fainstein 1999; Hannigan 1998), draw increasingly on public–private partnerships (Harvey 1989), and are oriented around symbolic economies that can act to express and reproduce hegemonic social relations (Zukin 1995). But if we listen carefully to the hegemonic discourses of urban entrepreneurialism we may be able to access other subterranean, vernacular discourses – resistant, subversive or perhaps uncategorisable in currently available terms – that are brought into relief and partial legibility by those same hegemonic discourses. Notions of resistance have been a staple of socio-cultural analysis for many years and, as McCarthy (2001: 11) argues, this dynamic of ‘the anonymity of mass culture and the ineffable specificity of its myriad appropriations’ is central to the social production of space. In this chapter I examine this dynamic in relation to urban entrepreneurialism, exploring how resistance and governance in the specific forms of outdoor advertising and graffiti are articulated in terms of space and property, and are framed by ideas of creativity and innovation. Analysing outdoor advertising and graffiti and their shifting significance can help us think about the changes wrought by urban entrepreneurialism, and any parallel shifts in articulations of governance and resistance. Indeed, I argue that such an analysis points to urban space and spatial practices as paradoxical and unstable, and in parallel, highlights how resistance and domination cannot be imagined as strictly dichotomous phenomena.

If we understand the city not as an arrangement of fixed sites but as a confluence of relationships that are constantly reworked (Amin and Thrift 2002), then we can approach the relationship of outdoor advertising and graffiti as an example of the myriad relationalities that act to make and re-make urban space. Further, we can start to think about material and symbolic associations between space and property, hegemonic governance and resistance, and the terms which enable the provisional and ambiguous legibility of social phenomena. What follows is an exploration of the relations between advertising, graffiti and urban entrepreneurialism within the context of Euro-American societies. Much of the analysis makes general points about the spatial significance of outdoor advertising and graffiti, but some specific examples and data are taken from the city of Manchester, UK.

A British graffiti writer – ‘Moose’ (Paul Curtis) – has created ‘Symbollix’, a group that are ‘pioneers of innovative forms of advertising’.<sup>1</sup> Moose uses a stencil, wire brush and

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.symbollix.com>



detergent to scrub away the dirt that has accumulated on urban walls and pavements to create sharp-edged logos and taglines that fade over time. Symbollix describes their creations as 'bold and clear, although they are non-permanent and environmentally friendly', an approach that has appealed to several companies which have employed Symbollix to create advertisements with an edgy urban feel to target youth markets. The Smirnoff vodka brand and 'Size?' shoes have had their logos and slogans etched into the grime of city pavements and underpasses. 'Hype' has had its logo scored through layers of flyposters to create a striking design. The Channel Four television programme 'Big Brother' has had its eye logo stencilled into the dirt on road signs, as well as onto pavements and walls (see figure 1). As no paint has been used to create these temporary texts and images, the legal status of the act is ambiguous: rather than a counter-cultural assault like graffiti, it represents a kind of creative 'commercial cleaning' of the city. Claiming to operate in 'areas previously unused or thought about' and to have 'a flexibility with our processes that allows us to work almost anywhere, worldwide', Symbollix also represent a highly entrepreneurial approach to the city's visual landscape and potential consumers in that space. In the space of the city, Symbollix's 'products' or artistic creations sit alongside graffiti and other visual phenomena such as murals (see figure 2) – does this engender a dialogue between them, posit a challenge, or effect a transformation? This relationship between graffiti and advertising, however, is not adequately addressed in the existing literature.

Despite their ubiquity in cities and their impact on the visual landscape, outdoor advertising and graffiti are rarely analysed in conjunction, and when they are, they tend to be framed and compared only as signifying systems (e.g. Stewart 1987). Indeed, advertising's spatial dimension or its impact upon space is rarely considered in the advertising literature except in terms of the (capitalist) conquest of global space through its transnational media networks and market ideologies (e.g. Mattelart 1991). Considering outdoor advertising and graffiti together immediately signals some striking similarities as well as some key differences. On the one hand, Sontag's (1987: 129) account typifies approaches which consider graffiti as a resistant mode of communication, acting as 'a criticism of public reality'. In many approaches, graffiti is framed as a non-commercial, counter-hegemonic or subversive enactment and text, and understood by some sections of society as an attack on the city itself (Austin 2001). In the hands of the powerless, often created in marginal or disregarded urban spaces, graffiti has been understood as a 'mode of outlaw communication' (Keith 2005: 136). Advertising, on the other hand, is seen less as a criticism of public reality and more as exemplifying a capitalist mode of reality that itself deserves criticism (e.g. Goldman 1992; Williamson 2000). Other accounts see advertising as a form of 'capitalist realism', in which its images and words portray not life as it is, but life *as it should be* according to the principles of capitalism – a hegemonic understanding of 'the good life' oriented by the production of, and aspiration for, consumer goods (Schudson 1993). Urban advertising and graffiti thus appear



differently inflected with 'producer motivations' and seem to represent divergent ideals and relationships to mainstream culture and modes of urban governance.

But a subtle approach can begin to tease out complex relationalities. Several accounts have focused on the interconnections between the form, spatiality and motivations of outdoor advertising and graffiti. Best (2003) notes that in Barbados graffiti writers' tags copy the logos of transnational brand names such as Fila and Nike. Lachmann (1988: 237) states that 'taggers compare themselves to advertisers, arguing that they purchase space with their boldness and style rather than with money', and notes that advertisements are rarely targeted by graffiti writers as they admire advertising artistry and see a consonance between the ads' appropriation of space and their own spatial practices. The crossover between advertising and graffiti can be even more direct and indeed commercial. Some advertisements, such as a series for Chrysler's 'PT Cruiser' car, use the motif of graffiti to create an edgy urban feel and 'creative' association for their product. Conversely, as Stewart (1987) argues, graffiti borrows from advertising: despite its status as a mass medium promoting mass-produced goods, advertising's textual address often promises potential consumers identities based on notions of difference and individuality. For Stewart, graffiti appropriates and subverts this empty promise of individuality, and at the same time mirrors advertising's mode of simultaneous distribution, scattering across the city its tags which mark 'the stubborn ghost of individuality and intention in the mass culture, the ironic re-statement of the artist as "brand name"' (Stewart 1987: 174-175). In this account, graffiti works with and then subverts advertising's form and conventions, and acts to reinscribe the agency, intention and individuality which advertising attempts to suppress or channel for its own commercial ends. Stewart's analysis of graffiti as a signifying system is fluent and persuasive, and raises important points about textuality and inscription. But by assuming unambiguous intentions on the part of graffiti-writers and by caricaturing the advertising industry, the account oversimplifies phenomena as both practice and textual product. Using ethnographic data, Halsey and Young (2002) argue that graffiti is a heterogeneous phenomenon and that graffiti writers have a range of different motivations. Although it may appear a counter-intuitive claim, it is also important to recognise advertising as an equally complex and ambivalent form which can be attributed no simple intentions and has few identifiable, unambiguous effects (Cronin 2004; Miller 1997; Schudson 1993). Setting aside the issue of intention as a key comparator, we might instead open up some questions about the social, discursive, and spatial *context* of these two urban forms.

Halsey and Young (2002: 180) note that graffiti's perceived status as "outside" or "beyond" the limits of "proper" expression' is unsurprising considering that the capability to make one's mark legally is circumscribed by the capacity to buy or rent legitimate spaces of inscription such as billboards. This, they suggest, should lead us to question other urban signifying practices such as outdoor advertising and ask if a company such as Nike can be



seen as a 'corporate tagger', a producer of urban scrawl and visual pollution (ibid.). But in what follows, I will argue that the most significant feature of the advertising–graffiti relationship is not merely a formal resemblance or even its potential capacity to question the legitimacy of all manner of urban signifying practices; rather, it is the way in which it embodies, performs and signals a shifting social paradigm of urban entrepreneurialism and its relationship to space and property, an issue signalled by the example of the Symbollix group's advertising noted earlier. On a popular level, this relationship is articulated through the urban ubiquity of forms such as graffiti and outdoor advertising with their hyper-visible marks of identity, artistry, property and ownership. The entrepreneurial drive evident in discourses of cities, and practices in cities, is also expressed and performed at the level of shifting relationships between what is conventionally understood as the mainstream on the one hand, and practices and understandings of resistance on the other.

### **Space, property relations and signs**

Spatiality is a key factor deployed in the practices of defining 'the resistant' and 'the mainstream' or hegemonic, and co-ordinates the social and regulatory response to particular signifying practices accordingly. Hung (2000: 766) notes that as graffiti exists both in the space of the art gallery and on the street, 'to decide which part of it is "inside" or "outside" means precisely to come to terms with one's own positioning in relation to a city at large'. This emphasises social positioning such as class- and race-based in/exclusion as well as spatially distinct urban zones. This positioning operates not only on the level of gallery/street, but on the related and more amorphous terrain of popular commercial culture and works to define illegitimate and legitimate signifying practices in relation to the ownership and performance of those spaces. For instance, a Manchester shop selling youth-oriented streetwear uses graffiti-style artwork as a façade (see figure 3). Here, the (sub)cultural value and 'outsider status' of graffiti is used by a legitimate commercial enterprise as a branding exercise, and the graffiti-style images position the viewer as a potential client of the shop and consumer of its products. In parallel, the 'graffiti-ads' produced by those such as Symbollix are seen as controversial by city councils not because they take a graffiti style or form but because they exist outside the legitimate space of the billboard (a space which is privately owned, commercially rented and its content regulated). In contrast, there is little sanction against graffiti in ruined or derelict areas of the city as such sites are already coded as 'unsightly and excessive' (Edensor 2005: 33). In these unvalued and disorderly spaces, or in spaces which have been temporarily suspended from regimes of value as they undergo a process of transformation, graffiti is deemed less problematic or transgressive as the site's place in property relations is ambiguous or in process (see figure 4).



In these examples it is clear that spatial demarcations are crucial for defining the social significance of texts, images and practices, but the point I wish to emphasise in relation to graffiti and advertising is the significance of the relationship of space to property. Graffiti has been seen as a struggle over inclusion, entitlement and belonging (Keith 2005). And as both advertising and graffiti attempt to lay claim to space, this struggle is framed by key relationships between place, property and ownership. Ley and Cybriwsky's (1974) study claims that black youths use graffiti to make a claim on the world outside the ghetto or to mark turf ownership. And particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, graffiti came embody societal fears that the dispossessed would rise up and take possession of what had been denied them (Milnor 2005). Graffiti's association with 'excessive', resistant or dangerous activity is common and graffiti is often elided with vandalism (Young 2005), or more strongly, seen as a symbolic attack on property. Some accord graffiti considerable power in this regard: Stewart claims that 'graffiti attempts a utopian and limited dissolution of the boundaries of property' (1987: 175). In contrast, advertising represents the mainstream or hegemonic culture of consumer capitalism and has been seen as an emblem, mediator and propagator of principles and practices of property and ownership (Goldman 1992; Leiss et al 2005; Wernick 1992; Williamson 2000). Indeed, the ubiquity of advertising, and its presumed success in commercial persuasion, is often understood as symptomatic of an ever-increasing commodification of society.<sup>2</sup> But such over-arching and unnuanced accounts of advertising and graffiti – the unrealistic optimism at graffiti's challenge to property relations in parallel with the over-drawn pessimism about advertising's impact on society – do not provide a useful analysis of the two forms, nor do they comprehend the more subtle but no less important societal changes that are occurring. An analysis of these two urban forms reveals a broader urban shift which cannot be understood simply as a further commodification of city space or a branding of place. One form of this shift – what we could call a new constellation of phenomena – centres on urban entrepreneurialism's appropriation and exploitation of discourses and practices of creativity and innovation.

### **The excessive or paradoxical city**

If we accept that capitalism is performative and thus always under construction (Thrift 2005), we must recognise that there are shifts in the terms and effects of governance and also in the terms of resistance to this governance. The quotation by Derrida (1998) at the head of the chapter suggests that the city always exceeds what is represented, what is legible, or framed as viable at any one moment and that this openness is articulated, at least in part, by memory and by a diffuse urban promise. And if we take seriously the claim that cities are spaces that

---

<sup>2</sup> For a critique of this tendency see Cronin (2004).



are constantly *in process* (Lefebvre 1991), then we must direct more attention at understanding the shifts in the ways in which the city exceeds its legibility and we must analyse the particularity of urban constellations of practices, ideas, ideals and strategies.

One important way to understand such shifting constellations and the complex relationality between hegemony and resistance is through Gillian Rose's (1993) concept of paradoxical space. In attempting to analyse the place of women in social space and the gendered theoretical structures that underpin many academic understandings of space, Rose challenges conventional demarcations, dichotomies and polarities. She argues that certain spaces can be seen as paradoxical – 'spaces that would be mutually exclusive if charted on a two-dimensional map – centre and margin, inside and outside – are occupied simultaneously' (Rose 1993: 140). Such spaces are 'impossible' in conventional terms but for Rose represent not only women's lived experience of social spaces but also the poverty of conventional (masculinist) geographical theories. Thus in paradoxical space, plurality and contradiction are inherent: 'any position is imagined not only as being located in multiple social spaces, but also as at both poles of each dimension' (Rose 1993: 151). Rose is here drawing on Teresa de Lauretis' (1989) notion of a space 'elsewhere', a space outside the frame of hegemonic knowledge, which functions to define that which is within the frame or space of hegemony knowledges. Understandings of space and social positionings are produced by an oscillating movement between that which is within the frame and the elsewhere or 'space-off', as it would be understood in filmic terms. This elsewhere or space-off is not visible or legible within the frame yet it is implied by the frame: the space of representation articulates with the non-represented, the space-off, or the elsewhere. This articulation – itself the tension which locks the realms together – is the force which generates the very borders of discourse and enables them to be imagined and visualised. But for de Lauretis, this 'elsewhere' is neither a mythic past nor utopian future. It is the blind-spot of discourse, that which is not represented but which is implicated in the construction of what is represented. Thus the space of representation and the elsewhere are,

neither in opposition to one another nor strung along a chain of signification, but they exist concurrently and in contradiction. The movement between them, therefore, is not that of a dialectic, of integration, of a combinatory, or of *différance*, but is the tension of contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy.

(de Lauretis 1989: 26)

Through the tensions inherent in paradoxical space and the nebulous potential of the 'elsewhere', Rose points to how we can begin to imagine other ways of thinking space and



social positionings that are not entirely subordinated to hegemonic discourses.<sup>3</sup> I have been arguing that a shift is occurring on the discursive terrain on which the terms of hegemony and resistance are played out. This discursive terrain can be understood in broad terms as a paradoxical space with all the associated implications of plurality, contradiction and counter-hegemonic potential. And while cities have long been paradoxical spaces, there is a current constellation of space, property relations and images that is articulated by the entrepreneurial city. In Derrida's terms, this is indeed a promise of the city, an openness, and a struggle whose outcomes are at present unclear. Thus, we need not interpret outdoor advertisements only as textual muggers, hurling insults at passers-by (see Banksy 2005), nor as capitalist heat-seeking missiles which efficiently and inevitably channel our consciousness into predefined purchasing habits or consumption-oriented identities. One way to reconsider this paradoxical space and the promise and open-endedness of urban forms like outdoor advertising might be to frame them as 'wish images' in the way Walter Benjamin (2003) outlined in relation to commodities. He imagined that commodities could exceed the role and meaning defined for them by the market and that they could provide the material base from which people could grope towards an understanding (or dream) – albeit hazy and provisional – of a society that could take a form other than that of its current capitalist structure. Such an alternative society is not *represented in or by* commodities in any transparent way, nor is it conventionally legible in their form, but a broad understanding of its contours might nevertheless be released by the ambiguous form that is the commodity. In de Lauretis' terms, this can be seen as an 'elsewhere' which is not immediately visible in commodity capitalism or the entrepreneurial city but nonetheless structures what might be possible for urban futures.

In this spirit, might not the urban hyper-presence of advertisements and the glut of their extravagant textual promises and threats invoke a rather different response from that hoped for by advertising agencies and their clients? Might not this response be a turning away from such an intense consumption-orientation and a triggering of dreams of how we could live otherwise, how cities might be otherwise? Of course, such a response was articulated by the Situationists some years ago (see Debord 1994) and more recently by various counter-hegemonic groups such as The Billboard Liberation Front and Adbusters which subvert the textual content of advertisements, offer critiques of the consumerist logics of Western ways of life, and present alternative conceptions of social relations (see Carducci 2006; Cresswell 1998; Klein 2000).<sup>4</sup> These groups use mainstream advertisements as a trigger and focus for resistance, and as a point of departure for a broader critique of capitalist societies.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Cronin (2000) for a discussion of de Lauretis' (1989) concept of 'an elsewhere' in relation to gender and advertising.

<sup>4</sup> Adbusters' website: <http://www.adbusters.org/home/>. The Billboard Liberation Front's website: <http://www.billboardliberation.com/>. In a more conventionally political sense, advertising billboards in Northern Ireland are also hijacked and used for political slogans (McCormick and Jarman 2005).



Advertisements here do not function as facilitators or catalysts of capitalist modes of consumption, but as the raw materials for elaborating modes of dissent. But advertising, graffiti and counter-cultural activist groups all operate by overwriting urban space with rich layers of texts, images and meanings, subtly altering those meanings in the process. Advertisements build on our (perhaps hazy, imagistic) memories of previous ads offering 'new, improved' products or more entertaining visual display. Graffiti writers and the subverters of advertisements use a process of 'détournement' made famous by the Situationists in which hegemonic meanings are overturned and overwritten in order to jolt passersby from their complacency. Both these hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices are able to function precisely because urban space is a site of multiple and contested meanings, visualities, and practices. They draw on 'the street' not merely as a location or space, but as an idea, an aesthetic, and a potential. This joint openness in understanding the street points to important connections between these forms and practices – a particular constellation in which the openness and promise of the advertisement as wish image takes a broader form from that of the classic 'hegemony and resistance' model offered by many accounts of graffiti and advertising (and its subversion). Such a response might not be restricted to a politicised and articulate activist minority such as the Adbusters group – it also challenges the standardly-conceived distinctions between resistance and hegemony, mainstream culture and the counter-cultural. In different ways, both outdoor advertising and graffiti have been seen as exterior to, or excessive of, mainstream culture: as a commercial form, advertising is thought to *infiltrate* that culture and commodify it (e.g. Goldman 1992; Williamson 2000), and as a counter-cultural form, graffiti has been seen as an outsider form which *transgresses* into mainstream culture and attempts to mark it (e.g. Keith 2005).

It is clear that only a minority of urban dwellers use graffiti-writing as a medium for challenging mainstream culture or as a way of asserting denigrated or invisible identities. For the vast (non-graffiti writing) majority, graffiti's significance is more ambiguous. Indeed, the distinction in advertising and graffiti's status as either inside or outside, mainstream or subversive, cannot be seen as tenable. They occupy a paradoxical space with multiple and contradictory positionings. Neither advertising nor graffiti can be understood simply as extra-ordinary attempts to lay claim to ownership of city spaces, nor simply as external challenges to a generalised mainstream culture as some studies claim: many graffiti writers are firmly embedded in a commercial culture (of fashion, music etc) and, as noted earlier, some even see an affinity between their practices and those of advertising practitioners. With the changes in understandings of the value of city space, as well as the shifts in more diffuse notions of property relationships that urban entrepreneurialism effects, there are subtle and perhaps subversive changes in notions of property and entitlement. The ubiquity of outdoor advertisements and graffiti mean that they have become quotidian and familiar elements of the city. This does not mean that people necessarily like or approve of urban graffiti and outdoor advertising; indeed such forms can be the focus of local discontent or serve for some



as representative of more general societal ills. But because both advertising and graffiti punctuate people's everyday experiences and create an urban vernacular, these forms nevertheless articulate an embeddedness of place and experience alongside a diffuse sense of a possible 'elsewhere'. In effect, they have become framed as *belonging to* the city and its people. For instance, a graffiti piece was commissioned by Manchester's City Art Gallery from local graffiti artist 'Kayze' (Tony Brady) with the aim of creating a backdrop for an exhibition on Manchester city life and popular culture.<sup>5</sup> This commission signals not only how graffiti has come to be seen as a key characteristic of urban life but also highlights its perceived capacity to *mediate* urban space – to act as the vernacular medium for the life and character of a city. Indeed, Manchester's Urbis museum of city life held a graffiti exhibition called 'III Communication' in 2004, creating the UK's largest ever exhibition of street art, featuring ten graffiti artists from around the world.

This explicit deployment of graffiti to capture the street-level essence of the city appears not so far removed from urban entrepreneurialism's emphasis on place marketing, that is, the packaging and advertising of the essence of a particular city to attract tourists and various forms of inward investment. But the recognition and performative enactment of graffiti as an established mediating form of the city is precisely a recognition that forms such as graffiti and advertising *belong to* the city in a way which is rooted, everyday and pedestrian in every sense of the word. They belong to the city as its 'elsewhere' or set of 'wish images' which articulate a dream of how urban life could be otherwise. This is a very different form of property relation from that instanced in corporate ownership of city space, or that embodied in the textual, consumerist exhortations of specific advertisements. It is a rooted sense of place that is marked by – and more strongly – *mediated* by, the presence of advertising panels and billboards and the often opaque poetry of graffiti, while not being reducible to the specific textual content of either form. That is, it is often not the words, images or messages of these forms that carries the most social traction or symbolic potential; it is their explicit mediating presence as a dream-medium of paradoxical space. The medium is not so much the message as the performative enactment of a tacit sense of place and belonging in which people belong to places but places also belong to people. It belongs to them as a right to imagine their lives and their cities in ways beyond the frame of hegemonic discourse. This sense of belonging subsists at a barely tangible and often unarticulated level but nonetheless contains the potential of being tapped and used to challenge modes of governance and specific entrepreneurial initiatives which aim to 'tidy up' and re-brand lived urban spaces. For instance, in 2004 Manchester launched the campaign 'Challenge Manchester – 100 days to a

---

<sup>5</sup> Kayze's website: <http://www.urbandamage.com/>. There is established practice of resituating graffiti from the street to the art galleries and reframing it as art, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s (see Milnor 2005). Manchester's City Gallery and Urbis museum's displays of graffiti apparently aim to draw on its vernacular capacity to embody the experience, look and feel of the city rather than to frame graffiti explicitly as 'art'.



clean city' which aimed to mobilise the public to create a tidier urban environment, targeting various 'urban problems' of litter, graffiti, and fly-posting.

But systems of governance, whether in the form of city councils or advertising companies, are sensitive to subtle social shifts such as this mildly subversive sense of belonging that subsists outside the hegemonic discursive framework of entrepreneurialism and urban rebranding. Hegemonic forces, too, can mobilise the paradoxical quality of spaces to their own ends – as Rose (1993) reminds us, paradoxical spaces may not remain emancipatory. These hegemonic systems respond by developing a range of strategies to identify and channel shifts in attitudes: focus groups, mapping projects, stakeholder consultations, demographic analyses combined with qualitative research methods such as interviews and consumer profiling.<sup>6</sup> But it is important to recognise that such initiatives represent not the dominance of hegemonic forces, but are born of a reactive anxiety centred on the need to *know*, and the difficulties in controlling, the social world. Amin and Thrift (2002: 129) argue that such systems of governance 'acknowledge that they are dealing in part with the unknown and ungovernable; they do not just tell their inhabitants what to do, they learn from them'. These systems sense shifts in the make-up of cities and changes in people's relationships to cities. At the same time, they recognise how both cities and people exceed the multitude of representations that are produced by the many technologies of knowledge-production that those same systems initiate. Such strategies should therefore be understood not as a further evidence of such groups' unassailable power but as a sign of their ignorance, their limitations, and an instance of organisational improvisation rather than systematised, rule-based responses (Amin and Thrift 2002).

### **Creativity and innovation as urban paradoxes**

City councils and private entrepreneurs have responded recently by attempting to tap into this excessive, imaginative, innovative quality of people's urban engagements by flagging up and trying to exploit the notion of 'creativity' and, in parallel, the creative industries. Some time ago now, Harvey (1989: 9) argued that the shift from managerialism to entrepreneurialism meant that cities had to appear 'innovative, exciting, creative', citing the UK cities of Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool as examples of urban reinvention along just such lines. But now there is an intensification of such discourses in the UK and a diffusion in the parameters of what is understood by the innovative and the creative. The advertising industry has long been associated with creativity (see Nixon 2003) and by siting its offices in key urban spaces has contributed to cities' 'creative', innovative, forward-looking image which has been important for attracting inward investment (O'Connor and Wynne 1996). Recent academic and policy-oriented literature on 'creative cities' tends to focus rather instrumentally on the potential of

---

<sup>6</sup> See Cronin (2006) for a discussion of outdoor advertising companies' research strategies and their commercially-oriented attempts to tap into the rhythms of the city.



creativity to generate prosperity (Dvir and Pasher 2004; Healey 2004; Landry 2000). Richard Florida (2002: xiii) has famously claimed that 'human creativity is the ultimate economic resource' and others maintain that cities are the ultimate creative milieu (Leadbeater and Oakley 1999). In economic terms, some claim that 'the industries of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will depend increasingly on the generation of knowledge through creativity and innovation' (Landry and Bianchini 1995: 4). Others, however, are most sceptical of the potential of creative initiatives to deliver the results imagined by city entrepreneurs. Indeed some sectors of the 'creative industries' also question this impulse, particularly in relation to public art's assumed role. The artists 'Hewitt & Jordan' have used billboards to disseminate various provocations that challenge hegemonic narratives about the 'good' of public art used in entrepreneurial initiatives. These billboards carry slogans such as, 'The economic function of public art is to increase the value of private property' and 'The function of public art for regeneration is to sex up the control of the under-classes'.<sup>7</sup>

The context for this recent emphasis on creative cities is the well-documented shift from industrial production in urban spaces to urban service economies reliant on 'the new knowledge economy'. This knowledge-based economy is understood as design-intensive, and centred on the production of signs and the trade in information (Lash and Urry 1994; Leadbetter 1999) and, in effect, produces an 'informational city' (Harvey 1989: 10). In this new knowledge-based economy, or 'the cultural circuit of capitalism', creativity, commodities and innovation have been seen to take a central role (Thrift 2005: 6). The 'culture industries' such as advertising, music, film, and publishing play a central part in this shift, but in a move which mirrors that of UK government policy, these sectors have been reframed by academics as 'creative industries'. This reconceptualisation seeks to describe 'the conceptual and practical convergence of the creative arts (individual talent) with Cultural Industries (mass scale), in the context of new media technologies within a new knowledge economy' (Hartley 2005: 5). The creative industries are central to how the UK government frames growth initiatives and international competition. In the 2001 Creative Industries Mapping Document, the government flags the importance of the UK's creative industries, citing the significance of these industries in the new knowledge economy and the government's desire to make Britain 'the world's creative hub' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2001). The Department's 2004 economic estimates state that the creative industries accounted for 8% of Gross Value Added in 2002, with an average growth of 6% per annum between 1997 and 2002 and a 9% growth per annum for the advertising industry. While the Department's figures may be contested, the overall aim of the various reports was to raise the profile of the creative industries and their economic potential, an aim that they have achieved (Oakley 2004).

---

<sup>7</sup> Hewitt & Jordan's website: <http://www.hewittandjordan.com/>. See Miles (2005) for a discussion of public art in urban spaces.



Certain cities have been seen as forerunners in this national drive to tap creativity and innovation. In a speech in June 2005, the Minister for Creative Industries cited Manchester as an example of how the creative industries can transform a city. And indeed Manchester City Council was a founding member of 'Manchester: Knowledge Capital'. Established in 2002 with the aim of 'stimulating and supporting increased business innovation from research, science and knowledge', it includes the strategic health authority, four universities and a range of businesses. One of its key initiatives, 'City Growth Strategy', aims to tackle inner city deprivation by investing in several areas including 'creative and media'. The Council's 'Northern Quarter Development Framework' cites one area of the city (the Northern Quarter or 'N4') as having a major concentration of creative industries such as advertising agencies and artists' studios. It claims that 'the creative businesses in the N4 will be of growing importance in a world where employment generation is increasingly based on knowledge, innovation, new ideas and entrepreneurialism'. The document goes on to stress that one of the key challenges to achieving this development and image change in the Northern Quarter is the presence of derelict buildings, empty sites and associated problems such as graffiti. This is rather ironic as the bohemian, 'creative' character and appeal of the Northern Quarter is generated precisely by its 'edgy' feel, its ramshackle aesthetic and the sense of subversion created by its ageing buildings marked by graffiti.

This stress on urban creativity and innovation is pervasive and has a distinct entrepreneurial emphasis. In a policy-oriented approach, Dvir and Pasher (2004: 16) argue for the fostering of 'urban innovation engines' – complex systems which include a range of participants such as people, relationships, values, technologies, and physical and financial infrastructure. Innovation is here understood as 'the process for turning knowledge and ideas into value' (ibid.). It is notable that in this and many other governmental and policy interventions, creativity and innovation are seen as both resources and income-generators, but also as representative of the excessive, unpredictable, ungovernable elements of urban life. By drawing on these wild, creative aspects, urban entrepreneurial initiatives hope to both tame them and to capitalise on them. As I have argued, one irony in this is that by placing an emphasis on the unpredictable and the ungovernable, these initiatives open up the field for new articulations of resistant or subversive possibilities. By intervening and attempting to channel these forces and thus create a new constellation of practices and ideas, modes of governance inevitably unleash a whole host of other reactions, interconnections, paradoxes and possibilities.



## Conclusion

Sharon Zukin notes that 'as cities have developed as service economies, they have both propagated and been taken hostage by an aesthetic urge' (1996: 44). Many accounts have followed this insight citing the development of galleries, public art projects, renovation of derelict areas of cities, cleaning and rebranding initiatives (such as Manchester's '100 days' project). This tendency is also evident in the desire to visually re-present particular cities back to their inhabitants, as in Manchester City Gallery's exhibition of life in the city, Urbis' staging of aspects of city life, or advertising's use of urban tropes such as graffiti on its panels and billboards. But city spaces are contested, multiple and paradoxical: they signal an elsewhere that is outside the frame of hegemonic discourse and so is not clearly visible or legible in familiar terms. Yet this elsewhere is also constitutive of that which is within the frame – advertising acts as capitalist lure but also exceeds this narrowly defined role; graffiti is a mark of marginal or explicitly counter-hegemonic groups but also forms a poetry that speaks to many mild or inarticulate public dissatisfactions. Thus advertising and graffiti, although differentially positioned in relation to mainstream, commercial and hegemonic cultures, also function to connect city dwellers to a dream-space, a barely articulated or nebulous sense that urban life could be different. Like Benjamin's commodities, advertisements and graffiti can act as 'wish-images' that bridge the here and the elsewhere, the present situation and different possibilities. Unlike Benjamin's account in which wish-images are longings for a utopia, in Rose's (1993) and de Lauretis' (1989) terms, this elsewhere is part of the 'now' and the 'here' and is the dormant or presently barely legible potential for social change.

This doubling of the mainstream and the subversive also works on the level of property, space and belonging. Urban entrepreneurialism's intensified emphasis on the aesthetics of city space and 'the street' has some unintended consequences: people may sense that forms which mark their everyday visual experience of the city such as outdoor advertising and graffiti *belong to* the city in ways which exceed the terms of property relations, spatial relationships and profit-orientation. And people can come to feel that they own or have some entitlement of belonging with regard to the 'buzz' or creative feel of their city. This is often articulated in a more diffuse sense in popular critiques of development or regeneration destroying the 'character' of certain urban areas. This tendency strains against the reality that the spectacle of the city is increased *owned* by private interests, or public-private initiatives, whether through rebranding projects or image-oriented building projects. But resistant or counter-hegemonic impulses cannot be suppressed. These responses are being articulated and performed in new ways, ways in which space and property are re-articulated by urban entrepreneurialism. Thus, the hegemonic and the resistant are woven together in particular constellations and this struggle is worked through space and spatial practices such as those articulated in outdoor advertising and graffiti. This is a terrain that has not been fully conquered by private interests as there is no such thing as a clearly defined 'capitalist space' and capitalism cannot be considered a cohesive or closed system (Lefebvre 1991: 11).



Instead, it is open, 'so open, indeed, that it must rely on violence to endure' (Lefebvre 1991: 11). That violence may take many forms, in this case that of an incorporation and rechanneling of creativity and innovation in the entrepreneurial initiative. But this openness also attests to the subtle power of the 'elsewhere' inherent in the paradoxical spaces of capitalism. Shifts in both governance and counter-hegemonic responses are unpredictable and may often be inaccessible to current modes of knowing (whether generated by academic analysis or by corporate governance). As Derrida notes, the city's memory and promise escapes any particular time's frameworks for representation. It may be that these shifts set new questions that exceed capitalism's modes of knowing.

## References

- Amin, Ash, and Nigel Thrift. *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*. Cambridge: Polity, 2002.
- Austin, Joe. *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Banksy. *Wall and Piece*. London: Century, 2005.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Best, Curwen. "Reading Graffiti in the Caribbean Context." *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, 4 (2003): 828-852.
- Carducci, Vince. "Culture Jamming: A Sociological Approach." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6, 1 (2006): 116-138.
- Cresswell, Tim. "The Crucial 'Where' of Graffiti: A Geographical Analysis of Reactions to Graffiti in New York." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10, 3 (1992): 329-344.
- Cresswell, Tim. "Night discourse: Producing/Consuming Meaning on the Street". In *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space*, edited by N. R. Frye. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Cronin, Anne M. "Advertising and the metabolism of the city: urban space, commodity rhythms." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* .....(2006):.....
- Cronin, Anne M. *Advertising Myths: The Strange Half-Lives of Images and Commodities*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Cronin, Anne M. *Advertising and Consumer Citizenship: Gender, Images and Rights*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.



- de Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of Gender*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 1994.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport. *Creative Industries Mapping Document*.  
[http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive\\_2001/](http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive_2001/)
- Derrida, Jacques. "Generations of a city: memory, prophecy, responsibilities." In *Open City*, edited by J. Knechtel. Concord: House of Anansi Press Ltd, 1998.
- Dvir, Ron and Edna Pasher. "Innovation Engines for Knowledge Cities: An Innovation Ecology Perspective." *Journal of Knowledge Management* 8, 5 (2004): 16-27.
- Edensor, Tim. *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005.
- Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.
- Goldman, Robert. (1992) *Reading Ads Socially*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Hall, Tim, and Phil Hubbard. Eds. *The Entrepreneurial City: Geographies of Politics, Regime and Representation*. Chichester, New York, Weinheim, Brisbane, Singapore, Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1998.
- Halsey, Mark, and Alison Young. "The Meanings of Graffiti and Municipal Administration." *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 35, 2 (2002): 165-186.
- Hannigan, John. *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Hartley, John. "Creative Industries." In *Creative Industries*, edited by J. Hartley. Oxford, Malden, Carleton: Blackwell, 2005.
- Harvey, David. "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism." *Geografiska Annaler* 71B (1989): 3-17.
- Healey, Patsy. "Creativity and Urban Governance." *Policy Studies* 25, 2 (2004): 87-102.
- Hung, Wu. "Zhang Dali's *Dialogue*: Conversation with a City." *Public Culture* 12, 3 (2000): 749-768.
- Judd, Dennis R., and Susan S. Fainstein. Eds. *The Tourist City*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Kearns, Greg, and C. Philo. Eds. *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present*. Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1993.
- Keith, Michael. *After the Cosmopolitan? Multicultural Cities and the Future of Racism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.



- Klein, Naomi. *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. London: Flamingo, 2000.
- Lachmann, Richard. "Graffiti as Career and Ideology." *American Journal of Sociology* 94, 2 (1988): 229-250.
- Landry, Charles. *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. London: Earthscan Publications, 2000.
- Landry, Charles, and Franco Bianchini. *The Creative City*. London: Demos and Comedia, 1995.
- Lash, Scott, and John Urry. *Economies of Signs and Space*. London: Sage, 1994.
- Leadbetter, Charles. *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy*. London: Penguin, 1999.
- Leadbetter, Charles, and Kate Oakley. *The Independents: Britain's New Cultural Entrepreneurs*. London: Demos, 1999.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. D. Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- Leiss, William et al. *Social Communication in Advertising: Consumption in the Mediated Marketplace*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Ley, David, and Roman Cybriwsky. "Urban Graffiti as Territorial Markers." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 64, 4 (1974): 491-505.
- McCarthy, Anna. *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space*. Durham and London: Duke University, 2001.
- McCormick, Jonathan, and Neil Jarman. "Death of a Mural." *Journal of Material Culture* 10, 1 (2005): 49-71.
- Mattelart, Armand. *Advertising International: The Privatisation of Public Space*. Trans. Michael Chanan. London and New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Miles, Malcolm. "Interruptions: Testing the Rhetoric of Culturally Led Urban Development." *Urban Studies* 42, 5/6 (2005): 889-911.
- Miller, Daniel. *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford: Berg, 1997.
- Milnor, Kristina. "Gendering Ghetto and Gallery in the Graffiti Art Movement, 1977-1986." In *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating Morality and Space* edited by L. Dowler, J. Carubia and B. Szczygiel. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Nixon, Sean. *Advertising Cultures: Gender, Commerce, Creativity*. London: Sage, 2003.
- O'Connor, Justin, and Derek Wynne. Eds. *From the Margins to the Centre: Cultural Production and Consumption in the Post-Industrial City*. Aldershot: Arena, 1996.



- Oakley, Kate. "Not So Cool Britannia: The Role of Creative Industries in Economic Development." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7, 1 (2004): 67-78.
- Rose, Gillian. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity, 1993.
- Schudson, Michael. *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Sontag, Susan. "The Pleasure of the Image." *Art in America* 75 (1987): 122-131.
- Stewart, Susan. "Ceci Tuera Cela: Graffiti as Crime and Art." In *Life After Postmodernism: Essays on Value and Culture*, edited by J. Fekete. London: Macmillan, 1987.
- Thrift, Nigel. *Knowing Capitalism*. London: Sage, 2005.
- Wernick, Andrew. *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression*. London: Sage, 1992.
- Williamson, Judith. *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. London and New York: Marion Boyars, 2000.
- Young, Alison. *Judging the Image: Art, Value, Law*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Zukin, Sharon. *The Cultures of Cities*. Malden, Oxford and Carleton: Blackwell, 1995
- Zukin, Sharon. "Space and Symbols in an Age of Decline". In *Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Metropolis*, edited by A.D. King. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996.