



# Community Identity & Displacement Research Network Seminars & Events - Semester 1 2014

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Wednesday 9 April at 3.30pm-4.30pm  
Room G368, Footscray Park Campus

## *Contesting Citizenship at the Margins: The Case of Young Graffiti Writers*

*Dr. Alison Baker*

**Abstract:** Young people engaging in graffiti have been portrayed as the antithesis of the ‘good citizen’. As politicians and the media fight the ‘war on graffiti’ these young people are tagged as criminals and misfits, overlooking the ways this arts practice reclaims their ability to tell stories and unhinges traditional ways of practicing citizenship. Using ideas from Michelle Fine’s work on the social psychology of spatiality as conceptual lens, this paper explores the tensions, contradictions and binaries these young people find themselves caught between; art or vandalism, professional or amateur, criminal or artist, and legitimate or illegitimate citizens as young people and transgressors of ‘normative behavior’ in public spaces. Using multiple methods, including ‘hanging out’ and participatory visual methods, this study explores how young graffiti artists’ experiences in and out of a legal ‘street art’ program, speak back to ‘normative’ conceptualizations of citizenship. Their experiences of differential belonging and contested citizenship, which are played out in public spaces (and beyond), highlight the importance of negotiating young people’s ‘right to the city’ through alterative arts programs and the creation of ‘free spaces’.

**Bio:** Dr Alison Baker is a community psychologist, currently working as a research fellow at the Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity & Lifelong Learning at Victoria University. Her dissertation research examined sociopolitical and civic development among young people in El Salvador using photovoice and surveys. Her current research explores civic engagement through community-based arts with young people in Melbourne’s West. Alison is interested in blending creative research methodologies and documentary techniques to develop young people’s sense of social justice and capacity for action.

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