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# **Where do we draw the line? Graffiti in Maboneng, Johannesburg**

MARCH 2019

**Researched and written by**

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**A Partnership of:**



**WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?**

**GRAFFITI IN MABONENG, JOHANNESBURG**

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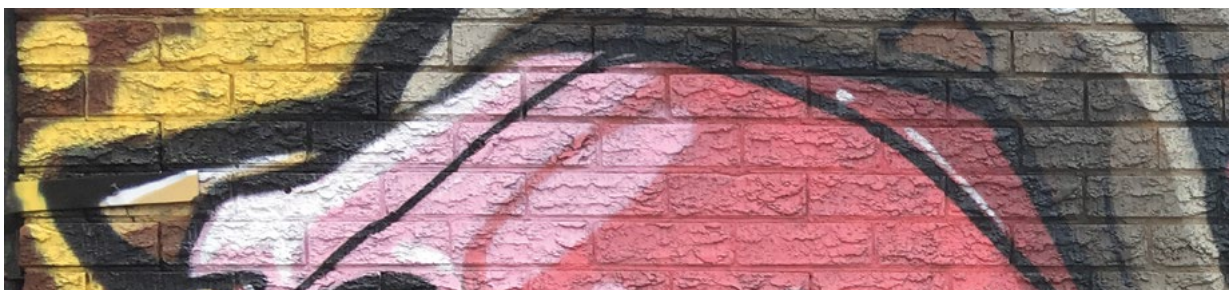
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# **Where do we draw the line?**

## Graffiti in Maboneng, Johannesburg

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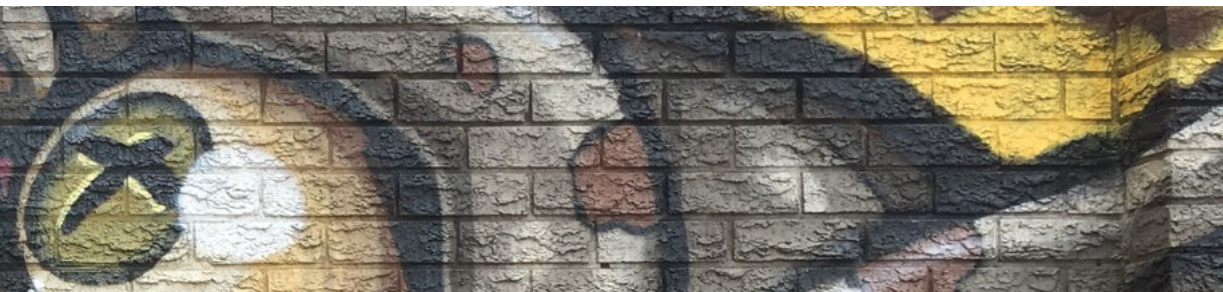
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## Acronyms, abbreviations and terms

<b>3D</b>	Three-dimensional
<b>ANC</b>	African National Congress
<b>CBD</b>	Central Business District
<b>CID</b>	City Improvement District
<b>CoJ</b>	City of Johannesburg
<b>GCR</b>	Gauteng City-Region
<b>JDA</b>	Johannesburg Development Agency
<b>NYC</b>	New York City
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>US</b>	United States



<b>Black book</b>	Books where graffiti creators draft or jot down ideas; these are similar to sketch books.
<b>Bomb</b>	When graffiti artists tag or paint over another artist's piece.
<b>Formal/ traditional art forms</b>	Art, commonly paintings or sculpture, found in gallery spaces.
<b>Graffiti</b>	Graffiti refers to public writings or expressions found in a variety of spaces and surfaces, from toilet cubicles to bus stops and large walls. In this paper, we use the term to refer to modern graffiti, frequently created using spray paint, but the term also encompasses street art which includes a wider spectrum of media and types of art.
<b>Graffiti styles</b>	All terms used to describe different graffiti styles such as throw-up, blockbuster, heaven, masterpiece, wildstyle, etc.
<b>Hip hop</b>	A culture including the practices of graffiti, breakdancing and music, also known as rap music. Sometimes the term refers only to hip hop music.
<b>Legal walls</b>	Designated permission walls (assigned by local authorities) which are managed by graffiti creators without the interference of local authorities.
<b>Piece</b>	A term referring to an instance of graffiti.
<b>Public art</b>	Primarily sculptures or paintings commissioned and located in the public sphere. In some contexts public art includes graffiti.
<b>Street art</b>	Art comprised of a variety of media such as installations, performances, murals, etc. This type of art is commonly seen as part of the post-graffiti movement. Also see 'public art'.
<b>Tag</b>	A simple graffiti piece of letters, a name or signature.



## Abstract

Graffiti is a controversial subject beset with ambiguities and contradictions. The global success of graffiti artists such as Banksy, or Melbourne's booming graffiti tourism, has blurred the lines between what some regard as vandalism and some as public art. More and more, graffiti is being seen as a valuable, rather than a negative, urban aesthetic, contributing to placemaking by creating meaningful or identifiable spaces. Contemporary graffiti in South Africa draws from the American hip hop movement of the 1970s, but South African graffiti also has a history of political commentary dating back to how it was deployed in resistance to apartheid. Today there is a rich and vibrant graffiti culture in and around central Johannesburg.

In 2016, Johannesburg's mayor, Herman Mashaba, declared that he would eradicate graffiti through stricter by-laws to create an 'investor-friendly environment' in the city (Sosibo 2016). However, this is arguably at odds with the City of Johannesburg's (CoJ's) own policies of urban redevelopment to the extent that these rest on programmes to support public art and promote tourism opportunities.

Through a case study of Maboneng, a precinct in the inner city of Johannesburg, we examine how graffiti can contribute to the potential for tourism and public and private investment in the inner city of Johannesburg. The Maboneng precinct began in 2009 with the completion of 'Arts on Main', an artists' space

in a renovated industrial building. Over the last decade, Maboneng has become an iconic example of how investing in 'creative spaces', 'creative industries' and 'creative tourism' can be used to drive urban renewal of previously disused or derelict urban environments. The developers of Maboneng have created a strong public and street art presence, both physically and digitally. The area now boasts several large-scale murals produced through street art festivals as well as artistic commissions. In addition, the area has attracted significant attention from graffiti artists, which we argue contributes substantially to the aesthetic identity of and tourist activity in Maboneng.

This paper uses photographs of graffiti to trace Maboneng's development and locate graffiti within the precinct. Through visual and spatial analysis, we explore the ambiguities of how graffiti and urban places are defined. We demonstrate that graffiti has aesthetic value in that it signifies the redevelopment of the neighbourhood, distinguishes the area from surrounding spaces and projects a global aesthetic. In these respects we show how graffiti is being leveraged to nurture urban development, creative economies and tourism. On the other hand, we also consider how graffiti continues to contest the production and ownership of public space in the Maboneng precinct, even as it becomes an increasingly commodified component of a redeveloped urban environment.









## Introduction

In 2016, the newly elected mayor of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba, announced his intention to eradicate graffiti in Johannesburg's urban centre as part of his aim to bring investment and development to the inner city (Sosibo 2016). Mashaba's strategy reflects pervasive views amongst local authorities that graffiti is an element of urban decay or neglect and that it is symptomatic of 'crime and grime' in an area. These perspectives are increasingly at odds with global trends over the last twenty years that have seen the rise to stardom of graffiti writer and artist Banksy and the success of Melbourne's graffiti alleys. Some cities, such as Bogota, Colombia, have attempted to implement graffiti-friendly policies but with limited success (Hopson 2017).

Emerging alongside breakdancing and rap music as part of hip hop culture, graffiti has long proliferated in the urban context. The urban environment presents a multitude of surfaces and objects to mark and, simultaneously, an audience to view these marks. For many writers, graffiti is an expression of oneself in an environment that otherwise limits individual expression. Some forms of graffiti are an explicit commentary on the control, use or design of urban spaces. As graffiti and images of graffiti circulate in galleries and on the internet and social media, its aesthetic profile has been raised. However, its relationship to space and environment

is over-shadowed or absent altogether. This paper forms part of a larger project, 'Graffiti in the City', that aims to understand the role of graffiti in the urban environments of Gauteng and eThekweni in South Africa. Using an online application, the project collects data about graffiti, including geolocations, photographs and metadata, in these locations. The project aims to provide more detailed analyses of the locations, surfaces and densities of graffiti in space.

Graffiti is a term which is applied to a wide spectrum of practices, from vandalism to street art. Several scholars have emphasised the need for a framework or theory to encompass the contradictions and tensions inherent to the practice, reception and management of graffiti (Visconti et al. 2010; White 2001). Graffiti can be both 'art and crime' (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011, 130) and it 'ought not to be condemned, nor celebrated, without due attention given to the ambiguities inherent in its various manifestations' (White 2001, 253). Graffiti's occupation of public space and the ownership of that space is frequently contested regardless of any particular property rights. Although public space is intended to be accessible to all, it is frequently managed through powerful public and private groups. In this regard, the contention of graffiti is not dissimilar from debates surrounding public art (Miles 1997).

A defining element of graffiti is its public urban context. Its publicness has made it controversial as vandalism but accessible as a form of art. The practice of graffiti is frequently a response to, or commentary on, the urban environment. In turn, local authorities are compelled to respond to instances of graffiti. At the heart of these practices are questions about the design and control of public space. These questions are

also related to the aesthetics of urban space and who governs these aesthetics. Both the aesthetics and the practices of graffiti are key to understanding graffiti in the urban environment. Arguably, how we read graffiti is explicitly tied to its context. Indeed, even distinctions which cause us to see graffiti either as art or as vandalism are, for the most part, rooted in a reading of context, placement and urban fabric, rather than skill



or content. Yet graffiti is also a marker of public space. Graffiti inscribes our shared social spaces – beyond individual, private spheres – in public spaces and on public infrastructure.

This paper provides an in-depth review of graffiti – its history, practices and aesthetics – and also examines the relationship between the urban environment and graffiti through a case study of Maboneng, Johannesburg. Maboneng was selected because it is a site that has recently seen significant investment and redevelopment but also has a vibrant graffiti scene. It is not the only precinct in the Gauteng City-Region (GCR) with redevelopment and graffiti occurring simultaneously, but these activities are particularly richly concentrated in Maboneng. The study was conducted through site visits and tours of Maboneng, during which we photographed and documented graffiti sites in the area. The photographs were geotagged and from this information we were able to map the locations of graffiti while including other data such as scale and graffiti type. A full description of the method is detailed from page 32. The focus on a single case study limits our ability to understand how graffiti practices shift in different neighbourhoods, which our research interviews suggest is in fact the case. We hope to address this in future research through the larger project.

The first half of this paper aims to understand the role of graffiti in its urban context. In the first three sections we examine the history, practice, aesthetics and dialogue of graffiti, both abroad and in South Africa. In the first section we look at centuries-old traditions of markings on walls, which intersect with the birth of hip hop culture. In South Africa, there is a further intersection with protest graffiti for much of the twentieth century. In the next section we trace graffiti's relationship to the urban environment: from vandalism to dialogue to outdoor galleries. In the third section we explore the spectrum of the aesthetics of graffiti from a text-based expression to the murals of street art. The sections in this first half of the paper serve to illustrate the transitions graffiti has made over time and to highlight the fluid nature of graffiti, both in space and in the way that it is conceived. The discussion examines how graffiti has been tied to urban blight and decay, vandalism and crime. It also traces

the way in which graffiti has gained a more legitimate social status, for example through commissioned murals or the work of famed international artists. This calls into question who decides the aesthetic of the urban environment and who has a right to participate in the production of urban space. Indeed, part of the common discourse of graffiti is a commentary on the spaces and structures of urban environments that are neglected or ignored.

In the second half of the paper we focus on a single case study, Maboneng, which is an area of redevelopment in Johannesburg's inner city, established in 2009. The neighbourhood has transformed through investment in the environment and the upgrading of dozens of buildings in the precinct, with a focus on the creative economy. Graffiti and street art are prevalent in the area and have contributed to the branding of the area as a creative space. Through a photographic essay and mapping, we analyse the spatial and visual elements of graffiti in the area. The case study shows, in detail, the relationship between graffiti and the urban environment but also how graffiti relates to larger processes of urban and economic development in the city.

Graffiti can have negative consequences for public space beyond the devaluation of property. Graffiti has been used to express anti-semitic, racist and fascist sentiments in the public domain and has very recently been implicated in a process of 'artwashing', where the work of artists in a neighbourhood is used to distract from the process of gentrification (Francis 2017). The broad meaning of graffiti in urban space is quite rapidly shifting. This is related to the way in which graffiti has been integrated into more formal urban processes and is an extension of its commodification. The research demonstrates that graffiti has aesthetic value in the urban environment. This aesthetic value signifies the redevelopment of a neighbourhood, distinguishing the area at a local level but also linking it to a global aesthetic and approach. Using the case study of Maboneng we also show that graffiti is leveraged in nurturing urban development, creative economies and tourism. Graffiti continues to contest the production and ownership of public space even as it becomes increasingly commodified in the urban environment.







# The history of graffiti

## Defining graffiti and street art

Graffiti, according to Whitehead (2004), refers to words or drawings scratched or scribbled on a wall in a private or public space. Graffiti is the plural of the Italian word *graffito*, which means a little scratch (Loeffler 2012), but the word is of Greek origin and comes from *graphein*, and the Latin word *graphire* both of which mean 'to write' (White 2014). These terms encompass graffiti's early origins but do not capture the practice's evolution over the last fifty to sixty years. Common media used to create graffiti are spray paints, pencils and inks (Grider 1997 in Rabiega 2015). Modern graffiti, however, is characterised by the use of spray paint, invented in 1949, enabling quick and bold applications. Graffiti began as simple tags and progressed to full-blown art pieces as new forms and styles emerged (see Figure 1). Tagging consists of letters in which alphabetic style, use of colours, and crafted script are highly valued and as a result is frequently only legible to insiders (Gross and Gross 1993). The stylised script emphasises textual and graphic over pictorial features. When this occurs it is not unusual for the artist to make a smaller tag in

a corner that is a more readable version of the larger and more elaborate piece (MacGillivray and Curwen 2007, 358). Graffiti is found on public property or on private property adjacent to public space, such as transportation systems, subways and buses and in transit shelters, vehicles, walls facing streets, statues, monuments and traffic signs (Weisel 2002). Graffiti is undeniably urban in concept, execution and ideology and 'is considered a transgressive practice in urban cities' (Mackay 2015, 11).

The modern graffiti art scene has evolved to contain a rich variety of universal graffiti styles. The list below cites examples from Maboneng (illustrated in Figure 1 on page 14).

- Tags (see Figure 1a) – an individual's or crew's name, usually using one colour.
- Throw-ups (see Figure 1b) – similar to tags, throw-ups use three bubble letters at most and are found on the outside of walls and trains (Loeffler 2012). They are characterised by two colours, one used for outlines and the other for filling in (Penfold 2017).
- Blockbusters (see Figure 1c) – also the signature of artists, usually in large block letters covering a large space (entire blocks/train bodies), with

- Masterpieces aka ‘pieces’ (see Figure 1d) – considered a hip hop form of graffiti (Hawthorn et al. 2012), masterpieces require a significant amount of skill as they are more elaborate than tags and throw-ups and are stylistically drawn to have fill and background colours. Masterpieces are commonly circulated in ‘black books’ to showcase an artist’s work (MacGillivray and Curwen 2007).
- Wildstyles (see Figure 1e) – an elaborate version of a throw-up consisting of interlocking letters, angles, curves, arrows and spikes, rendering the piece unreadable to non-graffiti artists, but giving an indication of the flow of movement (Whitehead 2004).
- Posters/stickers (see Figure 1f) – are easily executed as they are brought to the graffiti site already produced, ready to be pasted onto the wall or surface. The only difference between the two is size – posters are larger than stickers.
- 3Ds (see Figure 1g) – give an illusion that the graffiti is three-dimensional (Whitehead 2004).
- Heavens (see Figure 1h) – any of the aforementioned graffiti styles which are located in a place that may be hard to get to, such as at the top of a tall building. Graffiti artists of these works gain a lot of recognition and respect from their peers (Ion 2017).
- Stencils (see Figure 1i) – intricate graffiti writings produced by spraying over a stencil placed against a wall (Ion 2017).

In the 1980s new graffiti artists and graffiti techniques emerged. Today this is commonly referred to as urban or street art but is also termed the post-graffiti movement. This shift was due to the increasing popularity of graffiti and discourses that challenge the indiscriminate criminalisation of the practice. The terms ‘post-graffiti’ and ‘street art’ both emerged in the United States (US) and were used to draw a distinction between graffiti art and vandalism (Whitehead 2004). While graffiti is often characterised by works ranging from tagging through to elaborate pieces with a focus on stylised words and text – including the tag name of the artist/writer and their associated crew – street art encompasses a variety of media including the use of stencils, posters, stickers, installations (Whitehead

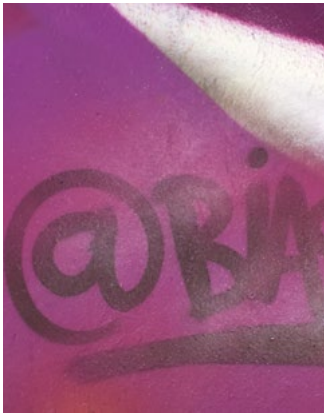
2004), murals, photocopies, paper cut-outs, mosaics, performances and video projections in urban streets (Chung 2009). Street art is practised by graffiti artists or retired graffiti artists (McAuliffe 2012) but can also include the work of traditional artists.

For some people the distinction between graffiti and street art is a critical one and some graffiti artists resent artists for moving into the domain of street art without spending years on the streets building an urban presence. We use the term ‘graffiti’ in this paper to refer to modern graffiti styles and practices encompassing street art or post-graffiti. Street art is an extension of graffiti practices and aesthetics and it is important to understand how both forms of graffiti interact with the urban environment. In the rest of this section we trace the history of graffiti from historical scratchings to a contemporary public art form. In the second and third sections we consider the practices and aesthetics of graffiti.

## The origins of graffiti and modern graffiti

While modern graffiti only rose to prominence in the 1960s (Mettler 2012), curators have shown that graffiti art forms came into existence long before the twentieth century and can be traced to the earliest times when cavemen started to ‘scratch’ the world they saw around them on the walls of their caves (Sehgal 2013). The term ‘graffiti’ was originally used to describe inscriptions and other writings found in historical and heritage sites or cities such as Pompeii (Whitehead 2004). These writings are thought to have been used for a number of purposes, such as to indicate brothels, as proclamations of love and as expressions of political discontent (White 2014). Other references to graffiti date back to 1407 in Italy where it was associated with social movements and other societal issues such as epidemics, natural disasters, records of wars as well as the demolition and erection of buildings (Plesch 2002). During this time, graffiti-like art forms were fast increasing in other countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) (Chung 2009). In the twentieth century, ‘Foo/Kilroy was here’ writings were sighted where soldiers were stationed in the first and second world

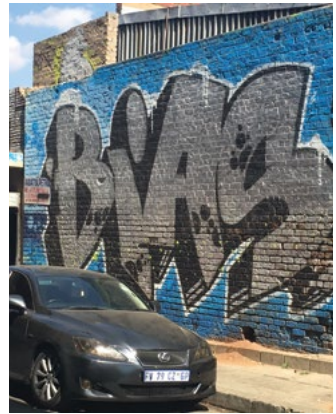




(a) Tag



(b) Throw-up



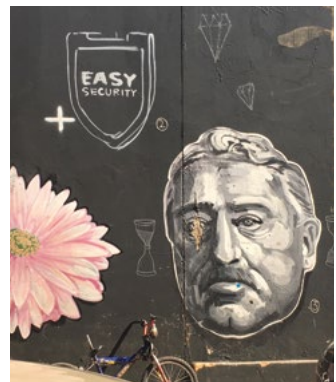
(c) Blockbuster



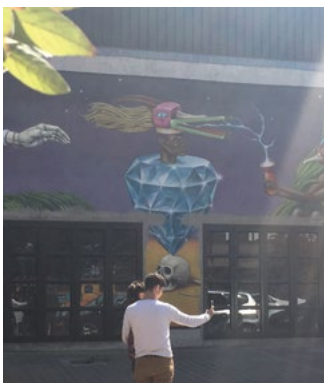
(d) Masterpiece



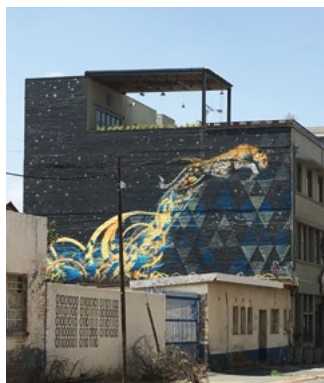
(e) Wildstyle



(f) Poster/sticker



(g) 3D



(h) Heaven



(i) Stencil

Figure 1: **Graffiti styles.**

wars as well as the Korean War (Bates 2014; Huebner 2005). At the same time, writings on roads and railways by the homeless, territorial markings by gang members in Chicago, political inscriptions, writings of children's names on street corners, and proclamations of love on tree trunks and the built fabric were not uncommon (Gastman and Neelon 2011).

While there is a long history of graffiti-like writings in many places, historians have traced the origins of modern graffiti to deprived areas of New York City (from here on referred to as New York) and Philadelphia in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. The earliest graffiti writer has been noted as TAK 183, a bicycle messenger who wrote his tags all around New York (Rabiega 2015). However, graffiti was popularised by writers such as Cornbread, Tity, Kool Klepto and others, whose tags were omnipresent throughout the US (Gastman and Neelon 2012), mostly in low-income residential areas. Global travel and media introduced hip hop to a wider audience and led to the international recognition of graffiti art forms (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2010; Loeffler 2012). These media included the release of the glossy artwork book, *Subway Art* by Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper, and documentaries such as *Beat Street* (Heathcote 2000) and *Buffalo Gals* – the latter a music video by Malcolm McLaren. The *Buffalo Gals* video clip introduced hip hop music and breakdancing, while also showing some members of the crew writing in spray paint in the background (McAuliffe 2012). In this way, the aesthetics and styles of modern graffiti reached many diverse parts of the world at the same time.

In European countries the hip hop scene emerged in the mid-1980s in places such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain but was only popularised in the 1990s (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2010). While modern graffiti styles were popularised by artists in the US, graffiti writings can be traced back to as early as the 1960s in Paris (Kostov 2014). In France, graffiti included stencil art in the 1970s at a time when the graffiti scene had just gained popularity in the US. The French graffiti scene has a history of being embroiled in politics and societal matters, beginning with the 'savage views' posted in 1971 and, more recently, anti-Muslim graffiti after Islamic militants killed 130 people in November 2015 (Chung 2015). Consequently, the public often associates graffiti with

times of social unrest, and it is considered an act of vandalism that has to be governed by strict by-laws and the police. However, graffiti has also been recognised as an art form in its own right, notably since an early 1991 exhibition, entitled 'Graffiti Art: Americans et Français, 1981–1991' at the Musée National des Monuments Français in Paris. Similarly, the German government has had a conflicted relationship with graffiti since its first appearance on the Berlin Wall in the 1980s, with authorities seeking both eradication and celebration of graffiti. In 2013, Germany deployed drones to monitor railway depots, where the surveillance footage could be used in the prosecution of graffiti writers (Ralph 2013). However, the Berlin-based Museum for Urban Nation Contemporary Art has openly celebrated graffiti as an art form (BBC News 2017). As a result, street artists in Berlin have become popular for converting neo-Nazi swastikas, installed to intimidate minorities and migrants, into beautiful art pieces. Many living in Berlin have come to accept the existence of graffiti in their shared spaces (Laze and Cole 2017).

In Australia, the graffiti subculture influenced many a youth during the 1970s and 1980s. Today, while some parts of Australia still have strict by-laws in place for the management of graffiti, Melbourne has seen some graffiti styles, such as stencils, being endorsed and supported by local businesses and government (MacDowall 2006), so much so that the inner suburbia of Melbourne and associated railway stations are some of the world's most famous stencil art hotspots. Similar to Melbourne, Sydney has started celebrating street art in its attempts to establish itself as a creative city (McAuliffe 2012). Since 1999, the heritage value of graffiti has been debated, with the possibility of establishing some graffiti tolerance zones (MacDowall 2006). These zones would provide certain graffiti protection under local planning regulations and heritage legislation (MacDowall 2006).

Contemporary graffiti has also spread on the African continent in countries such as Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, South Africa, and elsewhere. While graffiti and public art can be found as far back as the Stone Age, public art is mostly associated with colonial and apartheid monuments in African countries. In Nigeria, the earliest surviving graffiti of the Igbo community in southeastern Nigeria can be traced back to the tenth

century, consisting of idioms, proverbs, folktales, philosophical writings, interpretations and warnings of wet and dry seasons (Obiozor 2008). Similarly, Southern Africa has much rock art, dating back at least 2 500 years, which is of significant religious and symbolic value and has World Heritage status (Deacon 1997). By contrast, before 2011, graffiti, particularly politically charged graffiti, was uncommon in Libya, (Ghouma 2015). However, following the deposing of Muammar Gaddafi, the leader of Libya, anti-Gaddafi graffiti was found all over the country's free cities. This graffiti was mostly characterised by drawings of Gaddafi, drawings depicting his execution (showing Gaddafi with a bullet between his eyes), quotes from his recent speeches and other symbolic drawings such as hands breaking free of chains. Most of this graffiti was painted using the colours of Libya's flag (Abushagur 2011). Similarly, graffiti in Egypt flourished during and after the ousting of President Mubarak in 2011 (Shaw and Harris; 2011). Graffiti in African countries, although not a new phenomenon, has strong ties to political contestations and struggles. As a result, and like European countries and the Americas, governments have made some efforts to remove this type of graffiti (Findlay 2012; Shaw and Harris 2011).

Modern graffiti has had a similar adverse reception to its emergence in many countries. However, graffiti has seen an almost global shift to greater tolerance and gains in prominence in popular culture. In countries such as France and Germany, the global graffiti culture has intersected with local political sentiments, giving rise to different approaches to freedom of expression. Graffiti in South Africa has followed a comparable trajectory.

## History of graffiti in South Africa

Graffiti links the graffiti artist, their identity and their sense of place. This relationship is particularly prominent within the South African context, where the apartheid regime confined different population groups to specific areas under the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Gasser 2014). Resistance to the apartheid

government sparked political graffiti in South Africa, which acted as a voice for the oppressed long before the influence of the New York contemporary graffiti scene emerged (Rabiega 2015). As a result, South African graffiti quickly gained a tone of resistance through its engagement with politics of identity and space (Penfold 2017). During the apartheid regime, it was not uncommon to come across unsanctioned graffiti challenging authority and reclaiming land (Smith 2017). Political graffiti, made with spray paint and stencils, could be quickly repeated and as a result was found across many sites (Williamson 1989). This graffiti was characterised by text-based political slogans, in either English or Afrikaans, and was a jailable offence, treated as an antagonistic act of defiance or indicative of an uprising (Smith 2017). The most popular message was a simple 'Free Mandela', but graffiti included humour and satire, such as 'Why join the army when you can get stoned at home?' (Williamson 1989, 96). During the 1980s, an intense dialogue between left and right wings took place on the walls of South Africa. Anti-apartheid protest messages would go up, only to be shortly followed by a retort by the right so that, for example, 'ANC for peace' became 'WANK for peace' (Williamson 1989, 97). The artist Garth Erasmus successfully translated this anti-apartheid graffiti into artworks that went into gallery spaces in the 1980s and he was thus an early pioneer of the artistic value of political graffiti (Williamson 1989).

Although the South African graffiti scene cannot be directly traced to that which emerged in New York in the 1980s, there are some similarities and evidence of crossed paths (Penfold 2017). According to Cale Waddacor, author of the book *Graffiti South Africa* (2014), contemporary graffiti as an art form was first introduced to South Africa through the work of Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, with the publication of their book, *Subway art*, which was released in 1984. It was during this time that graffiti was first taken up in Cape Town as a response to the book and a rise in hip hop music. Graffiti in Johannesburg was influenced by the rise of the hip hop scene in Cape Town.

South Africa's graffiti scene was initially captivated by the art form's free-spirited nature, but actually had little knowledge about the accompanying subculture (Waddacor 2014). Many graffiti pieces were

largely derived from Western art styles, and with the exposure to Western graffiti came the understanding of the graffiti subculture (Waddacor 2014). Initially, graffiti was mostly utilised by marginalised youth as a form of expression and opposition to the apartheid regime. However, since 1994 graffiti artists and the graffiti subculture have been less engaged with politics (Sitas 2015). The urban graffiti scene has flourished in post-apartheid South Africa, evolving into a more expressive art form, although falling short of evolving into a distinctive South African style. Recently, South Africa has seen a resurgence in graffiti as a tool for political intervention, although this cannot be compared to the apartheid era. Protest graffiti has focused on major political or social issues, such as the Marikana massacre and the ongoing student protests associated with the #FeesMustFall movement. However, high crime rates in South Africa have often posed a threat to graffiti artists in the streets (Waddacor 2014).

From 1994, Johannesburg's contemporary graffiti scene was linked to a club called 'Reality' (later called 'Insanity') in the inner-city centre, where graffiti artist Gogga (also known as Devastator 16) held classes and emerging graffiti artists could learn their graffiti-writing foundations (Waddacor 2014). Relatively soon thereafter, graffiti artists such as Rasty, Angel, Tapz and Riot came onto the scene, forming graffiti crews such as Pressure Control Projects, Not Average Taggers, Fuck Shit UP, Hidden Invasion and Most Hated Crew. These crews were fluid and appeared or dissolved as members joined up or shifted away (Waddacor 2014). Graffiti artists are mostly middle- to upper-income youth (Penfold 2017), and, consequently, graffiti in Johannesburg is mostly prevalent in the inner-city neighbourhoods and the northern suburbs (City of Johannesburg News 2012). These graffiti artists in Johannesburg are focused on placing themselves within the global street art movement (Smith 2017). To achieve this, artists refrain from pieces that invite oppositional politics, resulting in a relative lack of political graffiti in the city (Smith 2017).

Until recently the graffiti scene in Johannesburg was largely characterised by tags (City of Johannesburg News 2012). The many unwritten

rules in the early days of the graffiti subculture in Johannesburg stunted the social and cultural development of graffiti (Smith 2017). A fully fledged street art scene could not be accounted for within the region (Waddacor 2014), in contrast with the large-scale graffiti murals in Durban and Cape Town (City of Johannesburg News 2012). However, Johannesburg currently boasts the biggest graffiti scene in South Africa, with up and coming writers such as Anser, Drake, Nuke and Dynner constantly contributing to the art scene (Waddacor 2014). This shift is mainly attributable to the CoJ's more relaxed approach, accepting some forms of graffiti as an addition to its urban landscape (Penfold 2017). This has encouraged members of the design and creative arts community to take to the streets to showcase their art and vision (Waddacor 2014).

There is a rise in suburban projects which focus on the aesthetics of graffiti, such as the Community Mural Project, an organisation aimed at addressing contestations around diversity and known for murals such as 'Mama Africa' in Durban (Sitas 2015), and the Westdene Graffiti Project, Johannesburg, which aims to brighten up the neighbourhood as well as remove the negative connotations associated with graffiti. The residents in the area donated their street-facing boundary walls to the cause (Penfold 2017), providing many canvases for writers and artists. By contrast, graffiti hate speech, targeted at certain racial groups, has also made its appearance in public spaces, such as the 'K- word' which recently adorned the Roodepoort bridge (Mitchley 2015). As with many forms of communication, graffiti is not immune from abuse or hate speech.

Contemporary graffiti originated in the US and quickly spread to other parts of the world through various media. However, most countries have a long history of their own graffiti practices and political contexts, and these intersected with the imported aesthetics and styles of hip hop graffiti from the 1960s onwards. South Africa was no different in this regard. The current graffiti culture stems from a practice of sharing artistic work globally and this practice has led to the shifts in graffiti's reception in popular culture.





# The practice of graffiti

Graffiti is practised by a subculture of society and the responses to graffiti by the public and city authorities can be viewed as forms of urban practice. This section explores the production and eradication of graffiti in the urban environment. Graffiti has been characterised as a practice of youthful rebels, petty criminals or gang members, but for artists it is largely a practice of self-expression and identity. Formal responses to graffiti in the landscape have involved implementing by-laws, clean-up campaigns and instituting zones of tolerance. These are common practices by local authorities.

## Graffiti as a form of expression and identity

Graffiti is linked to both personal identity and identity of place and is itself a form of social relation. Tagging can be understood as a local literacy practice and as an avenue into the construction of mostly youth identity and group affiliation (MacGillivray and Curwen 2007). Graffiti artists may work on their own and individually identify with a 'marginal or transitional status' (White 2001, 256), but they frequently collect and work as a group or 'crew' (Waddacor 2014). This enables writers to navigate some of the logistics of graffiti writing. As a group, writers can create large

pieces quickly, and assist each other with safety – looking out for law enforcement or criminals. Research has shown that graffiti crews develop and cultivate skills and knowledge: 'There is [...] a strong culture of collaboration and sharing of tools, skills, knowledge, and information' (Docuayan 2000, 116).

Conventional graffiti may be isolated or associated with other graffiti. While it may commonly be regarded as spontaneous acts of 'youthful exuberance' (Weisel 2002, 3), graffiti can also have more depth and may be characterised by: (1) provocative statements, which address themselves to a targeted audience with a particular purpose; (2) expressive statements using conventional writing styles, usually mystical and poetic; and (3) persuasive statements, which are more pluralistic communicative attempts (Islam 2010, 253). At times, graffiti also provides commentary on larger societal issues. Further to this, graffiti writings can be ideological and may convey political messages or racial, religious or ethnic slurs (Weisel 2002, 3). Lachman notes that, 'piecing is both vandalism and an artistic expression', and that 'this duality created a dichotomy of meanings of graffiti that stemmed from the notion of space' (cited in Alonso 1998, 14). The moral judgement of graffiti is influenced by the assumed understanding of the discourse of that space (Cresswell 1992); spaces have an ascribed meaning and limited appropriate



behaviours (Ley 1974 cited in Cresswell 1992). Thus, graffiti as an art form is a rather complex phenomenon and should always be considered within its social and environmental context (Thompson et al. 2012).

In terms of graffiti tagging, many art critics have argued that it is a developed social practice, despite the interpretation of meaning being limited. MacGillivray and Curwen contend that, 'Tagging has its own rules and codes, it is a literacy practice imbued with intent and meaning' (citing Aguilar (2000) in 2007, 354). Lee and Chung propose, in line with Barthes<sup>1</sup> interpretation, that contemporary street art pieces are relevant illustrations of 'how meaning is not just given but is always socially constructed' (2009, 22). The tagging performed by graffiti artists is considered to be a complex social practice in the urban environment, where tagging is a form of saying to the world 'Hey, look I am here' (Mars interview). Graffiti is governed by its own rules and laws and is mostly associated with youths eager to place themselves within a particular social network or establish their identity (Thompson et al. 2012). The point of the graffiti practice is to 'become known' (Jackson 2014; MacGillivray and Curwen 2007; Mars interview) by writing your tag everywhere and thus being 'seen' around the city.

Graffiti's origins in hip hop culture and political protest imbued urban spaces with meanings of local identity (Chmielewska 2007). However, it has not been immune to appropriation and globalisation. Graffiti has been incorporated into mainstream visual culture through fashion, advertising and the internet, so that local nuance and identity is lost. Graffiti writers and street artists travel the globe to create pieces in varied contexts, resulting in aesthetics being reproduced

and multiplied without place specificity. Graffiti has become a universal brand for trendiness and creativity (Chmielewska 2007), with which both writers and cities have to grapple. As graffiti has shifted into more mainstream media and spaces, it is important to remember its origins as a social practice located in the urban environment. Some graffiti writers have assimilated into the mainstream, but others – while acknowledging the influence that mainstream culture has on their craft and daily lives – continue to resist assimilation (Rabiega 2015).

## Graffiti as vandalism and urban blight

A defining aspect of graffiti is that it exists in the public domain on a surface that is usually immovable, whether that surface is the walls of public toilets, the concrete columns of highway structures or street poles. These surfaces may be owned by various levels of government as infrastructure, or they may be owned privately by companies or individuals. Graffiti is most often framed as an infringement on these property rights.

This infringement depends heavily on a clear distinction between the public and the private realms and the ownership of these spaces. Public and private spaces are defined by property and territory and the aesthetic practices of graffiti writers blur the boundary between the two (Visconti et al. 2010). Graffiti writers inscribe meaning and use onto walls and surfaces that turn spaces into places. The practice of graffiti

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1. Roland Barthes was a literary and cultural theorist who theorised text and semiotics. See Moriarty (2007) for further reading.

highlights the issue of ‘ownership’ of the public realm. In theory, streets, parks and pedestrian paths belong to ‘no one’ (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999) and so belong to everyone, but in reality these spaces are frequently ‘owned’ or managed by the state or public authorities. Private property is privately owned by individuals or companies but has an interface with public space at the boundary between private and public. While graffiti frequently occurs on public property, it is also found on private property and often contests ownership by publicising the contradictions of property (Mettler 2012). Graffiti can be on the surface of private property and yet exist in public space where the property meets the street, for example.

Thus, ‘to a certain extent the presence of graffiti has been linked to the “fear of crime”. That is, graffiti represents the visible signs of disorder and unruliness, a threat to the “quality of life” of residents and the private property of businesses’ (White 2001, 258). Graffiti has strong ties to criminality and the theory of broken windows.<sup>2</sup> Although a relatively minor crime, graffiti’s association with the broken window theory magnifies its conception as a serious blight on public space and order. Graffiti is seen to communicate disorder and to erode community values (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011) and is criticised for creating ‘visual chaos’ (Chmielewska 2007, 161). As vandalism and a form of deviance, it is conceptually and physically outside the pristine walls of mainstream galleries (McAuliffe 2012).

Graffiti has different purposes and is used by different groups. A case in point is tagging related to gang activity, which is seen to be a criminal activity promoting further crimes, while tagging by graffiti artists may not be associated with gang-related activities. From the outside, the distinction between the practices of graffiti crews and criminal gangs is hard to discern and therefore evokes fear in the public. Graffiti writers and gang members are not necessarily separate identities and members may move between the two groups in some instances (Docuayan 2000). However, gang graffiti tends to have additional

meanings for gang members, including presence and territory (Docuayan 2000). Gang members may exert more control over graffiti in an area or neighbourhood and, in fact, artists may be severely beaten for tagging in the wrong neighbourhood (Docuayan 2000). However, while some graffiti crews have been associated with truancy and involved with drug and alcohol abuse (Weisel 2002), MacGillivray and Curwen (2007) argue that graffiti artists are generally not gang members and not all graffiti is vandalism, and therefore a crime, or related to gang activity.

The emphasis on graffiti as an illegal practice creates a moral order in public space that denies graffiti as an everyday practice (White 2001). Defining public art as good and graffiti as bad is a false dichotomy, the boundaries of which are quickly eroded (McAuliffe 2012). Graffiti writers and urban managers are implicated in the ambiguity of these boundaries, and both constantly blur the lines between definitions of good and bad, and legal and illegal. Urban authorities attempt ‘to mobilise the transformative power of public art in place’, while simultaneously enforcing property rights and controlling access to public space (McAuliffe 2012, 203). For instance, many contemporary crime prevention and law and order strategies are premised upon the social exclusion of designated people from public spaces (see Ferrell 1996; White 2001; White and Sutton 1995). ‘Exclusion from public spaces has been matched by an inability for many people to voice their concerns in public debate and discussion’ (White 2001, 257). Criminalising graffiti has enabled city authorities to ignore citizens who do not engage through, or cannot access, more formal procedures (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011).

Through formal approval or permission processes, graffiti can be legal and legitimate (White 2001). Legal walls enable graffiti writers to move between subcultures of graffiti and commercial ventures (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011). They thus become a space of transition and result in a blurring of legal and illegal practices in public spaces. The contestation and transgression of graffiti practices

2. The broken windows theory is the idea that general criminal activity is promoted by the appearance of neglect or decay, like broken windows. The theory was first published as an article by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling in 1982 in *The Atlantic* and rapidly became hugely influential in policing and urban policy (Maskaly and Boggess 2014). The theory continues to be debated and remains controversial.





reveals the ways in which ‘space is configured, constructed and reproduced in the city’ (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011, 129). It is this subversive threat, rather than the act of vandalism itself, that is most feared by the public and authorities (White 2001). The criminalisation of graffiti is being challenged by graffiti writers, police officers and property owners through practice and discourse on the use and appearance of urban space (Docuayan 2000). Graffiti writers are breaching the pristine walls of galleries and exhibiting as artists while some have associated commercial activities that include graphic design and sign writing (Docuayan 2000). This emphasises the role of graffiti as an urban practice.

## Urban policies and management of graffiti

From the 1970s to the 1980s graffiti was considered unacceptable as it was largely characterised as deviant and a major contributor to a loss of revenue, decrease in property values and reduction in retail sales in certain neighbourhoods or communities (Weisel 2002). With the emergence of the practice, local government authorities in many cities around the world quickly established strict laws and regulations against graffiti (Moreau and Alderman 2011). Urban authorities rejected all forms of graffiti and continue to do so in many parts of the world. However, more recently management efforts reflect some nuance in dealing with graffiti and street art, differentiating between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ graffiti (McAuliffe 2012) and trying to understand the drivers behind graffiti and vandalism (Whitehead 2004). This recent shift in urban policies comes with the rise of discourse surrounding creative cities, which Landry (2000) suggests is effective for promoting urban development that encourages communication between people. As such, the ‘importance of creativity to the postindustrial economy’ (McAuliffe 2012, 189) has prompted city managers to rethink graffiti.

Policy approaches to graffiti were informed by neoliberal concepts, which promote the privatisation of the public sphere in support of capital gains (Dickinson 2008). Policy-making within municipalities and cities

is indirectly shaped by existing social and economic paradigms (Young 2010). Policies towards graffiti draw on notions of race, youth and poverty, which are often employed in an effort to restructure municipalities or cities as neoliberal capitals (Dickinson 2008) worthy of investment. Existing social and economic policies play a pivotal role in informing new policies but favour the privatisation of public spheres for the benefit of capital accumulation (Dickinson 2008). Although cultural projects, such as graffiti culture, produce commons and promote shared spaces, they are often framed as problematic and are therefore disregarded by these policies (Dickinson 2008). Neoliberal perceptions of graffiti were – and in some parts of the world continue to be – an issue of public concern and led to the development of policies against graffiti (Young 2010). Most of these policies were aimed at eradicating the graffiti subculture and ‘cleaning up’ cities affected by this cultural practice (Young 2010).

The practice of graffiti by individuals and crews has been countered with a practice of removal through formal channels. Local governments have spent copious amounts of money and time painting over graffiti, removing graffiti chemically, cleaning off graffiti and replacing signs and other vandalised items (Weisel 2002). These attempts to eradicate graffiti from the urban environment have been so aggressive in some cases as to be termed ‘wars on graffiti’ (Dickinson 2008; Iveson 2010 cited in McAuliffe 2012). Furthermore, these efforts are usually futile in eradicating graffiti but only serve to change its form or style (Ferrell and Weide 2010; McAuliffe and Iveson 2011). Interestingly, ongoing wars against graffiti have not resulted in a discontinuation of the graffiti subculture and more and more youth – predominantly young men from middle-income households – have taken up graffiti precisely because it is often seen as risk-laden behaviour (McAuliffe 2012). Participation in the graffiti subculture is fuelled by contact with police, media attention and public recognition, all of which serve to enhance the artist’s reputation (Ferrell and Weide 2010).

Cleaning up graffiti is an expensive and never-ending practice. New York spent US\$2.6 million in 1970 alone on clean-up or graffiti removal initiatives (Ley and Cybriwsky 1974). Clean-up campaigns have continued through the decades in New York. During

his administration, Mayor Giuliani focused on the eradication of graffiti from all of New York: not just the subway stations but also the graffiti found in tunnels, bridges, highway dividers, overpasses, and derelict and abandoned buildings (Halsey and Young 2006). Giuliani's act was recognised as symbolic of urban regeneration and gentrification (Halsey and Young 2006). Anti-graffiti laws and eradication are not unique to the US. The Australian government established the Graffiti Task Force and a number of anti-graffiti laws developed by local government were aimed at eradicating graffiti in Australian cities (McAuliffe 2012). In 2008 alone, authorities spent AU\$3 million on removing graffiti from trains (McAuliffe 2012). It has become a popular political strategy in Australia and local government candidates have used the eradication of graffiti in their campaigns (Moreau and Alderman 2011). In the UK, graffiti is targeted by legislation which strictly outlaws behaviour violating social or public space norms, such as littering, flyposting, spitting, public drunkenness and other behaviours (Halsey and Young 2006). Simultaneously, the government has developed and provides educational support to youth about the negative effects of graffiti and other urban street art forms on surrounding communities (Whitehead 2004).

Similar to graffiti eradication attempts internationally, the City of Cape Town and eThekwin (Durban) municipalities have established strict laws against some forms of graffiti, while legalising other graffiti in the form of commissioned murals and even providing legal walls. In 2011, the Cape Town local government established a new by-law which made it illegal to deface or damage public property. Offenders are liable for a fine of up to R15 000 or three months' imprisonment (Smith 2014). Durban has seen a rise in private contractors hired to track down public space defacers, in response to the amount of money eThekwin Municipality spends annually on cleaning up graffiti in public spaces (Da Costa 2011).

In contrast, the CoJ has had a mixed approach. There is no specific by-law dealing with graffiti; rather, clauses related to graffiti are present in several by-laws. Section 17(1)(a) of the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality: Public Open Spaces of 2003 by-law states that 'no person may within public open space [...] deface, damage, destroy or remove any municipal property'. A 2003 by-law (Public Road and Miscellaneous By-laws) states that there is a prohibition on graffiti on any structure relating to public roads. However, the CoJ has accepted some forms of graffiti as an addition to its urban landscape – for example that found on the columns beneath the M1 freeway in Newtown. In addition, the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) has embarked on a city-wide public art programme and spends in the region of 1% of the project's budget on public art, the definition of which includes graffiti (JDA 2010). However, section 16 of the CoJ 2008 Public Art Policy, mentions an 'Anti-Graffiti Rapid Response Unit' responsible for 'the timeous removal of objectionable and unwarranted graffiti from key points'. This clause focuses on graffiti that defaces heritage structures and authorises the immediate removal of some types of graffiti from public spaces. This by-law enabled the initiative of the Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage in the CoJ to remove graffiti writings on the walls of Museum Africa in Newtown (City of Johannesburg News 2012). The CoJ has also been noted to hand out harsh punishments: in some cases the punishment for defacing public property is a R10 000 fine or twelve months' imprisonment (Smith 2014). The CoJ's conflicting policies regarding graffiti reflect on the one hand graffiti's ambiguity with regards to the law and its management and, on the other, policy tensions within the CoJ.

*The CoJ's conflicting policies regarding graffiti reflect on the one hand graffiti's ambiguity with regards to the law and its management and, on the other, policy tensions within the CoJ.*



## The aesthetics of graffiti

Graffiti began as a text-based exploration, an exaggeration of the signature. Since then, as spray-paint technology has improved, graffiti has increasingly incorporated the use of vibrant colour and pictorial aspects as well as text. This shift has improved graffiti's accessibility to outsiders and has enabled graffiti to transition into gallery spaces and grow a wider audience. This section explores graffiti as an art form where the primary canvas is the urban environment. As graffiti has increased in popularity so has its commodification and this has implications for how graffiti is used and managed in the city. These implications are discussed below.

### Graffiti as art

Graffiti may be the most familiar form of visual culture in our everyday lives (Kan, in Whitehead 2004). Graffiti offers an effective example of the intermeshing of the world of art and everyday life (Whitehead 2004). Crossover between street art and high art is commonplace under the graffiti banner, with the genre having been recognised by artists and art critics as an independent aesthetic for over half a century (Belton 2001, in Whitehead 2004). Many established and

celebrated artists occupy both arenas. Basquiat and, later, Banksy, are famous for bringing graffiti into the gallery and putting it on canvas. More recently, a new cohort of professionally trained artists, like Ireland's Conor Harrington, has moved from the gallery to the streets, painting classically inspired artworks on the sides of buildings. South African graffiti is no different. Faith47 and Freddy Sam are famous for creating realist masterpieces at massive scale, often taking up an entire building's façade. Many other writers have found various ways to bridge the divide. For example, Empty is a renowned artist from Soweto who 'now owns his own studio, making the transition from the vandal life to selling high-end contemporary art' (Langa 2017, n.p.). Yet graffiti remains at arm's length from 'Art'. Perhaps this is in part due to the fact that, as artist HacOne explains, '[t]he art itself does not conform to tradition. You are using non-traditional art material in a non-traditional space' (cited in Waddacor 2014, 142).

Graffiti gives us a glimpse into an unsettling universe where not only is the author anonymous, their text is also incomprehensible to most onlookers. Unlike the gallery space and the world of elite art experts, where proficiency is jealously guarded, graffiti texts are very visible in the world, while at the same time reserving meaning for only members of the

graffiti community. Graffiti holds the contradiction of being both extremely visually accessible and, for many, conceptually incoherent. However, the same can be said for the public's engagement with more formal public art. One such example is an installation by artists William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx called *Fire Walker*, one of Johannesburg's more prominent public art installations. Harrison and Phasha (2014) cogently argue that many people cannot recognise the fractured figure as a woman carrying a brazier on her head, and so do not find the artwork relatable on a symbolic level. Therefore, it is not the fact that graffiti frequently has obscured meanings or limited interpretation that prevents it from being considered art.

Cale Waddacor, author of *Graffiti South Africa*, says that although many often question the meaning behind graffiti pieces, most graffiti writers claim there is little to no rationale behind their art (ArtAfrica 2015). For many, the act of spraying is simply a fun way to hang out with friends rather than an articulated public commentary (Mars interview; Waddacor 2014). 'The fumes, the thrill, the pressure, the agony, the adrenalin, and the feeling the next day. It's difficult to mention one specific reason why I paint graffiti and why I love it,' says Ryza (cited in Waddacor 2014, n.p.). When asked, 'Is there any deeper meaning behind your work?' Myza420 replied, 'Absolutely not!' (Waddacor 2014, 167). While some artists use graffiti for socio-political commentary and seek public engagement, others shy away from explaining their work to the public – even when there is a deeper meaning to the graffiti. Often very little is known about who the author is as the work is carried out furtively and done under tags/pseudonyms. This is not to say that political graffiti is absent from the Johannesburg context, but that interviews with artists about their work suggest that politics is secondary to the practice and aesthetics of graffiti.

'Public art' is the collective term used to describe various creative art forms, from visual art to more physical art forms such as sculptures, architecture, monuments and culturally inspired arts seen in community projects and festivals (Sitas 2015, 5). Public art in Johannesburg is defined in three ways: 'That which is commissioned by the City of Johannesburg; that which is commissioned by private

institutions; and that which is more organic and has been developed by artists working in public space' (Harrison and Phasha 2014, 2). The 'Long Live the Dead Queen' campaign, sponsored by mobile network provider Cell C, saw the work of Mary Sibande all across Johannesburg in an effort to challenge the abuse of women (Sitas 2015). Public art is not only the domain of artists but includes the contributions of citizens participating in public space (Harrison and Phasha 2014). In Johannesburg, public art is part of a larger cultural policy that intends to make place and construct identity, and is tied to gentrification (Harrison and Phasha 2014). Graffiti would thus form part of public art by these considerations and in Maboneng we illustrate graffiti's relationship to gentrification. Public art is criticised for its inaccessibility of meaning – 'contemporary art appeals to a specialist public for whom this self-referential development has meaning' (Miles 1997, 7) – and for the fact that its public location does not shift this meaning. Graffiti is subject to these same criticisms and, in part, these issues may fuel opposition to graffiti in public spaces.

Graffiti differs from public art in that it is seldom curated or commissioned and therefore has the potential to be more accessible. However, graffiti's origins are embedded in a subculture with a small audience and as the discussion above highlights, some graffiti artists in the South African/Johannesburg context are not overly concerned with conveying meaning. This emphasises graffiti as a social practice in urban space but also highlights that an increasing appreciation of graffiti may have more to do with its aesthetic and stylistic elements than its intended meaning. Just like traditional public art, the meanings of graffiti can be ambiguous or obscure, although this does not undermine its value or level of engagement in public spaces.

## The city as canvas

We have argued that context is an integral part of the work in graffiti. Indeed, the urban fabric can physically shape a piece in a number of ways, notably through its architecture or shape, the materiality of

the surface and the visibility of the space. One piece in Maboneng depicts a snake wrapped around the large columns supporting the highway flyover and is an example of the form of the structure influencing the image (Figure 2). In the work, the architecture of the flyover gave rise to the shape of the piece. The artist interpreted the highway as snaking through the city, inspiring the serpent concept, while the elevated road's material form partially dictated the piece's shape (Mars interview). The materiality of surfaces, for example, how absorptive or smooth a wall is, can also change what a piece looks like. A porous surface means that the work will be likely to fade, peel or crumble away faster. Such conditions can even influence what colours are used in the design. Graffiti artist Mars (interview) explains that some brick walls are not the best for spraying, so a lot of writers opt to use silver cans – silver spray paint – on these as the metallic colour stays visible for longer.

Graffiti is for people whose medium for comment is not the newspaper or the television, but the urban fabric itself with its static and moving surfaces (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011). Sometimes graffiti – notably in the form of political slogans – appears in a particular place to make a point, or because it is a space where social critique and plurality of views are valorised, like universities or metropolises. As such, Sitas (2015, 5) argues that these 'creative interventions' – legal and illegal – work continuously to normalise the idea of 'urban space as a canvas'.

In a similar way to public art, or as a form of public art, graffiti contributes to placemaking in the urban environment. Places are spaces that have meaning or attachment for people or have an identity or multiple identities (Cresswell 2004). Places are also socially constructed (Holloway and Hubbard 2001) and graffiti serves as visual evidence of social engagement. Graffiti builds the image of the city, literally through visual displays, but also figuratively in the minds of inhabitants (Lynch 1960). By providing layers of identity and meaning to places, graffiti builds the legibility of spaces and places in the city (Lynch 1960). Thus, more than a two-dimensional canvas, graffiti promotes three-dimensional placemaking.

Graffiti questions the 'stringency of the urban environment structured around social control and aesthetic regulation' (Loeffler 2012, 75) and may

in fact differ according to context. So '[w]hen we encounter such works in unexpected places, and from unusual angles, it is a welcome relief' (Loeffler 2012, 75). This surprise creates a 'sense of beauty' in car parks, vacant lots or bang in the middle of the street (Loeffler 2012, 75). Mars (interview) says that graffiti artists see space differently to other people. On a tour of graffiti in Maboneng (20 August 2018), he pointed out a piece far above street level, on the third storey of a building. The unique placement makes seeing the work a surprise – you have to look up. The height also makes it accessible, from different viewpoints. People driving on the highway might also happen to see the figures, surprisingly level with themselves in their cars. This reveals the layers of the public environment. Although the majority of graffiti occurs on surfaces that are publicly available or accessible, these may have differing levels of visibility. A sticker on a lamppost is easily seen up close on the street but is quickly invisible at a distance. Pieces high above street level are obscured by angles, rooftops and buildings despite the fact that these writings may be far larger in scale than any sticker or tag. Each type of graffiti represents something unexpected or expressive in urban space.

Some cities have started to create zones of tolerance and others are embracing graffiti in the urban environment. In Bogota, Colombia, former mayor Gustavo Petro instituted Decreto 75, legislation that aimed to promote the responsible and legal practice of graffiti (Hopson 2017). Bogota has a vibrant graffiti scene but the legislation has proved to be controversial, both in the attempts to preserve pristine heritage buildings and in the way that artists have resisted its authority (Hopson 2017). In Melbourne, graffiti has been celebrated through streets in the central district. These are zones of tolerance where graffiti and street art are encouraged, leading to the city's designation as 'the street art capital of Australia' (Gill 2010, cited in McAuliffe 2012, 197) or the stencil art capital of the world, commemorated with the first stencil art festival in 2004 (Holsworth 2014). In 2011, the 1983 Northcote Koori Mural was added to the Victorian heritage, signalling an appreciation of the art form (Holsworth 2014). This demonstrates a recognition of the artistic value of graffiti but also of the city surfaces and spaces as the canvas and gallery of this art form.





Figure 2: The graffiti work 'snakes' around the structure of the road flyover, Maboneng.

## The commodification of graffiti

Graffiti spray-painted onto public infrastructure or in public space is likely to be interpreted as defacement or illegal activity. However, the same artist's signature displayed in a gallery, commissioned or produced alongside a product has simultaneously become a sought-after commodity.

From the 1990s the popularity of graffiti and urban street art forms gained the recognition of corporate America and has been followed by the gradual commercialisation of graffiti (Loeffler 2012) which, over time, has blurred the line between art and advertising (Sitas 2015). Graffiti has since been used in a variety of advertising campaigns, such as those run by Nike and Sprite, to attract youth groups (Whitehead 2004). The commodification of graffiti and street art in advertising, on t-shirts, or through successful crossover into the contemporary art marketplace, has raised the profile of individual artists and the genres of graffiti and street art more generally (McAuliffe 2012). This is especially true of the contributions made by artists such as Banksy, Shepard (Mettler 2012), Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon, who moved from subway walls to the walls of popular art galleries and private collectors around the world (White 2014). It is in many respects the rendering of graffiti as an 'art' style that has bequeathed it with 'new' value – in the first instance with a form of commercial profitability and secondly, as a tool for urban refurbishing.

This commodification of graffiti is present in the Johannesburg context. Graffiti is as likely to appear on t-shirts, caps and billboards as in corporate interiors (Waddacor 2014). For example, Jewel City, the diamond exchange near the Maboneng precinct, welcomed the opportunity to feature writing by an international graffiti artist (Mars interview). The fast food chain Nando's has also embraced South African graffiti, most notably through the work of Kilmany-Jo

Liversage (Mars interview). Liversage, whose tag is ORDA, is a South African artist who plays in the liminal space between the street, the gallery and the commercial. Her works appear in several Nando's restaurants across the world (McCann 2015). 'Shina', for example, is a major installation of aerosol spray and acrylic paint on board across 90 creative blocks, on exhibition at the Nando's in Maponya Mall, Soweto. McCann (2015, n.p.) explains: 'Nando's isn't an art gallery and it isn't a public space as such, but it does get 80 million visitors internationally per year, so that's a lot of human traffic.' The restaurant chain has deliberately chosen graffiti as an aesthetic and presumably it expects this look to draw in customers, rather than alienate the public.

Linked to graffiti's commodification, is the way that it is being used in urban renewal and gentrification processes. While the act of writing graffiti is typically criminalised, street murals created by graffiti writers are sometimes commissioned and viewed as a form of positive participatory urban refurbishing. Loeffler (2012, 71) proposes, however, that '[i]n its purest sense [graffiti] was neither financed by the private industry nor was it state-sponsored public art'. However, developers are increasingly manufacturing what was previously an organic process where artists moved into lower-income areas. These areas, in some instances, became neighbourhoods which attracted investment and redevelopment years later (Francis 2017). The deliberate use of artists and commissioned artworks in urban areas by developers has led to the derogatory term 'artwash' and has seen artists in these contexts heavily criticised (Francis 2017). Through this commodification of street art in urban development, graffiti artists are seen to be complicit in these urban politics (Pritchard 2017), with the result that graffiti takes on the negative connotations of gentrification. These debates have arisen in Europe (Pritchard 2017) but have yet to surface in Gauteng or South Africa as a whole.

*Linked to graffiti's commodification, is the way that it is being used in urban renewal and gentrification processes.*





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## Graffiti as urban dialogue

Graffiti forms part of a busy visual environment full of information signs, road signs, advertising, posters and business signage, not to mention public art installations. The practice of graffiti is a commentary on the quality of the urban environment and reflects this visual noise but also comments on who is allowed to produce this noise. As we mentioned in the history of graffiti, its practice can also be political – commenting on social issues or as a form of protest. The fact that graffiti occurs in the public domain and outside of authoritarian control forces engagement. Labelling the practice of graffiti as vandalism has obscured its meanings and commentaries, despite the fact that early anti-graffiti campaigns recognised graffiti as engagement. The 1982 New York public service announcement regarding graffiti stated: ‘Make your mark in society, not on society’ (Masilamani 2008, 9).

Graffiti is visual evidence of, or signifies, everyday activities and flux occurring in the city (Loeffler 2012). Graffiti is a form of informal communication and expresses ‘shared urban experiences’ (Miller 2002, cited in MacGillivray and Curwen 2007, 358). This commons<sup>3</sup> is illustrated in the case of New York where part of the strategy for eradicating graffiti included limiting the circulation of train cars (Masilamani 2008). This put an end to the ‘use of public infrastructure as a communication forum and showcase for multiple interconnected and disconnected group and individual interactions’ (Masilamani 2008, 9). While it is possible for some urban citizens to opt out of the consumption of public goods such as education or healthcare, ‘it is impossible not to consume public space at all’ (Visconti et al. 2010, 512). This positions graffiti to engage with the conception and framing of public space and public goods more broadly. In sum, graffiti appears in public space, on public infrastructure, but it is a commons that not everyone likes.

Graffiti is a less formal participation in public space that does not require engagement with government agencies (Visconti et al. 2010), thus making it more democratic and more political than

participation or public art, which does require such engagement. In this way graffiti writers are engaged in challenging the conceptions of public space. The ideological definitions of a universal public conceal the particular interests that are being privileged in these discourses (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011). ‘The intersection of artists’ and dwellers’ positions reveals four ideologies, including (i) private appropriation of public space, (ii) dwellers’ resistance to the alienation of public space, (iii) artists’ claim for street democracy, and (iv) joint striving for common place’ (Visconti et al. 2010, 517). Graffiti is also frequently a commentary on who has the right to public space. As a result, ‘[a] nalysis of graffiti work can never stray too far from considerations of social justice’ (White 2001, 261).

‘The location of graffiti gives us some indication of the circumstances under which it is produced’ (White 2001, 255). The location may indicate an intended audience and different locations have varying levels of associated risks which generate additional meanings for the writer and the audience. Graffiti writers engage actively and critically with the urban environment. The choice and surface of graffiti provides some of the meaning of the practice. Obscure and hard-to-reach surfaces with tags or throw-ups communicate credibility to other writers in the subculture. Graffiti on elements of urban infrastructure or long blank walls may be a commentary on the blandness of public spaces.

In some parts of Gauteng graffiti has been warmly received. Waddacor (2014, 139) explains that residents in Soweto encourage graffiti artists, ‘often offering walls of their homes as the next canvas’. Dayz, a graffiti writer, started painting in 2007 in Vosloorus. He comments on the surprising impact graffiti has: ‘I noticed that people were enticed by colour and enjoyed having the colours on their wall’ (cited in Sosibo 2016). This is in contrast to the ways that more formal public art is commissioned and experienced. Arguably, graffiti presents a much more noticeable, although sometimes subconscious, mode of public art. Though individual pieces may not be differentiated or recognised, the presence of graffiti in a neighbourhood, whether walls scrawled with tags or monumental building-sized murals in Braamfontein and Maboneng,

3. The ‘commons’ theory stems from Elinor Ostrom’s work, which documented how communities around the world make their shared communal and social assets work for them in a sustainable and equitable manner (see for example Ostrom 2015).

is keenly sensed by observers, creating atmospheres that range from unwatched, unsafe spaces of urban decay not to be lingered in, to bright, touristy billboards marking places to be and to be seen.

It is critical, therefore, to examine the dialogue that graffiti produces, who is engaging in the dialogue and its relationship to urban spaces. The urban fabric is the medium of comment or conversation, eschewing the formal platforms of the media or public policy (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011). Further to this, graffiti as part of an urban dialogue means that its value is independent of its aesthetics. The most modest, ugly graffiti is part of the conversation just as much – and maybe more – than a commissioned mural, and has value of its own.

This first part of the paper has outlined the many perspectives and tensions surrounding graffiti. Contemporary graffiti dates back to the 1970s but in most countries graffiti has an older and more varied history. In South Africa, graffiti played an important political role in anti-apartheid resistance.

Contemporary graffiti is highly global, having circulated around the world almost simultaneously through mainstream media such as glossy magazines and music videos. At the same time, graffiti's occurrence in the particular public spaces of cities has made it a very local phenomenon. Graffiti is a social practice of a subculture but has become increasingly popular as an art form and has entered mainstream culture. In this way, graffiti is about both the act of painting as well as the aesthetics of the finished product. As such, some graffiti has multiple meanings and interpretations – some deeply offensive – while for other graffiti artists there is no meaning beyond the play of text, colour and image.

Graffiti has historically been associated with vandalism and urban blight and recently has come to be seen as a negative component of gentrification. The next part of the paper examines these issues through a single case study, a newly redeveloped area called Maboneng, in Johannesburg, South Africa.

*Graffiti is a less formal participation in public space that does not require engagement with government agencies, thus making it more democratic and more political than participation or public art, which does require such engagement.*





## Maboneng as a case study

Graffiti is 'both a sign and a medium of a district's upwardly mobile reputation' (Zukin and Braslow 2011, 133).

Graffiti is ubiquitous in the urban environment in Gauteng. It is present on dustbins, bus stops, train carriages, tunnels, walls, buildings and along roadsides. It can be found at all scales and in all media. There are also numerous locations and neighbourhoods with significant street art. The meaning of graffiti changes in each of these contexts. In Johannesburg, graffiti takes many forms. Residents in Westdene, a centrally located middle-class suburb with free-standing houses, have given over their boundary walls to graffiti writers, transforming the suburb into a large canvas. In Braamfontein, a mixed-use higher-density area just north of Johannesburg's central business district (CBD), large murals create a hip environment, and in a cultural precinct of the inner city, Newtown, the underbelly of the double-decker highway is colourful with graffiti.

Although graffiti in these areas has followed urban renewal or, in the case of Westdene, a project of neighbourhood community building, graffiti in Maboneng appears to be an integral part of the district's urban regeneration strategy. This section of the paper provides the background to Maboneng, including its history and process of urban regeneration. We first examine in detail the graffiti in

the area through thematic and spatial analyses. We then draw out the relationship between graffiti and urban regeneration.

## Method

In order to focus more directly on graffiti's relationship to the urban environment we selected a case study area, the Maboneng precinct to the east of Johannesburg's CBD. The area is a mix of old, light-industrial buildings and commercial offices that is currently being renewed as a mixed-use higher-density neighbourhood. As a project that draws on the creative economy, graffiti is present in all its forms in Maboneng and is even part of tourist activities, although the intense and rapid urban regeneration is, in some instances associated with the eradication of graffiti (Weisel 2002). Maboneng provides a case study to examine the ways in which graffiti contributes to placemaking in Johannesburg.

Most of the research was conducted through photographic observation during several visits to the site. These visits spanned a period of six months, during which time it was possible to capture changes in the area as well as in the graffiti. This enabled us to capture some of the temporality of graffiti. We went on

two tours of the area: the first was a public tour of the graffiti of the area, which was co-guided by Jo Buitendach of Past Experiences (a local tour company) and a graffiti writer known as Mars; the second tour was a private tour conducted by Buitendach. The first tour provided an introduction to graffiti in Maboneng but also insight into how graffiti and street art foster tourism in the area. Jo Buitendach has a particular interest in graffiti and has studied Johannesburg graffiti, so the second tour provided an expert interview as well as a deeper understanding of the urban context of graffiti in the precinct.

The tours did not include all sites of graffiti but did include all major, large-scale or notable instances. As can be seen in the discussion of the types of graffiti, the tours covered the full spectrum of graffiti to be found in Maboneng, despite a focus on larger pieces or those that displayed good spray-painting skills. These observations were supplemented with an interview with one of Maboneng's developers, Propertuity, to gain an understanding of the role of graffiti in Maboneng's brand.

The tours and our guides focused on the streets, spaces and buildings that have been redeveloped as part of the precinct and where private security is present. Venturing beyond these boundaries to take photos of graffiti was met with some alarm and anxiety by our guides and security guards in the area, possibly due to the risk of crime in unpatrolled areas, an issue raised by graffiti artists in the area (Waddacor 2014). This containment means that most of the graffiti we captured is located in the redeveloped and curated spaces of the precinct. This spatial focus enables us to analyse the relationship between graffiti and urban renewal in Maboneng but limits how this might shift beyond this controlled area.

Although we were not able to capture every single instance of graffiti in the precinct, our photographic data included a wide range of media and types of graffiti. As a result we were able to analyse the spatial distribution of different kinds of graffiti. We used these data to analyse the graffiti thematically according to concepts of scale and temporality. We were also able to analyse the graffiti spatially.

### **Geospatial analysis of graffiti in Maboneng**

Locational data of graffiti occurrences were collected during the graffiti tours in August 2017 and January 2018, followed by a web search of graffiti and public art in Maboneng. During the fieldwork, geotagged and geo-enabled photos of graffiti were taken and the location of public art was digitised from maps using Google Earth satellite imagery. The tours of Maboneng, six months apart, enabled changes in graffiti to be recorded. In addition to this, maps of the Maboneng precinct showing its development since 2008 were collected from online sources.

A time series analysis of the Maboneng precinct was compiled to examine the development of the area. The extent of the precinct and buildings acquired and developed by the leading development company in the area were digitised on Google Earth, using maps from various sources as reference information. These layers were then mapped in an ArcMap environment using a graduated colour ramp, with the earliest developments represented in lighter colours and the latest developments represented in darker colours. After defining the extent of the study area, the different styles of graffiti were mapped in ArcMap to show the spatial distribution of graffiti and public art in the Maboneng precinct. This exercise illustrated the expansion of the Maboneng precinct over time and compared it with the current major graffiti hotspots within the area.

We took 166 photographs in August 2017 and 195 photographs in January 2018 of approximately 133 graffiti occurrences in Maboneng. An additional eight maps were acquired from online sources. Photographs were listed on Microsoft Excel and classified into different typologies, namely: masterpieces; blockbuster and throw-ups; wildstyle; hand-painted signage and commercial advertising; stickers and posters; stencils; tags; heaven pieces; street and public art pieces; and various (where there was more than one graffiti style present). In addition to the graffiti styles, photos were numbered according to graffiti occurrences. In some sites where more than one photo of the same graffiti was taken, all photographs of the same instance received the same number.

## Map of Maboneng precinct Johannesburg, South Africa

-  Railway
-  Buildings
-  Maboneng precinct

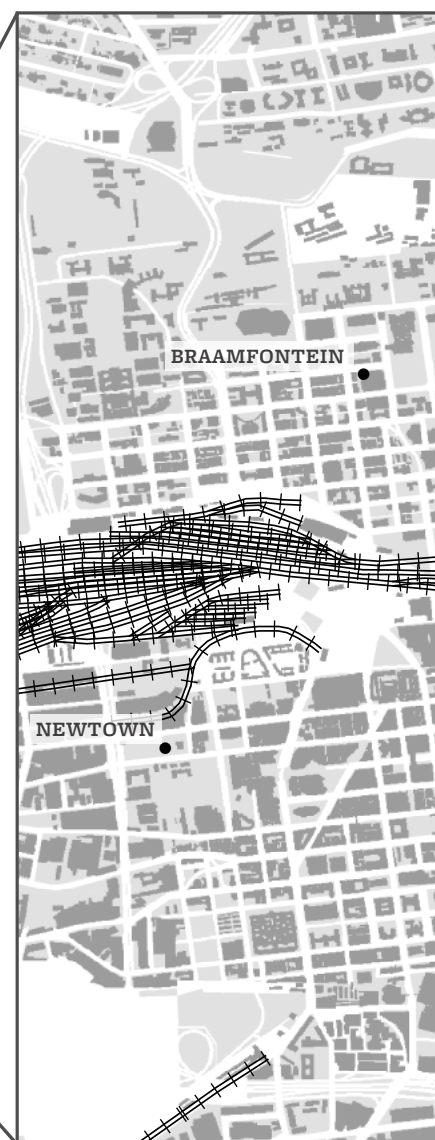
## GAUTENG PROVINCE



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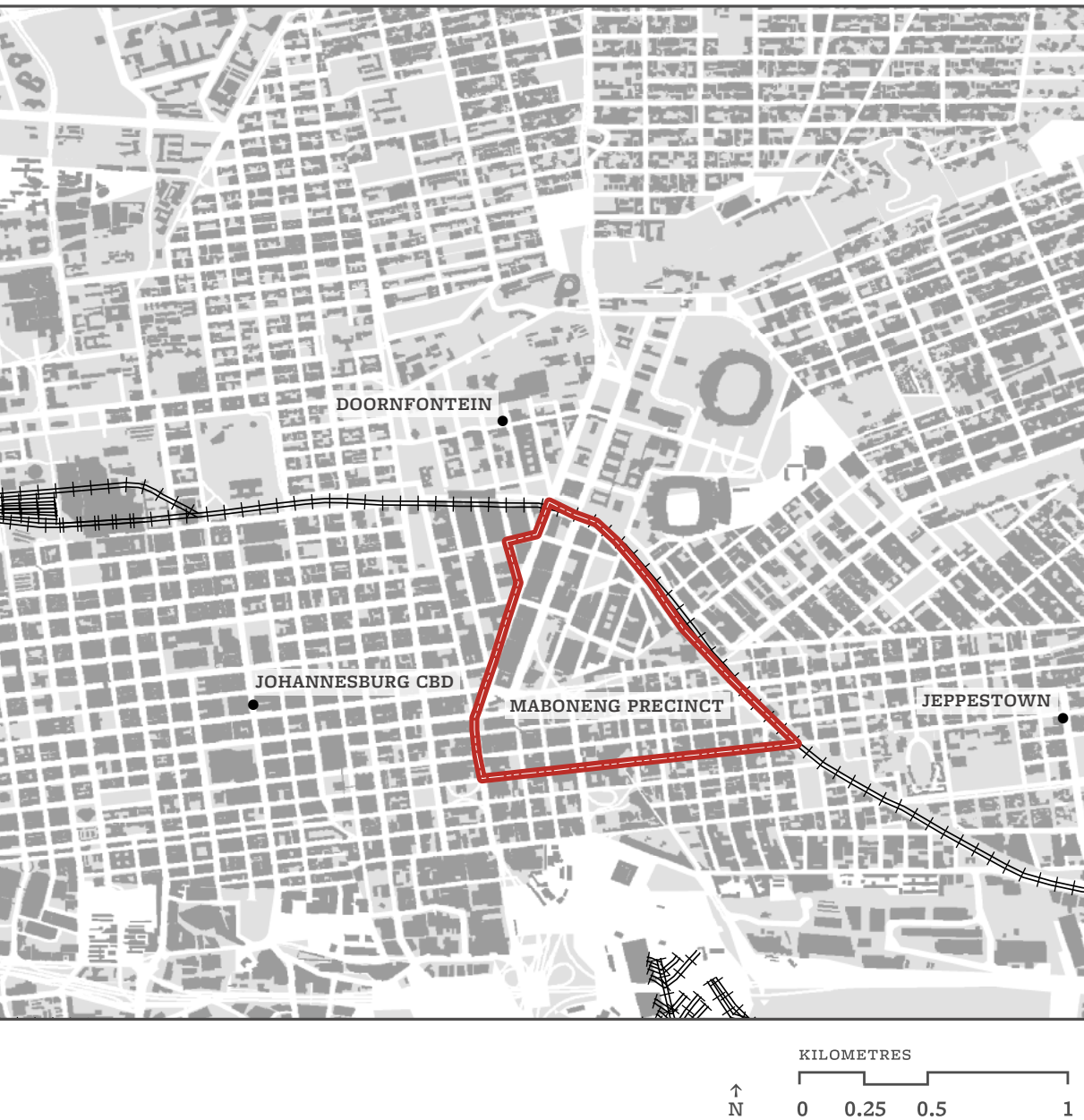
### Data Sources

GTI Land Cover (2014) and  
CGIS Planning Cadastre (2011)



Map 1: Map of Maboneng.



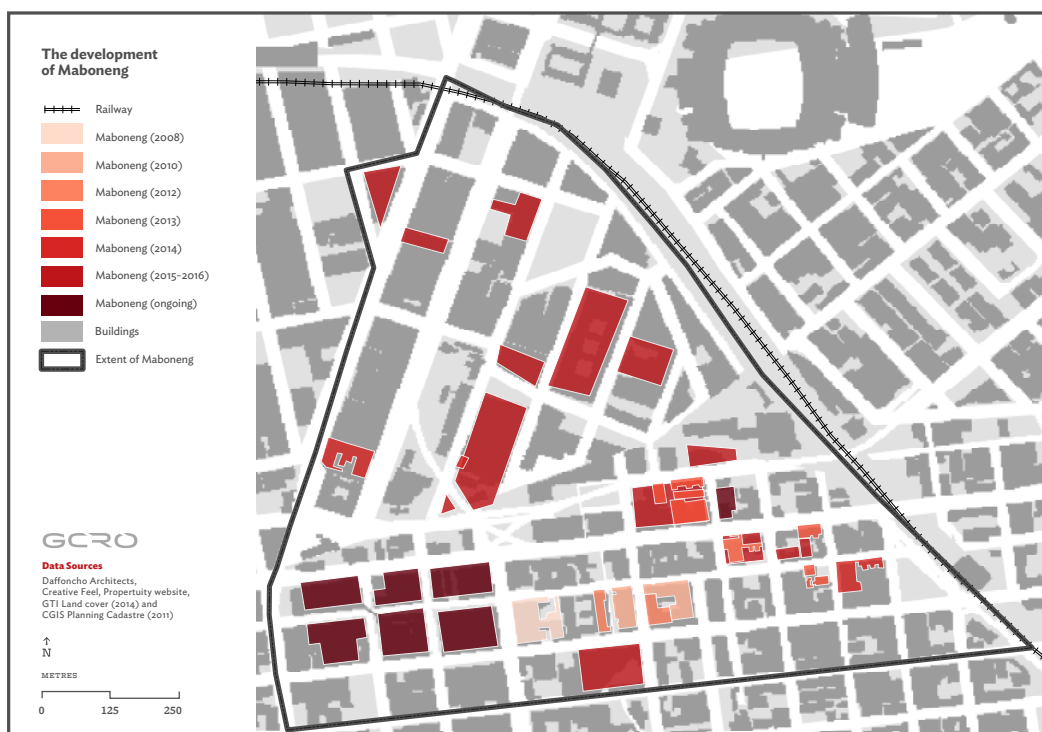


The locational data on street/public art digitised from static maps of the Maboneng precinct were compared to the photos taken during fieldwork and discarded if already recorded. A high-level analysis of all the recordings of graffiti and the different typologies was conducted in Microsoft Excel and used to evaluate the total number of each graffiti style and the occurrence of graffiti styles at each site location.

We generated a third map, a visibility analysis of all graffiti in the 'heaven' category (see graffiti types on pages 12 and 13). This was done to examine the reach of graffiti in Maboneng precinct and surrounds. Graffiti is a visual practice, where graffiti artists seek to expand their audience (Frabetti 2011). Our analysis focused on the broad aesthetic of graffiti in the area rather than the meaning or interpretation of individual pieces. The aim of this mapping exercise was to understand the visual impact of these large pieces beyond the

immediate vicinity of the building or surface. We focused on the large murals, which have contributed significantly to Maboneng's brand, and the projected sight lines of these pieces across the precinct. This was done on Google Earth and Google Street View, where the three-dimensional building features were enabled and polygons (closed geometrical shapes covering the real extent of an area) were created covering the extent of the visibility of the graffiti.

Although there are many other photographs and locations of graffiti and public art throughout the GCR, the data used for this analysis were only those collected during field work and publicly available through maps on the internet. Only graffiti instances along tour and field work routes were captured and analysed, and therefore graffiti occurrences in Maboneng are likely to be under-represented. Using the technology of mobile phones



Map 2: Map shows the development of Maboneng precinct by looking at the expansion of Propertyuity's footprint there.

and network coverage limited the accuracy of our location data, thus hampering our ability to fully analyse graffiti in the urban environment. We verified graffiti occurrences prior to mapping but a more comprehensive and accurate dataset of graffiti occurrence and removal, including to the level of structure and surface, could be created using GPS. Such an exercise would be beneficial for providing contextual information for understanding graffiti as an urban phenomenon and as a culture more broadly.

## History and context

*Maboneng is a neighbourhood celebrated through art. (Propertuity 2016)*

The Maboneng precinct began in 2009 with the completion of a renovated industrial building called Arts on Main. In 2010 and 2011, Propertuity, the developers of Arts on Main, acquired and converted Main Street Life, which included a hotel, a cinema and a theatre. By 2016, Propertuity owned 47 buildings covering a total of 176 677 m<sup>2</sup> (Propertuity 2016). As well as providing commercial and retail space, the developments of Maboneng provided 1 325 residential units for nearly 2 500 residents in 2016 (Propertuity 2016). These figures exclude information for buildings not owned by Propertuity but which fall in the Maboneng precinct. In less than a decade, Maboneng has seen significant development that has largely been driven by a single developer, Propertuity, although not exclusively.

Map 2 shows Maboneng's development, beginning in 2008 when Propertuity acquired Arts on Main. Between 2010 and 2012, the expansion of Propertuity's investment footprint was gradual, followed by more rapid development from 2013. The developers focused on a couple of blocks along Fox Street, which enabled them to create relationships between their first few buildings. The map shows the spatial clustering of development: between 2008 and 2012, development was concentrated at the core of the Maboneng area; in 2013, we started seeing developments to the east of the existing developments; in 2014, there was more expansion in the east and new developments were

introduced to northwestern parts of the area; 2015–2016 saw the growth of existing developments and new developments in the northern parts of the precinct; 2017 saw the expansion of developments to the east, and new developments to the southwest.

Maboneng is in an area of the city known as City and Suburban, named after the City and Suburban Mine of Johannesburg's earliest years. Before that, it was referred to as Natal Camp, one of two mining camps established after gold was discovered in 1886. City and Suburban is bordered by the mining deposits to the south and the railways to the northeast. To the west is Marshalltown, to the north Doornfontein and to the east Jeppestown. The area's proximity to the railway line made it ideal for industrial land uses, so most buildings are low-rise factories and manufacturing buildings dating from the 1940s and 1950s. The industrial landscape is further emphasised through a number of raised flyover roads and the major east–west arterial, Albertina Sisulu Street. The area is also accessible via the M2 highway.

The area was affected by the general decline in the CBD beginning in the 1970s and a decline in manufacturing in Johannesburg (Beavon 2004). From the late 1980s, the inner city of Johannesburg, due to a declining white population, began to accommodate black residents. However, many commercial and industrial buildings were simply mothballed as offices moved into northern nodes like Rosebank and Sandton and light manufacturing shifted to new industrial developments on the outskirts of black homelands (Ah Goo 2017).

From the 2000s, Doornfontein, to the north, began to see some investment and improvement. The improvements were driven by the presence of the University of Johannesburg's Doornfontein campus, precipitating the development of additional student accommodation. Another driver was the Ellis Park sports complex, which saw massive investment and upgrading ahead of the FIFA 2010 Soccer World Cup. The investment included the provision of a Bus Rapid Transit route along the eastern edge of Doornfontein. These developments provided the context for investment in the City and Suburban area.

Maboneng is currently an area quite clearly defined and mapped by developers and measures approximately 500 000 m<sup>2</sup>, although Propertuity

commissioned a 2016 study which examined an area of 1 km<sup>2</sup>. Maboneng is managed by a city improvement district (CID)<sup>4</sup> and has formed a 'super CID' with New Doornfontein CID. According to Propertytuity (2016), only 34% of owners live in their apartments – the majority are leased out. This low level of owner occupation suggests that much of the development is fuelled by speculation of property inflation in the near future. Maboneng residents are young. Most residents, whether owners or tenants, are between the ages of 25 and 34 (Propertytuity 2016). In 2015, there were 416 commercial tenants in Propertytuity buildings, providing work opportunities to over 8 500 people (Propertytuity 2016). From 2016, Propertytuity has focused on vertical expansion of their existing portfolio by adding floors to buildings rather than acquiring additional buildings in the area (Propertytuity 2016).

Maboneng demonstrates impressive private-led urban regeneration that has received mixed reviews. Urban researchers and journalists have labelled the development of Maboneng as gentrification and criticised it for its exclusivity (Nevin 2014; Walsh 2013). Although very few of the development projects have involved the displacement of residents, due to the extent of the industrial building stock, property prices and rentals are higher than in the surrounding areas. The commercial enterprises rely on the custom of wealthier residents from Johannesburg's northern suburbs or foreign visitors rather than serving the local community. Part of Maboneng's social exclusion comes from the distinctive architectural and aesthetic language that sets it apart visually from its surrounds (Nevin 2014). Maboneng's public art is part of this visual aesthetic.

There is also an inherent social tension between the single developer's active nurturing of an 'upwardly-mobile creative community' (Nevin 2014, 189) and a residential area that is less than a decade old. The Maboneng CID involves providing additional visible private security on the streets and supplementing public cleaning services. Although the area is not gated, these interventions create a form of enclave. 'The implementation of strategies of

gentrification in Johannesburg as ways to undo the racial spatial politics of the past is thus contradictory as, under the auspices of undoing social divisions, new – or pre-existing – divisions are introduced to or augmented in a gentrified area' (Nevin 2014, 195). Some of these tensions have erupted into violent protests in the adjacent area of Jeppestown, where developers, capitalising on Propertytuity's success, are evicting residents to develop buildings (Nicolson 2015). Developers are investing in buildings within Maboneng as well as in the surrounding areas of Doornfontein and Jeppestown. However, much of Maboneng is in line with the CoJ's urban development initiatives. In response to the issues in Jeppestown, organisations like Bjala have been established and are providing low-cost housing and educational facilities in the area.

## Urban regeneration in Johannesburg

Following global trends to foster creative economies through creative clusters or cities, South Africa developed policies at national, provincial and local levels in the late 1990s (Gregory 2016). The objectives of this approach were in line with other economic policies 'such as job creation, poverty alleviation and community participation' (Gregory 2016, 161). Although these policies were developed at multiple scales, the creative city or city-region has come to dominate the discourse following the work of Richard Florida (2002). Cities now brand themselves and compete to attract creative industries (Gregory 2016). Johannesburg, the largest economic centre of South Africa, is one of the country's centres for leading economic growth through creative industries (Gregory 2016).

Two decades ago Johannesburg's inner city was at the end of a long decline. Beginning from the 1970s, when the city authorities moved into the new metro centre in Braamfontein, businesses began to relocate northwards to Braamfontein, Rosebank, Randburg and

4. A CID is an area where property developers and/or owners supplement local government funding to maintain and enhance the physical and social environment in order to maximise investments or returns (Peyroux 2008).





Figure 3: Recognition of the commissioning of graffiti in the Maboneng precinct.

Sandton. Residential buildings began to accommodate black people from the 1980s, contributing to changing perceptions of the area. The 1990s saw an enormous influx of people, densifying existing residential accommodation and frequently and informally converting vacant office buildings for residential use. The inner city was associated with congestion, overcrowding and crime.

These poor inner-city conditions precipitated the drafting of policies in the CoJ to redevelop and regenerate the CBD and this included the creative city discourse. The most ambitious strategies were the Newtown Cultural Precinct and the Fashion District. The policies included the Inner City Economic Development Strategy (1999), Inner City Spatial Framework (1999) and the City Centre Development Framework (2000) (Gregory 2016). The urban regeneration policies focused on precincts and favoured renewal by the private sector through the provision of a tax incentive for Urban Development Zones (Gregory 2016). These policies were supported by a stock of buildings in need of redevelopment in the inner city. Enabling private development was intended to alleviate some of the burden on CoJ resources (Gregory 2016). The CoJ also established the JDA in 2001 to implement renewal projects in precincts such as the Newtown Cultural Precinct. The JDA has implemented the majority of Johannesburg's large-scale capital expenditure projects in the inner city, most of which were intended to provide urban renewal. Through analysis of Johannesburg's sectors and policies, the city was identified as a creative city (Dirsuweit 1999; Rogerson 2006).

As part of its urban renewal mandate, the JDA developed a public art policy to use up to 1% of project budgets for public art, mirroring a global practice (Harrison and Phasha 2014). The CoJ's definition of public art includes murals, sculptures, outdoor advertising, graffiti, buildings, cemeteries, landscaped gardens (People's Parks), monuments, and temporary installations (City of Johannesburg 2005, in Harrison and Phasha 2014), although most publicly funded art has focused on murals, sculptures and urban furniture. In Johannesburg, city-generated public art has been self-consciously constructed for beautification and urban regeneration (Harrison and Phasha 2014). Yet Harrison and Phasha (2014) suggest that for the many people who use or live in the inner city, the value of public art, and to an extent the art itself, is 'often invisible in a context where survival and safety are paramount'. In addition, the aesthetic focus within defined precincts has not addressed "ownership" of the space' (Harrison and Phasha 2014, 33).

Creative industries are intended to foster new industries and provide work opportunities and, additionally, create environments that are vibrant and liveable (Gregory 2016). The debates about the creative city focus on the role of creative industries in urban regeneration, particularly with regards to urban renewal policies (Gregory 2016). Creative industries can provide a gloss in the form of beautification to urban regeneration projects that may mask more negative aspects of such developments. The CoJ's urban renewal policies and the JDA's public art programme of the 2000s, in particular the redevelopment of the Newtown and Braamfontein

precincts with neighbourhood branding promoting culture and public art installations, established a precedent for a more explicit creative cluster development to be fulfilled by Maboneng.

## Maboneng as a creative cluster or city

The initial building project of Arts on Main aligned Maboneng with urban renewal for the creative city and creative tourism. The building contained artists' studios and exhibition spaces and, since then, the area of Maboneng has created a strong brand and presence, physically and digitally, through public and street art and 'instagrammable' interventions. The area now boasts several large-scale murals produced through street art festivals or commissions but there is also a significant level of graffiti and public art that contributes to the aesthetic identity and tourist activities of Maboneng.

Propertytuity's core focus has been on the arts and is reflected in many of their developments, including the Work & Art building and Hallmark House (Propertytuity 2016). The area hosts a number of art galleries, artisanal producers, the Museum of African Design and the Bioscope, an independent cinema. Propertytuity intended to nurture both a creative community and creative businesses (Gregory 2016). Propertytuity identified three levels of creativity in Maboneng (Alice Cabaret, cited in Gregory 2016, 165–166):

*[D]ifferent levels of creativity must be distinguished within the precinct. The first level of creativity is linked to the strong presence of arts and cultural activities within the area. The second element of creativity is linked to the innovative way in which spaces were conceptualised and built in the area. [...] The third level of creativity present in the area can be termed as 'creative entrepreneurs', who have a strong presence in the Maboneng precinct.*

Propertytuity has driven all three aspects through initiating regular events such as the Market on Main; investing in urban design; employing international

architects; sponsoring public art; and carefully selecting commercial tenants. The developer has contributed to beautifying and improving the public environment. By 2015, Propertytuity had planted over 1 000 trees (Propertytuity 2016). In collaboration with the JDA, 6 800 m<sup>2</sup> of street pavements were upgraded. This beautifying includes the commissioning and installation of several public art pieces and street art murals. There is also a fair amount of literal branding as several of these installations focus on the name of Maboneng. This has enhanced the creative identity of the precinct and generated a strong brand (Gregory 2016).

Although the creative enterprises and activities are central to this image, the brand is self-reinforcing as other artists and creative people are attracted to the area and keen to tap into the resource that the brand represents (Gregory 2016). '[T]he Maboneng Precinct's outward appearance is one of heightened sensitivity to imaginations of the urban, the beliefs in the "avant-garde," and the artistic inclination of its wished-for clientele, as well as of its developers' (Nevin 2014, 193).

In our interview with Propertytuity, graffiti was seen as part of a larger public environment strategy of placemaking to create one unified space (Nair interview). The Maboneng precinct and Propertytuity have sponsored both murals and street art in the neighbourhood. The brand is young and urban and the aim is to project the 'universal language of a city' (Nair interview). Graffiti is part of this universal language. Graffiti is seen to be non-threatening in the Maboneng precinct and engenders respect from residents and visitors (Nair interview). Uncommissioned graffiti – such as tags, stickers, etc. – are tolerated in Maboneng because it has not negatively impacted on development and investment. The graffiti artist Dekor1 is a resident of the area.

Maboneng is an urban regeneration project that has rapidly redeveloped this precinct in Johannesburg. Maboneng has been self-styled as a creative cluster and has used architecture, urban design and public art to project this image. In this paper, we argue that graffiti, including street art, has contributed significantly to Maboneng's identity and brand, and has, therefore, in part driven investment and tourism in the area. In the following section we examine in more detail how graffiti has contributed to the identity of Maboneng.





# A photo essay

## Graffiti in Maboneng

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This photographic essay explores the various contradictions and themes found in the graffiti occurring in Maboneng. The photos were taken over two days, six months apart, in August 2017 and January 2018. The essay begins with the changes captured during the six-month interlude and illustrates the larger context of signage and advertising in Maboneng, of which graffiti is a part. It also explores the surfaces and media of graffiti found in Maboneng and examines the various scales of pieces of graffiti and how these might relate to personal and neighbourhood identity. Finally, the photo essay considers the meaning of graffiti in Maboneng and how tourists and visitors engage with graffiti in the area.



## Temporality

Graffiti is impermanent but this temporality has different forms. These different temporalities are all visible in Maboneng and are presented in this section.



Figure 4: **Work in progress by Mars (January 2018).** Large murals or pieces may take days to create so there is a temporality to the work in progress.



Figure 5: Flaking walls (August 2017). The medium of the work or the surface may also have limited longevity and so either the paint fades or the surface crumbles.





Figure 6: Street art, created by South African Cameron Platter in 2012, has been painted over (August 2017). Graffiti is also frequently painted over either by other writers or as an eradication measure, as in this image and the next one.



Figure 7: The same historic church building in August 2017 (left) and January 2018 (right).





## Mixed media and surfaces

Graffiti in Maboneng can be found on almost any surface, including on signs, doors and windows. The surface plays a role in longevity. For instance, a more porous canvas will absorb paint, which will then fade more quickly; a temporary construction sign is

easily removed. Pieces adjacent to the street edge can be smaller as they can be viewed up close. This also means that they can be produced quickly and tend to be more prolific.

Although the majority of these pieces are tags, there are unexpected delights in small stencils or doodled characters..



Figure 8: An unsuccessful attempt at the removal of a tag (January 2018). The painted surface has absorbed the spray paint.



Figure 9: A tag, a sticker and a very traditional form of place and time marking all on one temporary sign (January 2018). This is an easy surface to mark, with a limited lifespan.





Figure 10: **Peeling layers of posters on a door with a tag.** Posters were found in several locations in Maboneng (January 2018). The peeling paint of the walls blends with the peeling posters to create a larger, textured surface.





Figure 11: A whimsical doodle just above eye level which could easily be removed from the glass at any moment (January 2018).



Figure 12: Stencil works are clustered on this stretch of Fox Street. The painted surfaces are the preferred canvas but larger, more dramatic pieces feature on the facebrick wall. Note how the concrete bollard in the foreground has also been claimed (January 2018).



## Scale and identity

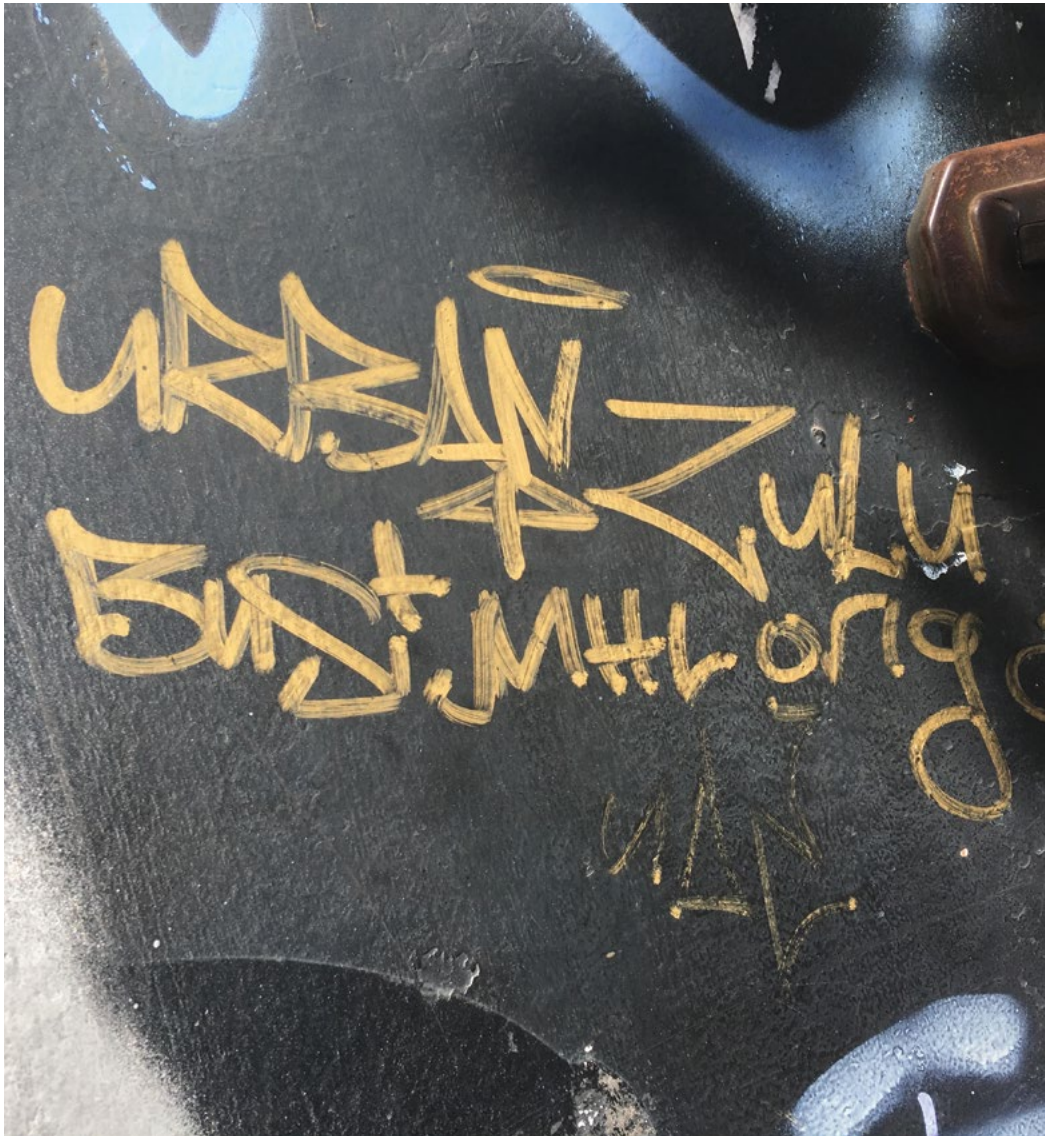


Figure 13: A tag done with a large marker on a door, representing the smallest scale of identity marking (August 2017). Graffiti's origins in tagging are an insertion and assertion of the self in the urban environment. Graffiti artists give themselves names and gain status through repetition in space and on surfaces.



Figure 14: Stickers on a road sign illustrating an equally small and quick way to mark identity (January 2018).





Figure 15: Signage and graffiti are two competing forms of identity claiming the building façade (January 2018). The identity marking of graffiti follows similar processes to branding and advertising, which rely on presence in the market and repetition.



Figure 16: The signature of the artist of a large-scale mural, creating recognition for the artist (January 2018).





Figure 17: A tag and a throw-up of two different writers laying claim to larger surfaces (January 2018). Here the scale of the tag is enlarged in response to the competitive marking of space and surface.



Figure 18: A clustering of tags claiming a wall (January 2018). Small-scale tags create a larger impact.



Figure 19: A wall claimed with the identity of Maboneng (January 2018). At the scale of the neighbourhood, street art and large pieces have been used to create a strong identity and brand for Maboneng.





Figure 20: A large-scale mural which contributes to the highly visible identity of Maboneng and is complemented by the design of the adjacent building, constructed out of shipping containers (January 2018). When these graffiti pieces are expanded to occupy the walls of multi-storey buildings, this identity becomes visible across vast spaces of the city.



Figure 21: Large-scale street art is blended with the architectural aesthetic of the building and again can be seen from afar (August 2017).





Photograph by Alet Pretorius

Figure 22: The first prominent piece of street art in the area painted in 2012 by ROA, a Belgian artist, as part of the I ART JOBURG project.<sup>5</sup>

5. The project was curated by Ricky Lee Gordon and included several installations and an exhibition of photographs. It was partnered with Adidas Originals and followed two similar projects in Woodstock, Cape Town, and Soweto.



## Advertising and signage

The industrial heritage of Maboneng is visible in the hand-painted signs advertising businesses in the area. Some of these have faded over time but others are fresh. Maboneng therefore has a history of painted pictographic surfaces, the language of which graffiti has extended. The lines are further blurred with recent installations of advertisements in the form of

murals and in other instances billboards have been erected over street art murals. In Maboneng, graffiti is one element of the 'corpus inscriptionum' (Sulima 2002 cited in Chmielewska 2007, 156) that includes signage and advertising.

The mural advertisements are aimed at younger consumers and include the promotion of alcoholic drinks, television shows and electronic devices.



Figure 23: Hand-painted signage for a supplier of electric goods in Maboneng (January 2018).



Figure 24: A medley of printed signage, hand-painted illustrations and some throw-up graffiti (August 2017).



Figure 25: **Part mural and part signage (August 2017).**







Figure 26: A mural imitating signage. The large street art mural was done by Steve 'ESPO' Powers and the Icy Sign Team as part of the I ART JOBURG project in 2012 (January 2018).



Figure 27: Behind the billboard advertising shoes along the wall is a mural done by Americans Steve ‘ESPO’ Powers and the Icy Sign Team in 2012. Their positive message of ‘stay up’ has been replaced with consumerism, as the wall is now used as advertising space (January 2018).





Figure 28: A strong visual mural advertising a television show (January 2018).

## Public art

Public art was present in the area before Maboneng was initiated. Since then, Propertuity, the developer of the precinct, has commissioned or sponsored several public art pieces, mostly in the form of wall murals.

This is supplemented by a range of graffiti and street art practices in Maboneng, including legal graffiti and illegal installations.

The result is an area rich in visual imagery but where the line between commissioning and tolerating is obscure.



Figure 29: Cows 1-7 by local artist Andrew Lindsay as part of the JDA's 1% public art programme in Doornfontein (January 2018).



Figure 30: Detail of a long wall mural by artist N. Makamo, completed in 2014 and paid for by Maboneng's CID (January 2018).





Figure 31: An iconic photograph of Nelson Mandela has become a ten-storey mural in Maboneng, commissioned by the CID and created by artist Freddy Sam in 2014 (January 2018).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This piece is very similar to a sculpture by Marco Cianfanelli, installed by the JDA in 2013 near the Magistrate's Court in Johannesburg.



Figure 32: The underside of a highway flyover is a traditional location for graffiti but in this instance it was commissioned by Maboneng CID (January 2018).



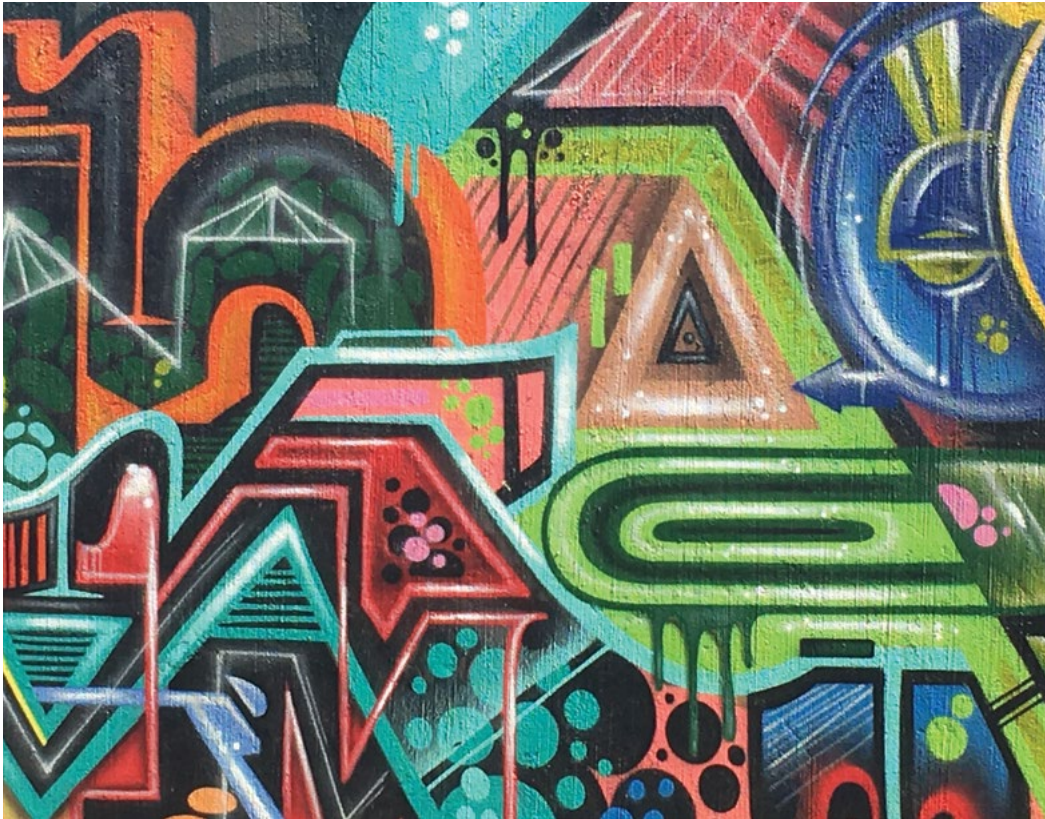


Figure 33: Detail of a legal wall mural by local graffiti artists (August 2017).



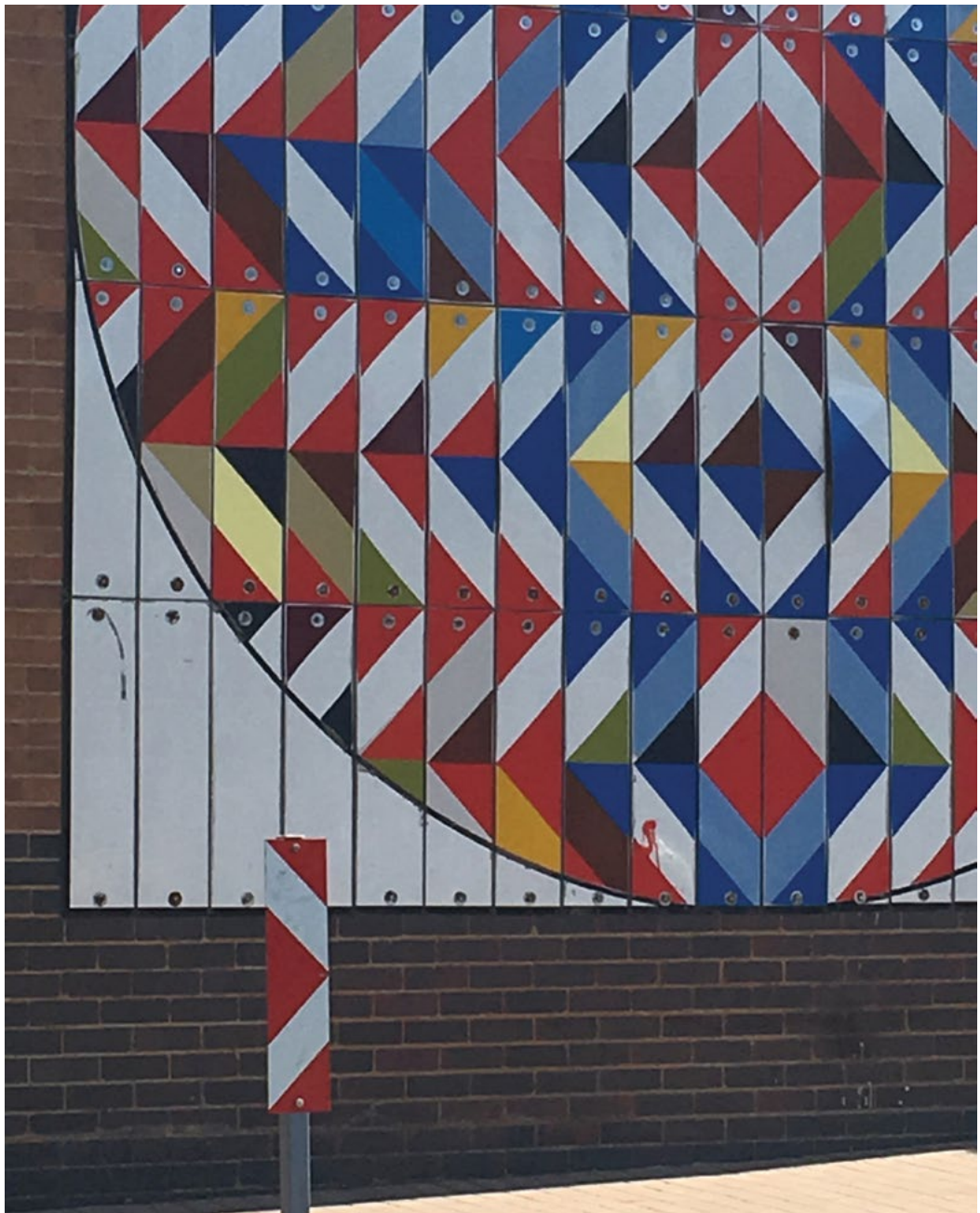


Figure 34: An illegal installation on a CoJ structure that references road signage. The signage post in the foreground, a ubiquitous element of the urban landscape, is also part of the installation (January 2018).



Figure 35: A mural that amplifies graffiti's textual basis to create a striking graphic image (January 2018).





Figure 36: A legal mural by artist Mars that speaks to both the graffiti subculture and a wider audience through a throw-up with indicative lettering to provide some legibility (January 2018).



## Engagement and meaning

It is clear from our various visits to Maboneng that the graffiti in the area engages the users of the space to varying degrees. Some of the works are head-turning and people take photographs of, and with, different graffiti. Other graffiti invites engagement through the

work by asking questions or leaving blank spaces for further public writing. There is not much political graffiti in Maboneng but there are a few pieces that seek to be thought-provoking, such as the portrait of Jan van Riebeeck. There is also evidence of significant engagement from the graffiti subculture through the tagging of earlier works.



Figure 37: The work of local artist Falko (2012) turning heads (August 2017).



Figure 38: A graffiti photoshoot (January 2018).





Figure 39: Tourists capture some stencil pieces while on a tour of the area (January 2018).





Figure 40: 'A tourist in the land of your birth?' asked in vernacular Afrikaans, providing a possible commentary on the demographics of Maboneng's local visitors (January 2018).



Figure 41: Small stencil pieces of historical figures and a reference to the #FeesMustFall student movement (January 2018).





Figure 42: Layers of dialogue made visible on the door's surface August 2017, left, and January 2018, right







Figure 43: A street art installation is 'bombed' with tags (January 2018).





Figure 44: A mural inviting engagement in the space as well as online (January 2018).





Figure 45: A large blank wall is animated by an invitation to 'make your mark'. Note the use of the hashtag connecting the work to social media (January 2018).

*The industrial heritage of Maboneng is visible in the hand-painted signs advertising businesses in the area.*

*Some of these have faded over time but others are fresh. Maboneng therefore has a history of painted pictographic surfaces, the language of which graffiti has extended.*



## Graffiti in Maboneng

Graffiti and street art in Maboneng are plentiful and varied in type and scale. Nearly every form of graffiti and street art is present and, in many cases, encouraged or supported. In this section of the paper we test the roles that graffiti and public art have played in the urban regeneration of the Maboneng precinct. While war has been declared against graffiti in the Johannesburg area (Sosibo 2016), this is at odds with the redevelopment of Maboneng, where graffiti and public art have been used to contribute to tourism and lure investment into the area. This section uses spatial analysis to understand the spatial distribution of graffiti and public art as well as the spatial and temporal trends which have influenced the success of the Maboneng brand. We show how graffiti contributes to placemaking through building meaning and identity into spaces and creating identifiable landmarks in the urban environment.

The first large-scale graffiti murals in Maboneng were erected in 2012 as part of the I Art Joburg festival sponsored by Adidas (see Figures 20, 22, 26). In total, eight murals were installed, which went on to become iconic emblems for the Maboneng precinct: two works by Spanish street artist Remed, 'Betty Fox' by Falko, 'Jozy' by Kazy Usclef, six animals by Belgian-born artist ROA, classified by Durban artist Cameron Platter, and 'Stay Up' and 'Mama' by Steve 'ESPO' Powers and the Icy Sign Team. These

were photographed by the world-renowned graffiti enthusiast Martha Cooper, so not only did the works create high visibility for Maboneng within the city, but they put the precinct on the global map. This was added to in 2013 with the mural Jan van Riebeeck by Gaia and Freddy-Sam, followed in 2014 by two 40 m murals on the side of a Propertytuity building. Both done by Freddy-Sam, the one is 'i am because we are' and features an antelope, and the second is a reproduction of Bob Gosani's iconic photo of Nelson Mandela (see Figures 21, 31).

## Types of graffiti

In total 133 graffiti sites were recorded in the photos taken during the fieldwork and graffiti tours around Maboneng over several days, six months apart. The graffiti data captured a diverse range of graffiti types, from simple tags to more elaborate and artistic works. This diversity is illustrated in Table 1. Most graffiti sites contain multiple instances of graffiti and are characterised by more than one graffiti style. Approximately 50% of the photographs contained more than one style of graffiti by different artists. A total of 253 individual graffiti pieces were recorded.



Table 2 shows a breakdown of these different graffiti types and individual graffiti occurrences. Table 2 indicates that when all graffiti instances are recorded per site as individual pieces, the most common graffiti style is tagging.

We mapped these various instances of graffiti (excluding commercial/advertising and information signs) in Map 3, illustrating the spatial distribution of graffiti in Maboneng. This map includes instances

recorded in both August 2017 and January 2018. Although we captured several changes over this period, the majority of graffiti instances showed no change. The map contains a couple of graffiti instances that were recorded in August but were painted over by January. In some cases, this repainting was an eradication of the graffiti but in others it was simply an indication of change of ownership or use of the structure.

Table 1: **The dominant (or identifiable) graffiti style at each recorded graffiti site.**

Graffiti type	No. of instances
Masterpiece	12
Public art	9
Heaven	9
Tag	7
Hand-painted signage or commercial advertising	8
Sticker and poster	1
Stencil	12
Wildstyle	6
Blockbuster and throw-up	2
Various and multiple graffiti instances	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>

Table 2: **Categorisation of all graffiti pieces in Maboneng.**

Graffiti type	Total instances
Blockbuster, bubble and brush	21
Heaven	12
Masterpiece	22
Sticker, poster and paste-up	24
Stencil	26
Street and public art	26
Tag	75
Wildstyle	16
Throw-up	10
Commercial, advertising and branding	17
Information sign	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>253</b>



Map 3: **Location and spatial distribution of graffiti in Maboneng.**

Given the dynamic nature of graffiti, we chose to include instances of change in the data and mapping. Our tours focused on Maboneng's core streets where public art, public environment and redevelopment are most prominent, although we also captured graffiti at some of the edges of the precinct. Public art and large pieces do seem to occur mostly in these main areas. In comparison, more traditional graffiti like tagging and throw-ups can be found throughout the precinct.

Drawing from the literature, we analysed the graffiti in Maboneng according to a number of thematic areas. The discussion of temporality that follows notes the multiple instances of change we recorded during our site visits, highlighting the

dynamic nature of graffiti. We explored graffiti pieces and their surfaces and the media used to create the work. We examined the various scales of graffiti works and how this tied to the expression of identity – whether small and personal or larger and part of the precinct. We documented traditional forms of signage and advertising in Maboneng and juxtaposed them with graffiti, highlighting the blurring of media – specifically advertising created by graffiti artists spraying paint on walls. We explored public art in the precinct, incorporating a broader definition, and analysed different forms of engagement and meaning derived from graffiti.

## Temporality

Graffiti is not meant to be permanent and its rationale is based on the fact that it appears and disappears. Cramer (2015) argues that this temporality elevates the importance of graffiti and creates a sense of urgency, which in turn creates more impact. Graffiti's temporality is attributable to its location in mostly public spaces which then act as a public canvas, open to layers and layers of new ideas, colours, motifs and concepts, and constantly evolving. Similarly, some public art installations may also be created as temporary installations. However, not all graffiti is intended to be temporary: while graffiti writers are free-ranging as they make temporary claims to space, the tags created by street gangs aim to occupy a more fixed and permanent territory (Ley and Cybriwsky 1974). The temporality of graffiti is ongoing and changes every day through the remaking of space through cultural, discursive and material practices of ingenuity, transformation and maintenance (Bain and Landau 2017).

Graffiti is impermanent but this temporality has different forms. Large murals or pieces may take days to create so there is a temporality to the work in progress. Sometimes graffiti's impermanence reflects the medium of the work or the deteriorating condition of the surface, which may have limited longevity, resulting in either the paint fading or the surface crumbling. Graffiti is also frequently painted over either by other writers or through eradication measures. These different temporalities are all visible in Maboneng.

In the six-month period of fieldwork in Maboneng, we captured a number of murals and walls that changed. These were generally pieces that were 'redone' by the original writers or by other writers. The effect is that the wall retains the aesthetic of graffiti but the content has changed. In other instances graffiti had been removed by being painted over. This was the case with the little church building (see Figure 7). This is an indication that not everyone in the area enjoys the graffiti aesthetic or benefits from its presence. However, Propertuity's policy of tolerance enables greater longevity of graffiti in Maboneng (Nair interview) and encourages better-quality graffiti as artists are prepared to invest more time in a piece (Ferrell and Weide 2010).

We also captured examples of change that had occurred before the fieldwork began. One mural that had been erected in the 2012 campaign was mostly, if irregularly, covered up with bright blue paint (see Figure 6). This may have been for a number of reasons, including a deterioration of the painted surface, unwanted tagging over the piece or a change in ownership of the building. Another example is a 3D graffiti mural which had been removed at a potential restaurant location (see Figure 46). By contrast, we also saw the introduction of new graffiti during this period (see Figure 47).

The temporality of graffiti enlivens the urban environment because it changes frequently. This is not limited to particular forms of graffiti. Commissioned murals change just as much as tags or smaller pieces. Graffiti can enhance a space through refreshed paint and colour but older pieces may highlight signs of neglect or deterioration as the graffiti fades or crumbles. In this way graffiti provides commentary on the condition of surfaces and the care of the public urban environment.

## Surfaces and mixed media

Graffiti in Maboneng can be found on almost any surface, including on signs, doors and windows. This means that graffiti can be in unexpected positions or locations along the street or in public places. There is also a variety of media used, including stickers, stencils, posters, traditional spray paint, paint and three-dimensional pieces using found objects or sculpture (see Figure 48).

Graffiti's temporality is tied to the surface and the medium in which it is written. The surface plays a role in the longevity of any graffiti as a more porous canvas will absorb paint which will then fade more quickly. Similarly, a temporary construction sign is easily removed. Pieces adjacent to the street edge can be smaller as they can be viewed up close. This means that they can be done quickly and tend to be more numerous. Although the majority of these pieces are tags, there are unexpected novelties in small stencils or doodled characters. In contrast, the large murals, which take days to paint, can be seen from afar.





Figure 46: **Graffiti removal:** August 2017 graffiti occurrence removed by January 2018.



Figure 47: **Introduction of new graffiti to site:** Poster stuck over existing graffiti.

*Graffiti in Maboneng can be found on almost any surface, including on signs, doors and windows. This means that graffiti can be in unexpected positions or locations along the street or in public places.*



Figure 48: Street art piece made from porcelain saucers, plates and shells.

### Scale and identity

Graffiti has its origins in tagging, which is an insertion and assertion of oneself in the urban environment. Graffiti artists give themselves names and gain status through repetition in space and on surfaces. This is a similar process to that followed in branding and advertising, which rely on presence in the market and repetition. At the scale of the neighbourhood, street art and large pieces have been used to create a strong identity and brand for Maboneng. When these pieces are expanded to occupy the walls of multi-storey buildings, this identity becomes visible across vast spaces of the city. By creating an identifiable district, graffiti builds an identity for the precinct of Maboneng. In addition, the scale of the graffiti pieces means that this district identity is visible beyond the precinct. This is demonstrated in the next section, where we map the visibility of graffiti in Maboneng.

Much of the graffiti occurs along the street and is accessible at eye level and at scales that relate to the human body, rather than the scale of buildings or districts. It is intended to be observed while passing through the public spaces of the streets. Small pieces such as stickers and stencils are intended to be viewed up close and are therefore frequently located along the street at eye level. Larger pieces such as throw-ups or murals can be seen from further away and can be found on walls above street level.

The visibility of pieces indicates the intended audience. There are no doubt many instances of graffiti that we did not capture on rooftops, in tunnels and in other out-of-reach places. Those kinds of pieces are intended for consumption by the graffiti subculture. By contrast, several large-scale murals are widely visible. Many of these murals are visible outside of the neighbourhood and are also frequently featured in social media and in the promotional material of Propertuity. These are part of the Maboneng brand and identity.

### Signage and advertising

Graffiti should be considered within the 'corpus inscriptionum' of a place: a context of multiple other writings including signage, advertising and other graffiti (Sulima 2002, in Chmielewska 2007, 156). Considering graffiti in the context of urban writings and semiotics again emphasises the issue of who has

the right to participate in the making of space and place in the city. Graffiti generates social capital in urban space dialogues. 'Aesthetic agency becomes the impetus to the social change of connection, belonging, and community; redesign re-enchants the cityscape, encouraging proactive and responsible dwelling, as if artists could view towns through the eyes of dwellers envisioning rejuvenated public places' (Visconti et al. 2010, 522).

The industrial heritage of Maboneng is visible in the hand-painted signs advertising businesses in the area. Some of these have faded over time but others are fresh. Maboneng therefore has a history of the painted pictographic surface, the language of which graffiti has extended. The lines between media are further blurred with recent installations of advertisements in the form of murals, and in other instances, billboards have been erected over street art murals. The mural advertisements are aimed at younger consumers and include the promotion of alcoholic drinks (see Figure 49), television shows and electronic devices (see Figure 50).

The various visual aesthetics in Maboneng illustrate a spectrum of signage, graffiti, advertising and branding. The differences between these different elements come down to authorship and legality – who installs these pieces and how. This relates back to the debates on the right to the city and how these rights are frequently withheld from those who are not property owners. For example, Propertuity can create a brand identity for Maboneng on the underside of a concrete flyover (Figure 2) but a tag of personal identity and expression on the same structure is illegal.

Propertuity has employed graffiti and street artists to create a strong identity for Maboneng. This is evident spatially in the precinct in the high visibility of key large pieces. This may be inspired, in part, by the industrial heritage of the area but also ties into the focus on the development of a creative industry. This curated identity is then replicated on social media, creating an identity in digital space. This online presence reflects the ways in which graffiti is increasingly present on the internet and other social media. This shift to digital platforms, however, focuses on graffiti as an image and seldom represents the spatial context of the work.





Figure 49: Brutal Fruits advertisement.



Figure 50: Installation advertising new Samsung S8 mobile device.

## Public art

Public art was present in the area before Maboneng was initiated. In 2008, the JDA upgraded the Doornfontein train station and provided a small transport square for minibus taxis. As part of that project, seven concrete cows by the artist Andrew Lindsay were installed in the square (see Figure 29). Since then, Propertuity has commissioned or sponsored several public art pieces, mostly in the form of wall murals. This is supplemented by a range of graffiti and street art practices in Maboneng, including legal graffiti and illegal installations. The result is an area rich in visual imagery but the line between commissioning and tolerating is opaque.

The first large-scale murals in Maboneng and surrounds were erected as part of street art festivals. But Propertuity has commissioned several large pieces since then, many of which adorn their buildings. Propertuity has also commissioned more traditional public art, upgraded pavements and planted trees. As a result, the public art tends to be clustered around or on the Propertuity buildings.

## Engagement and meaning

Numerous locality maps are present in Maboneng to assist visitors with navigating the area and as part of a neighbourhood shuttle service. These maps list public art locations (see Figure 51). This suggests that part of the interest in the area is in viewing the public art. In addition, a local tour company, Past Experiences, provides more formal engagement with the street art and graffiti in Maboneng by running tours for locals and tourists with a specific focus on the graffiti.

We also captured more informal engagement with graffiti. It is clear from our various visits to Maboneng that the graffiti in the area engages the users of the space to varying degrees. We witnessed people turning their heads to look at pieces and taking photographs of and with different graffiti. Some graffiti invites engagement with the work by asking questions or leaving blank spaces for further public writing (see Figure 52). There is also evidence of significant engagement from the graffiti subculture through the tagging of earlier works. These various

engagements are evidence of meaning and identity (Cresswell 2004) and, ultimately, placemaking in Maboneng. Engagement is also visible on social media, particularly on Instagram where graffiti features significantly in images tagged or located in Maboneng. There is not much political graffiti in Maboneng but there are a few pieces that seek to be thought-provoking.

At the time of the regeneration of Revolution House, one of Maboneng's developments, graffiti stating 'We won't move' was present on the rooftop of the building (Walsh 2013). This graffiti evoked the iconic image of protest graffiti from the Sophiatown forced removals in the 1950s and suggested a similar opposition to the development in Maboneng. However, there is very little evidence of further political commentary on urban renewal processes in Maboneng.

One mural sparked some tension and commentary. It was installed at the back of the Cosmopolitan Hotel, a building not owned by Propertuity but within the Maboneng precinct. The mural includes a portrait of Jan van Riebeeck and several people wanted to know why the Dutch coloniser was given such prominence, even celebrated, in the mural. Upon engaging with the artist, Propertuity learned that the mural was intended to draw comparisons between the coloniser and the process of urban renewal in Maboneng (Nair interview). Much like traditional art, meanings in graffiti and street art can be obscure for viewers and this is one such instance.

This section shows that the aesthetics and practices of graffiti in Maboneng are varied. In a relatively short period of fieldwork, we captured a number of changes to walls and surfaces that reflect different forms of engagement. The scale and quality of graffiti pieces are also multiple in Maboneng and each scale adds layers of interest to the urban environment. The graffiti in Maboneng also demonstrates a blurring of street art and public art, and signage, advertising and graffiti. Graffiti is only one of many kinds of visual elements in the neighbourhood.



Figure 51: Map showing Propertytuity-owned buildings and public art locations.



Figure 52: Public can interact by filling in the blank spaces. A Past Experiences tour guide said chalk was available and could be acquired from a shop opposite the installation.



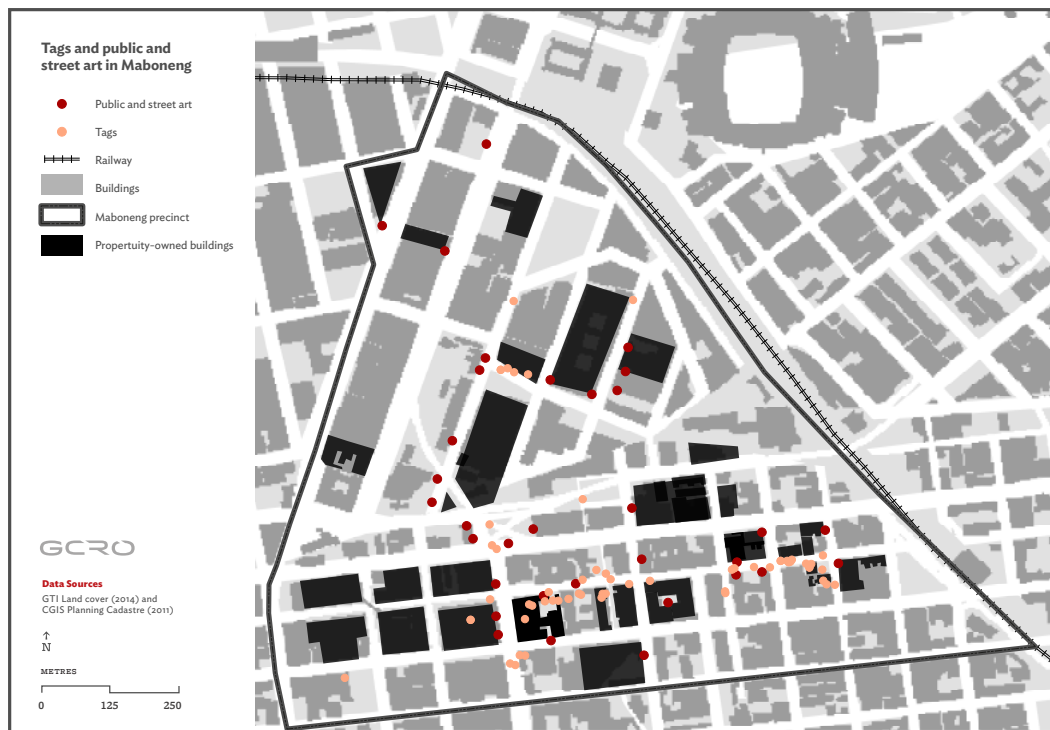
## Spatial analysis and mapping of graffiti

A key part of graffiti is its urban context: the relationship of graffiti with surfaces, the streets and spaces. 'However, there has not been any systematic attempt to date to trace these geographies of graffiti and to place this spatial work within the context of research by sociologists, criminologists and cultural studies scholars, who often evoke the spatial in their graffiti research' (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011, 129). Artists consider 'patterns of light, human movement, neighborhood policing tendencies, lines of visibility, major routes of commuter travel, and phases of urban development and decay' when choosing a 'spot' for their graffiti (Ferrell and Weide 2010, 49). This section of the paper examines the spatial relationship of graffiti in three ways. Map 4 explores the relationship between graffiti, public art and the buildings owned

by Propertuity. Map 5 illustrates the density of graffiti pieces and works in Maboneng and Map 6 depicts the lines of visibility of the 'heaven' pieces in the district.

### Local scale analysis of graffiti in relation to Propertuity-owned buildings

This mapping exercise sought to locate graffiti occurrences in Maboneng, while simultaneously looking at the development of Maboneng. Map 4 shows the locations of Propertuity buildings, public and street art and less formal graffiti tagging. There is a strong relationship between the street art and Propertuity-owned buildings. This is evidence of their strategy of branding buildings as they are redeveloped and demonstrates how street art is incorporated into public environment upgrades surrounding developed buildings. Notably, the mapping shows how tagging, accompanies both redevelopment and commissioned street art.

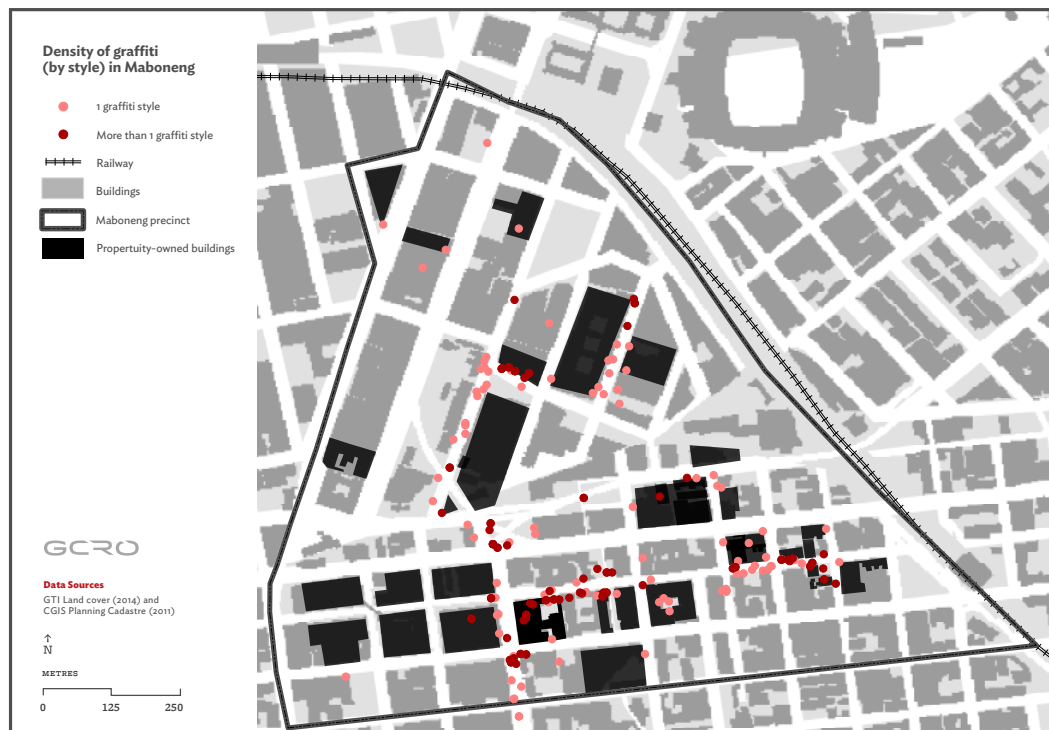


Map 4: Location of graffiti tags and public art in Maboneng.

Propertytuity does not have policies to control or remove less formal graffiti (Nair interview). Some may argue that murals have been commissioned to deter tagging and informal graffiti. However, Map 4 shows this is not the case either. In Figure 47, a doodle of a cat has been added to a commissioned mural, and subsequently covered by a poster. Although the cat could easily have been painted over to maintain the integrity of the original mural, the work has been left, to be added to by other artists. This example also highlights the futility of attempting to impose control over graffiti. The result is that the visual milieu of Maboneng includes the full spectrum of graffiti, even in the areas that have been upgraded. This approach is contrary to the long-held perspective that graffiti contributes to 'crime and grime'. The approach suggests that in Maboneng graffiti is treated as an aesthetic expression, whether it is commissioned or not.

### Density of graffiti and public and street art in Maboneng

Considering the role that graffiti has played in the rebranding of Maboneng, another important consideration of the study was the density of graffiti in the precinct. Map 5 provides an indication of the density of graffiti and the diversity of graffiti styles in Maboneng. The light pink dots represent photographs that contain a single piece of graffiti and the dark red dots represent photos with several pieces of graffiti in them. The clustering of dark dots shows walls, surfaces or corners with lots of different graffiti. This approximate measure of density can also be read as a proxy for scale. The photographs of single pieces of graffiti are likely to be of works that are larger in scale than the images with multiple graffiti. Therefore, the map also gives an indication of the clustering of smaller works.



Map 5: Map showing density of graffiti and diversity of styles at particular locations.



Map 6: The distance from which certain graffiti is visible at street level. (Where titles of pieces could not be ascertained, names refer to the content of the murals.)

Map 5 shows that there is a relationship between the number of graffiti occurrences, the development of Maboneng and the location of Propertytuity buildings. While single graffiti occurrences are common in Maboneng, multiple graffiti occurrences per site are mostly prevalent in the parts of Maboneng which were developed first. This supports the policy of Propertytuity not to remove graffiti as graffiti is prevalent around the older developed buildings. This also highlights a relationship between the development and graffiti, suggesting that the redevelopment of Maboneng has fostered a graffiti subculture.

### Visibility of graffiti

The location of a graffiti piece is a conscious decision as graffiti artists aim to express their views in the public realm (Dovey et al. 2012). Thus, the visibility of the pieces plays an important role in the art of graffiti writing, as graffiti artists gain more recognition and respect based on the reachability<sup>7</sup> of their work. This last mapping exercise looked at the reach of the murals (some commissioned) on high-rise buildings in Maboneng. Map 6 shows that while some of the murals in Maboneng can be seen from afar, others have limited visibility. These large, visible pieces, irrespective of their reach, make Maboneng more inviting and aid in the branding of the precinct.

<sup>7</sup> We use this term to describe a combination of a graffiti piece's physical access and its public visibility.





Figure 53: The visibility of the Mama mural in Maboneng (Google Earth Street View, 2018, 26°12'11"S, 28°08'28" E).

Map 6 shows how extensive the visual reach of some of the graffiti murals is in Maboneng. Works such as Nelson Mandela, Mama Africa and Jozy can be seen for several hundred metres down streets and in some cases beyond the boundaries of Maboneng itself. Both Mama Africa and Nelson Mandela are well placed for visibility along the raised flyover coming down from the M2 highway. This can be seen in the Google Earth image (Figure 53) simulating the experience of drivers on the flyover. Thus, the branding and the identity of the area are announced for the public, even for those not physically in the neighbourhood.

The maps in this section reveal the relationship between graffiti and the built fabric in Maboneng. Street art and traditional graffiti are clustered together, illustrating a density of activity along some routes and on particular buildings. Graffiti follows high-traffic areas in order to be highly visible (Ferrell and Weide 2010). This mapping also illustrates that tags and other forms of graffiti coexist with commissioned street and public art, highlighting the role that graffiti plays in the aesthetic and urban regeneration of Maboneng. This role contributes to placemaking in the neighbourhood and creates an identity and brand beyond the neighbourhood through high visibility.

## Graffiti and the creative economy

Graffiti marks place, therefore contributing to placemaking either through the contestation of space or through its beautification (Visconti et al. 2010). 'In this manner, graffiti artists simultaneously "make place" and are "out of place" in urban environments' (Docuyan 2000, 106). Graffiti's temporality means that it is more agile and can therefore engage in a 'design dialogue' (Burnham 2010, 137). The urban landscape is not the end of a design process but the beginning of sustained engagement with users and inhabitants (Burnham 2010). Graffiti artists are visualising this process directly in the spaces and surfaces of the dialogue.

Graffiti has been recognised elsewhere as having value in an alternative 'urban economy' (Snyder 2009), contributing to place valorisation (Brighenti 2016) and contributing to place branding (Evans 2014). However, this value of graffiti is largely seen to be divergent from, or to exist in a duality with, traditional forms of graffiti (Brighenti 2016; Evans 2014). There is a distinction between the value of post-graffiti and the continued criminalisation of other forms of graffiti. The case of Maboneng illustrates how these various forms of graffiti can coexist or converge in a single location and challenge the need for such a distinction.

Propertuity has spent considerable amounts of money upgrading the public environment of Maboneng through street art and public art in addition to the planting of trees, private security and the upgrading of parks. A key point is that this has not entailed the eradication of graffiti in Maboneng after development or upgrading (Nair interview), although some graffiti may be lost in the process. Maboneng demonstrates that despite graffiti's numerous negative connotations, it does not in and of itself constitute urban decay or crime and grime. In contrast, graffiti has been used in Maboneng to the enormous benefit of the neighbourhood and developers. Graffiti and street art are very clearly part of the strategy of urban renewal in Maboneng and part of its branding as a creative hub. Graffiti has been used on individual buildings to brand these buildings and create a distinctive identity for the building. Graffiti has also been used to create a

larger identity and brand for Maboneng and is present at very large scales on buildings, walls and freeway infrastructure.

The unique and identifiable traits of graffiti have been used in Maboneng as a form of way-finding. In the absence of reliable street signs, identifiable buildings and landmarks are a way of navigating the neighbourhood (Nair interview). Thus, graffiti functions in the same way as Lynch's landmarks (1960) – iconic elements of the city that help inhabitants navigate the urban environment. This is an extension of creating an identity for the neighbourhood, as these visual cues also signal the boundaries of the development of Maboneng. Visitors are able to establish for themselves, through the visual aesthetics of Maboneng, the limits of their navigation or exploration in the area.

All of these elements – the public art, the urban environment upgrades, the branding and the way-finding – contribute to placemaking in Maboneng. This is an important strategy in Propertuity's redevelopment of the area (Nair interview). Artists and other creatives were first targeted because of their need for cheap industrial spaces in which to work (Nair interview) – the dominant building stock that existed in Maboneng. The starting point for the development has continued by attracting businesses of fashion and art, theatre, cinema and the Museum of African Design. Graffiti is part of a larger focus on visual and design aesthetics, although not part of the original focus on creative industries in the neighbourhood.

Graffiti has also promoted tourism in Maboneng and contributes directly to the tourist economy. The tour company Past Experiences conducts a variety of tours in Johannesburg, including specific tours focused on graffiti. These tours attract both local visitors and international tourists. The graffiti tours are frequently guided by local graffiti artists, making them reminiscent of walkabouts with artists in galleries. The focus of graffiti in tours of Maboneng and other neighbourhoods makes explicit the positive link between graffiti and the economy.

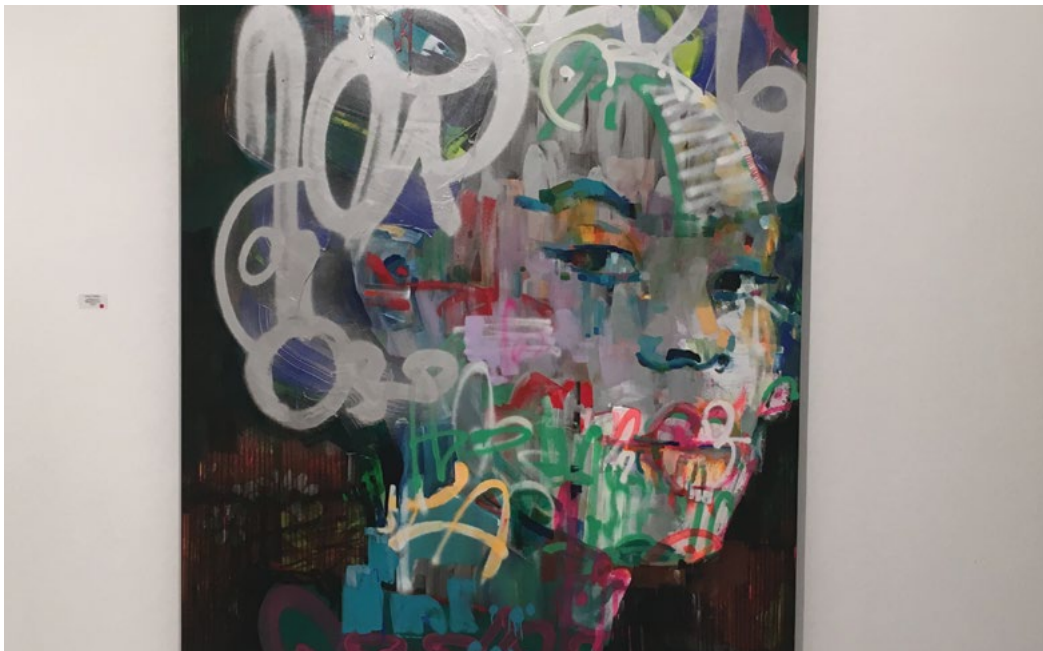
The global development of graffiti, and particularly the recent influence of the internet and social media, has resulted in a global aesthetic with subtle variations of place. Several of Maboneng's large-scale graffiti pieces are the work of international

artists. This aesthetic has contributed to creating an aspect of familiarity to the identity and placemaking of Maboneng, something that Propertuity has strived to achieve (Nair interview). In this way Maboneng can be compared to equivalent developments in Shoreditch, London, or Hell's Kitchen, New York. This reinforces known expectations and encourages and reassures visitors to the area. However, this may be at the expense of creating an explicit and specific place that reflects Johannesburg and its context.

Part of graffiti's ambiguity is connected to the way it has become part of the articulation of the creative city. The increasingly global geography of graffiti and street art coincides with the rise of creative cities, as photographs of locally produced images are reproduced and circulated transnationally through magazines, books and social media (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011). Graffiti, particularly street art, is used as a signifier of urban renewal and urban creative economies (McAuliffe 2012). The ambiguity of graffiti's meaning is in the way that city authorities mobilise street art towards a post-industrial economy while simultaneously deepening the criminalisation of graffiti (McAuliffe 2012).

Highlighting the role of graffiti in establishing creative economies shifts the discourse from vandalism to an urban renewal strategy. Graffiti as a practice in the urban public sphere makes visible the creative city but also contributes directly to its operation through the commodification of street art in advertising and merchandise (McAuliffe 2012). Graffiti has been framed as a transgressive practice that challenges the moral geographies of the city but it also challenges how we conceive of public space and what is deemed to be out of place (McAuliffe 2012).

The discourse of the creative city has provided graffiti with a commercial value in the urban environment. This can be seen in the way that some cities compete for the works of Banksy or how graffiti is leveraged in promoting a city's tourism. In Maboneng, graffiti has been used to create a local neighbourhood identity while simultaneously tapping into a global aesthetic that has attracted international visitors. This demonstrates graffiti's contribution to placemaking in the urban environment.







## Conclusion

The practice and reception of graffiti has evolved over time. The history of graffiti in South Africa and Gauteng is more than just the import of hip hop culture from America – it includes anti-colonial and anti-apartheid protests. In the post-apartheid era, graffiti continues to have political relevance, notably in the recent #FeesMustFall movement. Graffiti as a practice in the newly democratic state is an important and accessible form of individual and collective expression in the built environment. This expression can have both positive and negative consequences. The positive consequence of freedom of expression within the built environment can become negative when used to express hateful and prejudicial messages. Graffiti's political role is highlighted in the history of South African graffiti and represents an alternative form of engagement.

This paper examined graffiti in its urban context in the Maboneng precinct, Johannesburg. Maboneng contains multiple dimensions of graffiti, from tagging to street art festivals to graffiti tours and graffiti advertising; illegal and commissioned; local subculture and international artists; clean redevelopments and mothballed buildings. Through photographs, we documented instances of graffiti in Maboneng and the general visual context of the area. We used GIS methods to map graffiti and its context.

Our research illustrates how graffiti has been a

strategy of urban renewal in Maboneng. Large murals are incorporated into the architecture of renovated buildings. These murals are frequently accompanied in the same spaces by other forms of graffiti, such as tagging, posters or stickers. Graffiti is present in the precinct even where buildings or public spaces have been upgraded. This is a reflection of the tolerance of types of graffiti that are more frequently viewed as undesirable. Contrary to many urban development processes, the development of Maboneng has not involved eliminating graffiti in the area. The presence of graffiti in Maboneng has not detracted from its value in terms of urban renewal. The literature has shown the futility and enormous expense of local authority approaches to eradicate graffiti. Thus, Maboneng provides an alternative management approach which should be further investigated. This approach retains the authenticity of graffiti as a practice and aesthetic, but also ensures that the area remains economically viable or investment friendly.

In this study we did not focus on the meaning of graffiti, either the intended meaning of the artist or the reception of pieces by the public. As with traditional art forms, meanings are ambiguous and open to interpretation, as reflected in the depiction of Jan van Riebeeck in a mural in Maboneng. There is value in understanding the social processes of graffiti both within the subculture and how it impacts

local communities. However, we analysed graffiti as a visual aesthetic in urban space that has taken on general meanings and signifiers beyond the individual artists' expressions. In Maboneng, graffiti is signifying the upgrading of the precinct, creating a brand and positioning the area in relation to similar developments across the globe.

The iconic street art in Maboneng has been produced through the practice of graffiti festivals or commissions which extend the practice to those outside the subculture. Visits to the area and specific graffiti tours have also expanded beyond the subculture to include the engagement of tourists and the general public. This increased engagement is reflected in social media and on the internet, as well as in the urban environment. Graffiti is no longer confined to a subgroup of people, even though some of its meanings or nuances may remain obscure.

In the context of Maboneng, graffiti occupies a milieu that includes signage, advertising and public art and is being increasingly commodified. Our research illustrates that the aesthetics and functions of graffiti are blurred between signage and advertising. Traditional hand-painted signage and graffiti exist side by side in Maboneng and graffiti artists have been commissioned to create advertising billboards. The aesthetics and media of graffiti are not confined to its practice and are also associated with more formal processes in the neighbourhood.

These formal processes include placemaking and branding. In this paper, we showed that graffiti has been used to create a strong brand for Maboneng and is a form of advertising that extends beyond the immediate neighbourhood boundaries. Indeed, graffiti has been used as a form of way-finding or navigation, where buildings become unique landmarks in the landscape. It is through these elements that the value

of graffiti is being realised in Maboneng. Graffiti is creating a distinctive precinct within Johannesburg and simultaneously a familiar global aesthetic of the creative neighbourhood. Through urban renewal processes, graffiti has been fully incorporated as an urban commodity in Maboneng.

The use of graffiti in Maboneng emphasises the need to consider graffiti's relationship to space and city-building. As a form of personal expression, graffiti is part of the 'right to the city' debate, but Maboneng illustrates that graffiti can be incorporated into both formal and informal urban design processes. In formal processes graffiti is commissioned on buildings and in public spaces, and in informal processes graffiti is encouraged or allowed to manifest in the public environment. This is what Malcolm Miles argues for in his book *Art, space and the city* (1997) – the integration of public art into buildings and urban design, and the intervention of artists in public space. As the public gradually shifts towards recognising graffiti as an art, it is pertinent to draw on the tensions that surround notions of the 'public'.

*Central to the development of new, more theorised practices of public art is the recognition that there is no 'general public' (only a diversity of specific publics), and the redefinition of its location as the public realm, rather than a physical site assumed to grant access to an undefined public. (Miles 1997, 52)*

In the manner of public art, graffiti reveals multiple publics operating in a public realm that cannot be defined by a specific site or location. This is embodied in the tensions, ambiguities and dynamism of graffiti. Even as graffiti shifts towards being an urban commodity, it continues to challenge how space is produced in the urban environment.

*The use of graffiti in Maboneng emphasises the need to consider graffiti's relationship to space and city-building.*

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## Research interviews

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- Buitendach, J. (2018, 9 January, Maboneng). Personal tour and interview. Owner of Past Experiences, tour company, and also strong interest in graffiti and graffiti culture.
- Nair, S. (2018, 23 March, Propertuity Offices, Maboneng). Personal interview. Nair is the Design Lead at Propertuity.

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Alexandra Parker's research explores the intersections of people, their cultures and identities, and urban and suburban environments. Her current research is diverse and examines the roles of motherhood identity, graffiti, streets as public spaces and school feeder zones in shaping the Gauteng city-region. Exploring personal identities, cultural practices and social experiences offers alternative insights into the functions and dysfunctions of city spaces. Alexandra has a growing enthusiasm in the work of visually disseminating research findings through exhibitions, data visualisations, explainer videos and exploiting social media platforms.

Alexandra joined the GCRO in late 2016 after a long and fruitful association with the University of the Witwatersrand as an undergraduate and postgraduate student and as a postdoctoral research fellow. She completed her PhD in Town and Regional Planning in 2014 (*Images and influence: The role of film in representing Johannesburg and shaping everyday practice in the city*), published as the monograph *Urban film and everyday practice: Bridging divisions in Johannesburg* (2016, Palgrave Macmillan). Her doctoral and postdoctoral research explored the influence of urban films on everyday practice in the cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town.

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Samkelisiwe Khanyile joined the GCRO as an intern in 2016 and became a junior researcher in 2017. She holds an MSc in GIS and Remote Sensing from the University of the Witwatersrand. She is a member of the Wits Digital Mine Project group.

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Kate Joseph joined the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality in 2018 as a research specialist in the Group Strategy Policy Coordination and Relations unit. Her work contributes to the overarching long-term city development strategy and improving operations within the city, particularly around service-delivery infrastructure and customer satisfaction.

Kate's other research interests include visual culture, gender and identity, space and placemaking and questions of how power relations are embodied and reproduced in urban landscapes. Kate holds a Master's Degree in Political Studies from the University of the Witwatersrand. She is a member of the Metropolis Sustainable Cities Collaboratory and was previously a researcher based at, and remains a research associate of, the GCRO.



#### **GAUTENG CITY-REGION OBSERVATORY**

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