

Visualizing Pittsburgh Graffiti: using information design to create awareness between community members and graffiti writers

by Miso Kim and Anne Iasella

M.Des. Communication Planning and Information Design

Thesis advisor, Professor Dan Boyarski, School of Design

Thesis advisor, Professor Steve Kuhn, Department of English





Problem Statement

Graffiti is a complex social problem that has not been well explored. Our goal was to create an interactive tool that puts the perspectives of graffiti writers and community members in the same design space.



Pittsburgh's battle with graffiti in 1989

In the mid-1980s graffiti emerged in Pittsburgh. In 1989, Pittsburgh crafted its first initiative aimed at curbing graffiti within the city.



Pittsburgh's battle with graffiti in 2004

In the last 25 years approximately six more initiatives have been proposed to curb graffiti within Pittsburgh:

- 1989 anti-graffiti trust fund
- 1994 security guards in city parks
- 1995 anti-graffiti billboard campaign
- 1995 graffiti blitz team
- 1995 youth curfew measure
- 1997 \$200,000 anti-graffiti initiative
- 2003 ban on the sale of materials to minors



Pittsburgh's battle with graffiti in 2004

While these initiatives reduced the saturation of graffiti within the city did little to curb it all together.



Pittsburgh's battle with graffiti in 2004

Why have the city's initiatives failed?



Barriers to finding a solution to Pittsburgh's graffiti problem

“Communication. An understanding between council, those who are breaking the law, and the communities themselves. I think those who are tagging need to understand how they are hurting people. I think council needs to understand why they feel the necessity to tag. And I think the community has to understand that there needs to be a middle ground.”

Bill Peduto

Member, Pittsburgh City Council

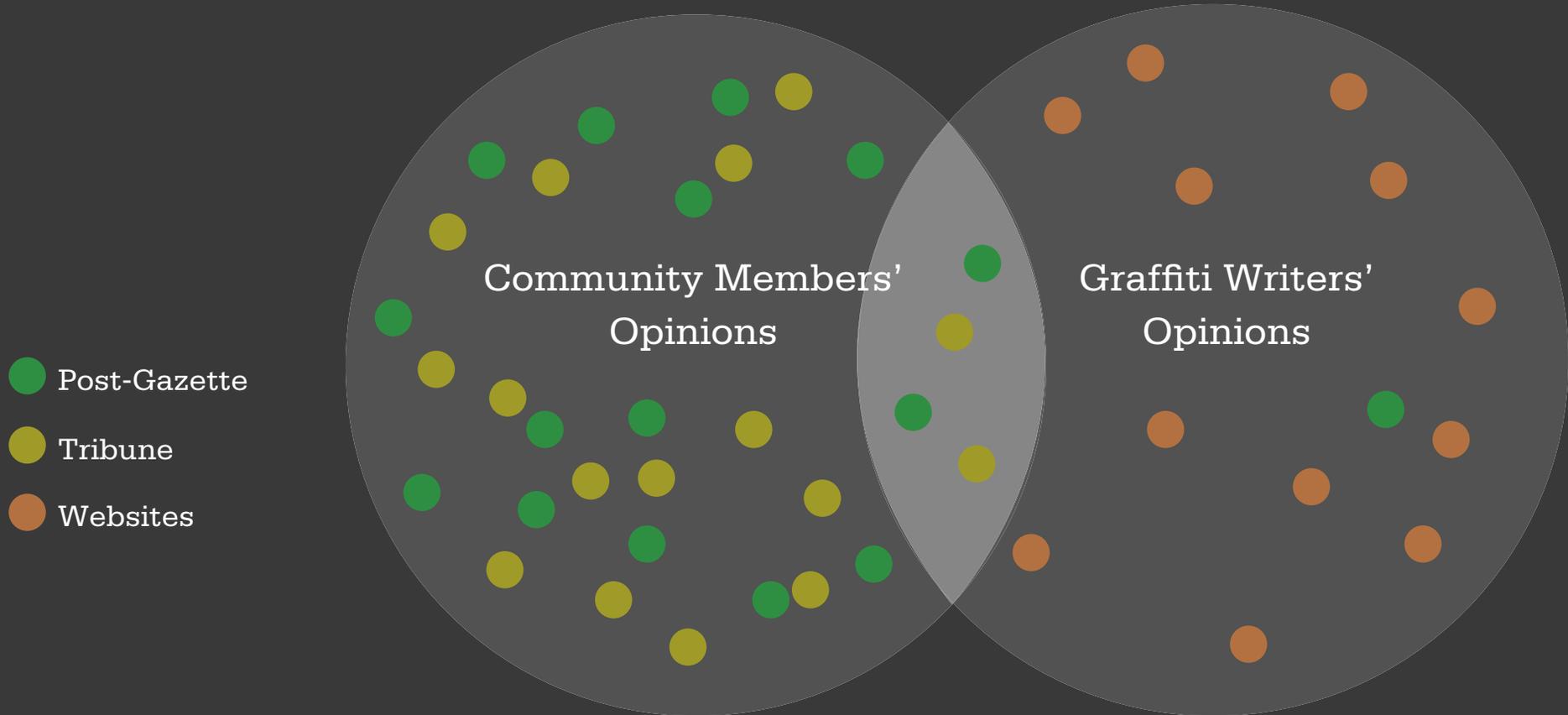


Barriers to finding a solution to Pittsburgh's graffiti problem

This lack of communication is fueled by the media sources that provide Pittsburgh with information on the subject.



Distribution of Pittsburgh information resources published about graffiti 2001-2004





Design Process

Our goal was to use information design to create awareness of divergent viewpoints held by graffiti writers and community members.



Design Process

1. Research the problem
2. Analyze the issues
3. Design a solution



Design Process: Archival Research

Pittsburgh Newspapers:

Post-Gazette, Tribune, Pulp and City Paper

Books:

Spraycan Art, Taking the Train, The Art of Getting Over

Websites:

12oz prophet, Art Crimes, Wooster Collective

Government Documents:

Graffiti legislation, press releases, educational videos

Documentaries and Videos:

Stylewars, Beat Street, Wildstyle



Design Process: Trace Measures

Walnut Street



The Eliza Furnace Trail



The Warehouse



The Busway





Design Process: Interviews

Graffiti Writers

Member
CSN crew

Member
CSN crew

Member
CSN crew

Kristoffer Smith
former writer

Community Orgs.

Alisha Sirk
Executive Director
Oakland BID

Alex Coyne
Code Education Liaison
Oakland BID

Grant Ervin
Program Manager
Pittsburgh Community
Reinvestment Group

Property Owners

Owner
Kawai Gifts

Owner
Village Pizza

Manager
Top Notch Art Store

Government

Bill Peduto
Member
Pittsburgh City Council

Patti Chavez
Operations Coordinator
Pittsburgh Public Works

Kathy Degler
Commander
Pittsburgh Police

Ashley Thompson
Police Officer
Pittsburgh Police



Design Process: Analysis

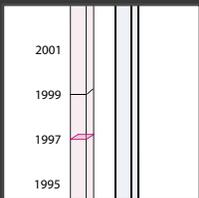
Graffiti writers and community member have radically different views on space and how one owns it.

Historical reasons for creating or combatting graffiti are not well communicated to members of the opposing group.

Perceptions of the opposing group are often driven by generalizations and stereotypes.

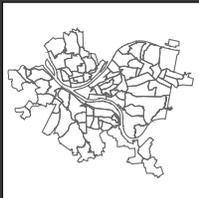


Design Process: Information Architecture



TIMELINE

Historical reasons for creating or combatting graffiti are not well communicated to members of the opposing group.



MAPS

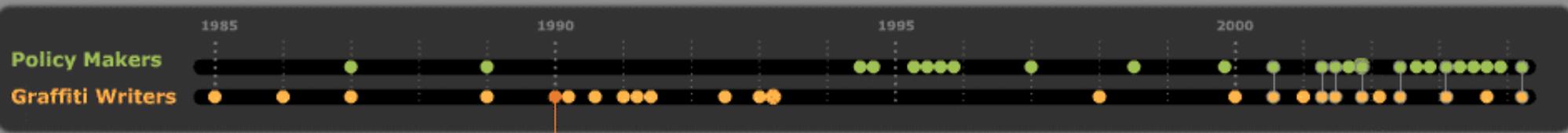
Graffiti writers and community member have radically different views on space and how one owns it.



INTERVIEWS

Perceptions of the opposing group are often driven by generalizations and stereotypes.

Visualizing Pittsburgh Graffiti



1990 Court Building becomes Pittsburgh's first writers bench

Local graffiti writers begin to frequent Armstrong Court, an abandoned building in the Strip District of Pittsburgh. The building becomes a place for graffiti writers to meet, paint and discuss work.

● [Recounting the Warehouse \(1 min 4 sec\)](#)

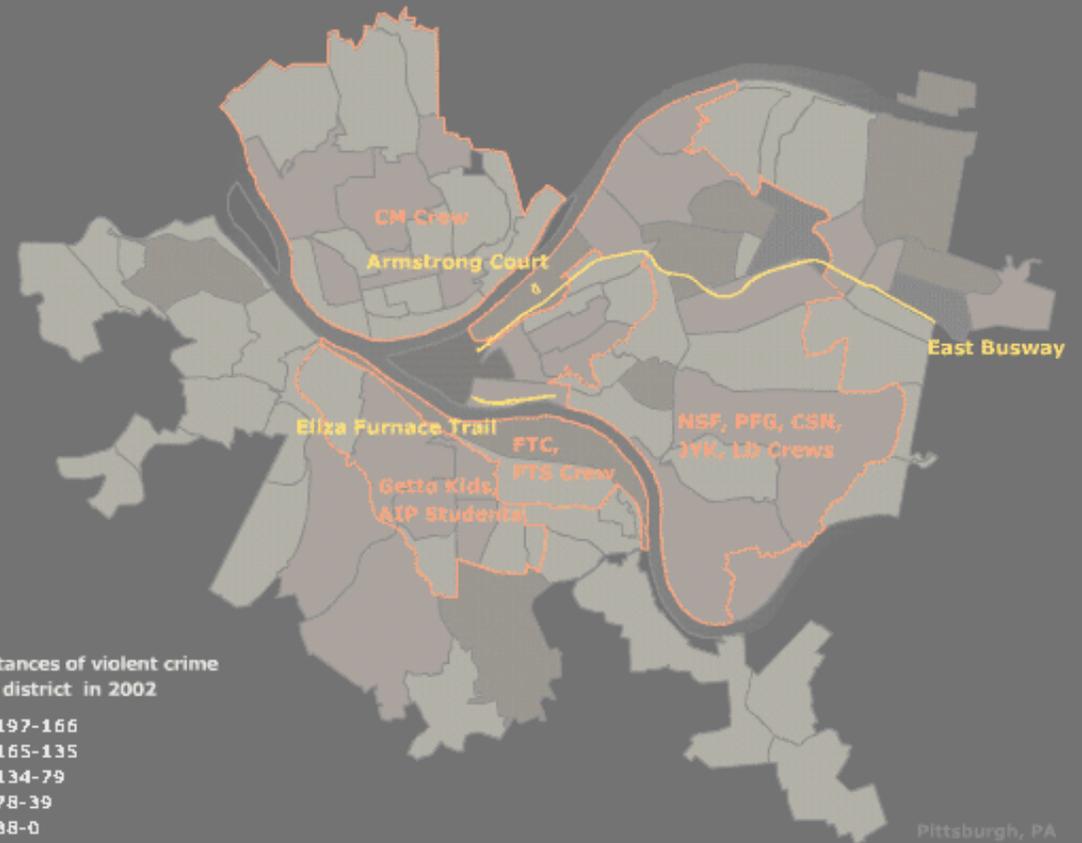
Piece Spots

Shows areas where there is a high concentration of pieces. A piece, short for masterpiece, is a multi-colored work that usually displays a graffiti writer's pseudonym and crew affiliation. Most pieces, because of the time necessary to create the work, are executed in areas rarely frequented by the public.

- On Getting Up
- On the Context of Piece
- Types of Graffiti
- Graffiti on the Trail

Instances of violent crime per district in 2002

- 197-166
- 165-135
- 134-79
- 78-39
- 38-0



Owned Area Maps

- Private Property
- Public Property

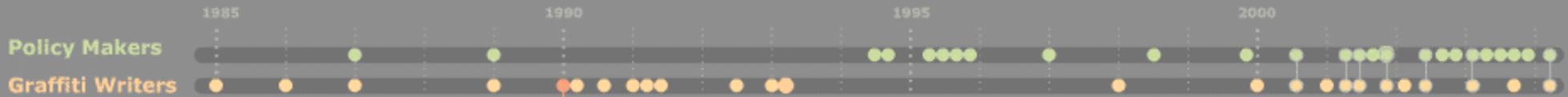
Claimed Area Maps

- Graffiti Crews
- Areas Affected by graffiti
- Piece Spots

Related Informations Maps

- Delinquent Property
- Violent Crime

Visualizing Pittsburgh Graffiti



1990 Court Building becomes Pittsburgh's first writers bench

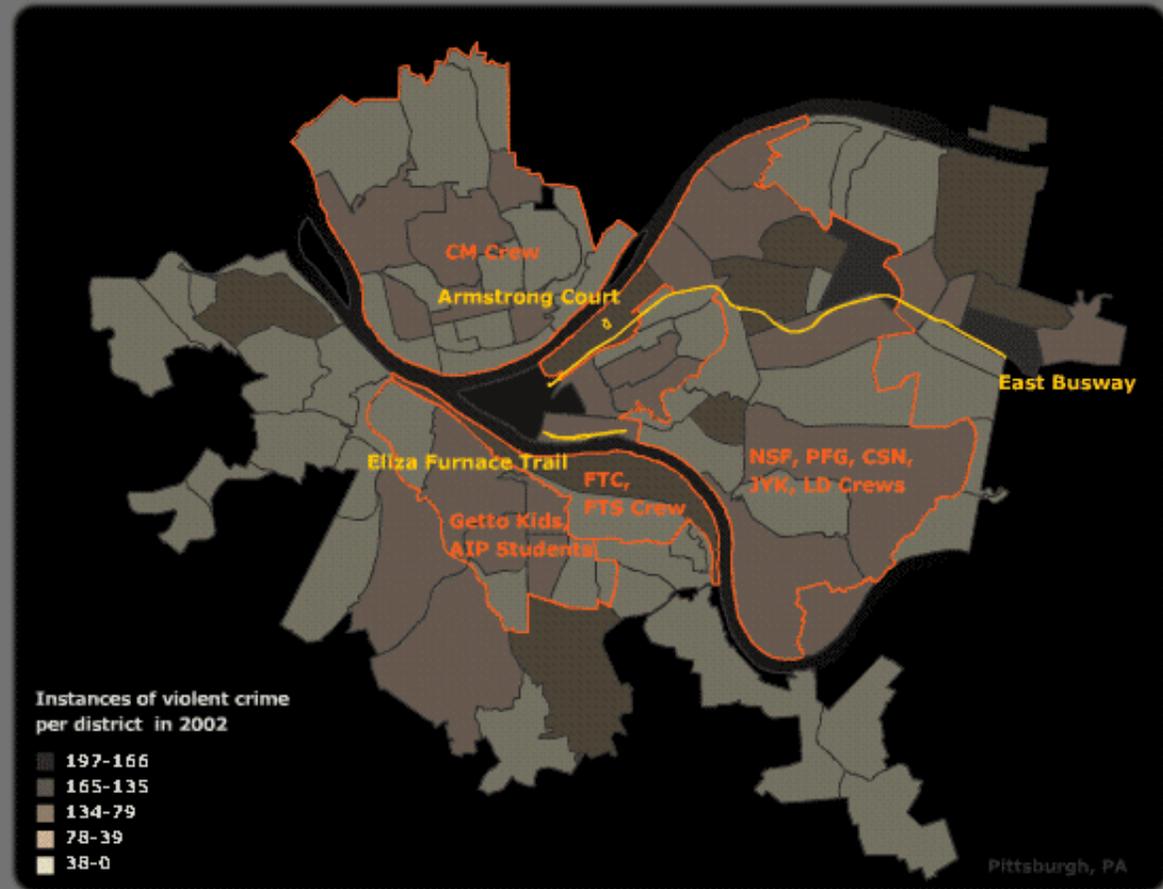
Local graffiti writers begin to frequent Armstrong Court, an abandoned building in the Strip District of Pittsburgh. The building becomes a place for graffiti writers to meet, paint and discuss work.

● [Recounting the Warehouse \(1 min 4 sec\)](#)

Piece Spots

Shows areas where there is a high concentration of pieces. A piece, short for masterpiece, is a multi-colored work that usually displays a graffiti writer's pseudonym and crew affiliation. Most pieces, because of the time necessary to create the work, are executed in areas rarely frequented by the public.

- On Getting Up
- On the Context of Piece
- Types of Graffiti
- Graffiti on the Trail



Owned Area Maps

- Private Property
- Public Property

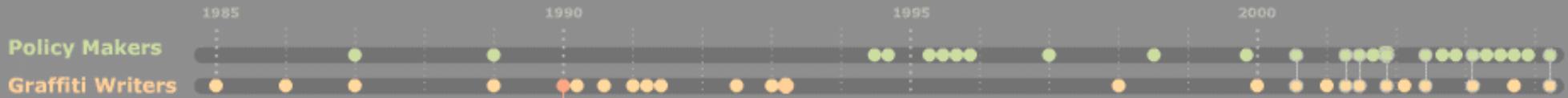
Claimed Area Maps

- Graffiti Crews
- Areas Affected by graffiti
- Piece Spots

Related Informations Maps

- Delinquent Property
- Violent Crime

Visualizing Pittsburgh Graffiti



1990 Court Building becomes Pittsburgh's first writers bench

Local graffiti writers begin to frequent Armstrong Court, an abandoned building in the Strip District of Pittsburgh. The building becomes a place for graffiti writers to meet, paint and discuss work.

● [Recounting the Warehouse \(1 min 4 sec\)](#)

Piece Spots

Shows areas where there is a high concentration of pieces. A piece, short for masterpiece, is a multi-colored work that usually displays a graffiti writer's pseudonym and crew affiliation. Most pieces, because of the time necessary to create the work, are executed in areas rarely frequented by the public.

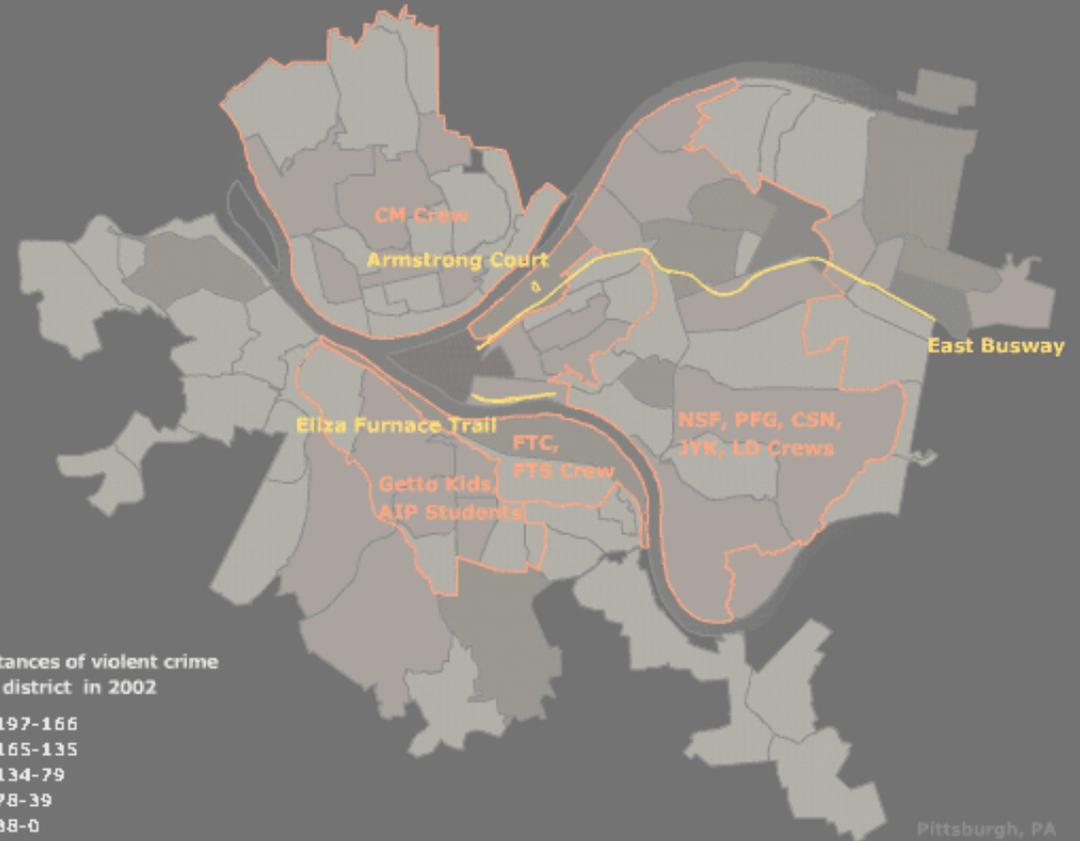
■ On Getting Up

■ On the Context of Piece

■ Types of Graffiti

■ Graffiti on the Trail

Instances of violent crime per district in 2002



■ Owned Area Maps

■ Private Property

■ Public Property

■ Claimed Area Maps

■ Graffiti Crews

■ Areas Affected by graffiti

■ Piece Spots

■ Related Informations Maps

■ Delinquent Property

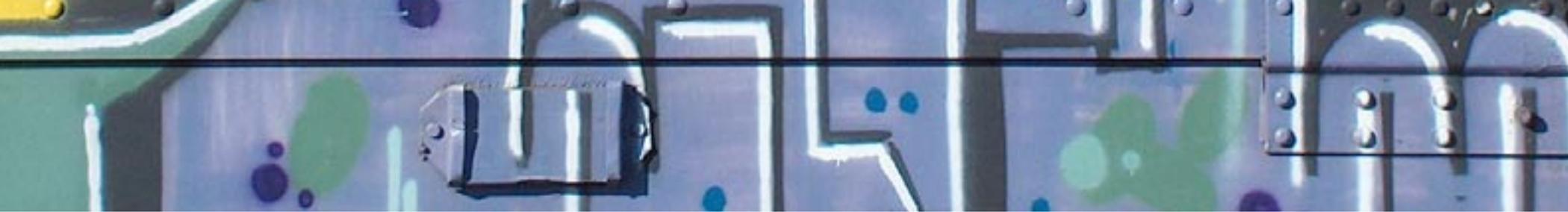
■ Violent Crime



Scenarios of Interaction

Secondary title:

1. Policy makers' perspective
2. Graffiti writers' perspective
3. Map comparison



Future Plans

Over the summer completely build out interactive piece incorporating feedback from user testing

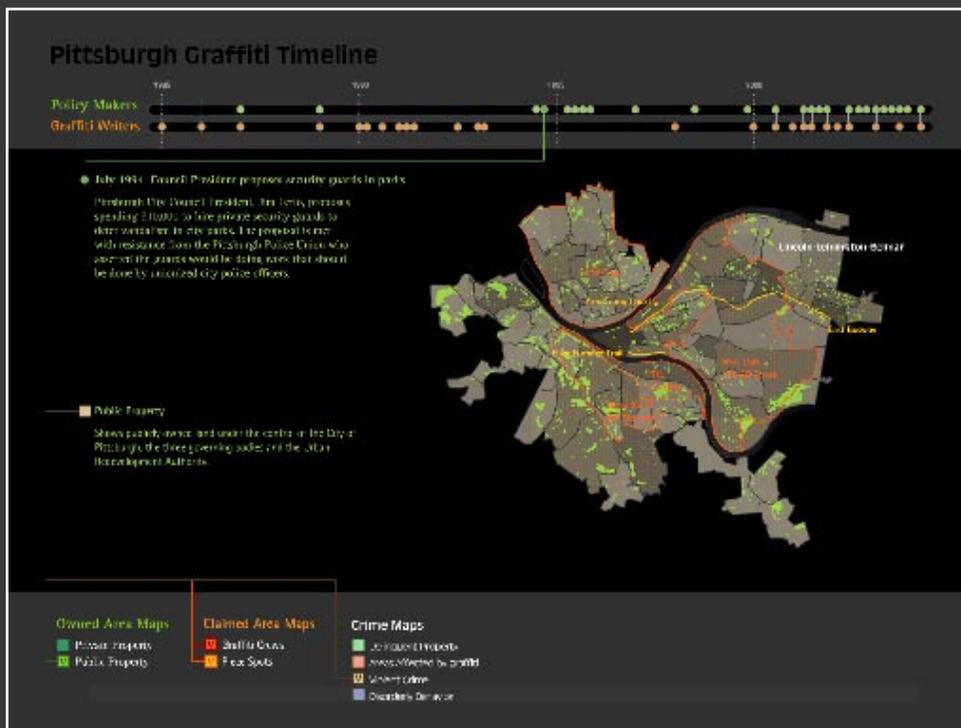
Publish to web

Distribute

If any of the visitors are interested in the project we are happy to collaborate with them



Design Iterations and User Testing



Iteration 5

User Testing

- + able to navigate through timeline and maps with ease
- + expressed an understanding of timeline and map information
- + color scheme helped clarify information
- “v” in the box which activates maps seems confusing
- confused about the area mapped
- had trouble understanding some textual explanations