The data used in this paper is that of Professor Cintron. Some he collected before I began my assistanship, and the rest was collected after January, 1991. Many of my observations in this paper have come from my year of working with Professor Cintron. Observations arose in conversation or sometimes in writing, but it is difficult to footnote the exact source. I highly recommend Dr. Cintron's writings for anyone who is intrigued by some of the ideas offered in this paper. In questions of conflict in citation to Dr. Cintron's work, I defer. Mostly I would like to thank Dr. Cintron for his unending support, and I hope this work does his data justice. I would also like to thank Dr. Laura Graham for her guidance as both my instructor and advisor.

"The nineties are going to be known as the gang decade," a police inspector in Angelville, Illinois told Dr. Ralph Cintron and me in a recent interview. For the past year, and to continue into the future, I have worked with Professor Ralph Cintron who for five years has kept a watchful eye on Angelville, a town approaching 100,000 in population according to recent census material. Dr. Cintron's main aim has been to study literacy within the Latino community of a predominantly white middle to upper class society. With all of the media hype and influx of entertainment centered on gangs, the inspector may be right on the mark; He would have a pretty good idea of any increase of gang activity as he it is his job to monitor it in this satellite city of Chicago. Most would not expect to see the drugs, the violence, and the colors in this town 40 miles west of Chicago. However, the new chief of police said that there will
be "zero tolerance" of gang activity in Angelville in response to the problem which claimed six lives and caused numerous injuries in 1991.

There are two confederations of gangs in Angelville, the 'Folks' and the 'People.' Just about all of the gangs are aligned with one of these two groups, with the noted exception being the Homeboys. This dichotomy certainly reaches as far as Chicago, and we have been told it affects Los Angeles gangs as well (when they eventually move into Chicago and Angelville). For now, in Angelville, the alliances among the major gangs are the following, Folks: Deuces, Spanish Disciples, Maniac Latin Disciples, and Peace Stones; and People: Latin Kings and Vice Lords. This was not always the case. At one time the Deuces were People and aligned with the Latin Kings. This is still the current make-up of the Chicago alliance. The story of the Latin King-Deuce break-up has become a part of Angelville gang lore.

A few years ago a woman was dating one of the leaders of the Latin Kings. He was sent to prison in a shooting, and she began dating a Deuce. This caused a major breach in the moral code of gang-life. Since then, the two gangs have been at war with each other. Until the summer of 1991, the Deuces seemed to have been striking the heavier blows. However, the Latin Kings struck back in the summer of 1991 despite many of their leaders being incarcerated. This feud does not sit well with the Kings nor Deuce chapters in Chicago. While they continually lend money and firearm support, they will not offer man-power to either group. Because of this breach with Chicago, many suggest the suburban gang-scene is one of wanna-be's. This is certainly not the case. These gangs are as authentic as those in major metropolitan
centers; they hold to the same laws, written down in sacred texts, as the rest, and they are involved in a similar drug trade. Before reading any further, I think one statement has to be made. These are not punk kids running around waving guns simply for the sake of doing so. The gangs are not some unorganized bunch of hoodlums arbitrarily breaking the law. They have a hierarchical structure with their own written constitution, organization, and nation, which feels victim to oppression. Their existence aims to impede this oppression. However, in the process, a war has broken out among themselves: a war which threatens their destruction by the hands of their own brothers.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the gang system is the rich sign system. These sign systems are related to the majority popular culture, but have taken on new meaning. For example, in the summer of 1991 many youths were wearing Chicago White Sox caps, jerseys, and jackets. In fact, I was in Iowa City watching a Sox telecast when the announcers mentioned the popularity of the merchandise. Their interpretation was that it was because of the slick black and silver design, but, also because of the team’s appeal. Unfortunately, this is a half-truth. Black and silver are gang colors. Being a student at The University of Iowa, I have a rather large collection, like any student, of Hawkeye sportswear. When I was doing fieldwork in the summer of 1991 with Dr. Cintron, I decided to leave much of it behind for the reason that Iowa black and gold is also the colors of the Latin Kings.

These sign-systems extend beyond clothing and reach to hand-signs and even the side of the body which is favored. By that, I mean that the Latin Kings and the
rest of the People ratchet their caps to the left, hand-sign with their left, wear bandannas on their left leg, and even stand with their left leg forward. The Folks do precisely the opposite in each manner. Below is a table of the affiliations, their predominate side, and their major signs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confederation</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Folk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang</td>
<td>Latin Kings</td>
<td>Deuces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colors</td>
<td>Black/Gold</td>
<td>Black/Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Side</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>Right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Number</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icons</td>
<td>crown, lion</td>
<td>spade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 1). A comparison of the deuces and kings.

In this paper I will not look at all of the various sign-systems at work in Angelville gangs. Instead, I will center on the graffiti which is put on the walls of homes, shopping malls, and fences. Graffiti litters the walls of Angelville in a disturbing manner to many of the residents. Each sign and word is an eyesore vandalizing a suburb searching for an identity in the economic upper crust. It is a cultural noise which the white leaders wish to drive from the city in the ongoing purification process to firmly establish Angelville in the economic elite. To accomplish such a feat would be to drive out the Latinos and other minorities who have a strong foothold in the history of Angelville. Latino, by many estimates, make up from 1/5 to 1/4 of the Angelville population and have been a fixture since the 1920s and 1930s. Most of the Latinos are of Mexican ancestry while others come from Puerto Rico, Central and South America. These minorities have met with blacks and lower
class whites (some immigrates from Romania and Germany, others from the Southern U.S. looking for work) in the Near East and West sides of Angelville surrounding the downtown area. The middle and upper class whites have stayed in the Far East and West sides leaving strips of land as a divider from the poverty of the inner city. The leaders of Angelville have created an "image task force" to clean-up the downtown area and bring the city up to the level of its surrounding cities. Angelville (40 minutes by highway west of Chicago) is in an area known as the Golden Corridor. Companies are setting up headquarters in this area, and much of the research taking place in 'corporate America' is moving to the western suburbs. Angelville wants a piece of that pie, but it has to be careful not to alienate the Latino population who make-up a much sought after labor force.

Graffiti is a part of the problem in Angelville image-building. The graffiti is without purpose, simply an eyesore for those ignorant of its purpose. What many people do not understand is that this 'cultural noise' is subject to a complex code created for purposes of signification and communication. Claire Taylor writes about visual noise: it is "commonly spoken about in a derogatory way" but "correctly understood and integrated into the visual expression can even cause communication (Taylor, 1984:276)." The graffiti of Angelville has been placed on the walls by gang members to at once signify their existence to passersby and also to communicate with other gangs. The signs in which the message is expressed, or coded, is a direct or metaphorical reflection of the sociopolitical, cultural, and aesthetic make-up of an audience (Taylor, 1984:278). These gangs are without an open forum, and therefore

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have taken to the walls. Graffitists are people who do not have any other outlet for
their thoughts (Reisner, 1974:vi). Much like prehistoric man outlining his hand on a
cave wall, possibly the first form of graffiti, the gangs proclaim on the walls "I exist."

Harvey, Professor Cintron's informant, gives a variety of reasons for graffiti. He
says it is to mark territory. A gang member is in need of this information in order to
know where he is safe or unsafe and how to act within the territory. Being in a
specific area, a gang member may have to 'throw' different hand signals or he may
have to wear his clothes differently (turn his cap on an angle). All of these actions
utilize the graffiti-sign to signify the territory. Also, gang-members like to
communicate their existence and power and can do so by painting one of its signs on
a wall. It is a scream of affirmation. As Harvey said, the gangs like to be noticed,
and graffiti is one way of achieving notoriety in Angelville. Therefore the graffiti
serves as an index of a) territory, b) intra-gang communication, and c) the gang system
as a whole. Peirce defines the 'index' as a representation "which refers to its object
not so much because of any similarity or analogy with it, not because it is associated
with general characters which that object happens to possess, as because it is in
dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one
hand, and with the senses of memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on
the other hand.... (Innis, 1985:13)," A /crown/ (representamen) indexes the Latin Kings
(the object) just as the spraying of the word /DEUCES/ (representamen) indexes the
Deuces (again, the object). The connection is made in the mind of the interpreter who
is aware of the sign system.
The aim of this paper is to understand how graffiti functions. What are its rules? I suggest it functions in an indexical mode pointing to gangs and their territory as well as making statements against other gangs. In many ways it is like a language, but in fact I will argue it is not a language. It is a code which needs language to mediate the signs since the graffiti signs cannot operate on a meta-, self-referential, level. The graffiti signs do have meaning because of a cultural link rooted in their iconicity which allows them to be understood. This link is manifested in icons appropriated from other codes such as religion, popular culture, and mainly from the English language code. However, since these codes are appropriated in some fashion, they can be partially understood by anyone literate in the appropriated code. The signs will be seen as tokens of a cultural type instead of as new gang-types (a new type by virtue of the added indexical function). Therefore, there are a variety of interpretants existent within the community, and the threat of misinterpretation cannot be overlooked.

Finally, I will ask, what does graffiti say about Angelville gangs?

First, it might be important to look for a moment at the sign producers. The graffitists go out under the cover of the night to perform their task. They search out places which are dark: unlit streets or the backs of malls. Once there, the graffitists use whatever spray-paint they were able to muster to put their signs on the wall. In some instances, they respond to other signs. This contributes to the dialogic nature of the graffiti. One gang can come along and paint their sign over another sign; a practice called 'cracking' by users of the graffiti-code. There are examples of this within the data. 'Cracking' is iconic with the scratching out of words in writing and
continues to show the practicality of the graffiti code. It makes perfect sense to simply 'write' over a sign in a form of negation to that sign.

More often than not, the graffitist does not leave a personal identity. 'Tagging' is a gang term used for gang member-graffitists putting up a personal sign to take credit for the graffiti. These signs do not have the decipherable quality of the other gangs signs to the community as they are intended for only a few intimates to understand. A Deuce writing graffiti against the Latin Kings does not want the Kings to be able to trace it to him, but he would also like a bit of credit. Concealing his personal identity functions to not only protect him but is also a show of unity for the entire gang. In a recent interview, Rico said that he felt many graffitists were wasting their talents. Judging by some of the very elaborate graffiti in Angelville, this may be true. If they are doing so, however, it is for the good of the gang.

I would like to show some examples of Angelville graffiti with their interpretations by a gang member, in this case, Harvey a peripheral member of the Deuces. The first four examples are from a shopping mall, while the next two are from the streets of Angelville.

Example 1: The inverted Ispadel and 121 both mean 'Deuce Killer' which is also spelled out. The figure is 'throwing' hand signs (a method of demonstrating gang affiliation); the left is a 'five' for the People while the right is a 'fork' pointing down to show 'Gangster Killer.' The Icrescent moon and starl indexes the Vice Lords. ISDKI stands for Spanish Disciple Killers. The Iforkl inverted means 'Gangster Killer.' Also, the hat turned at an angle is iconic of a style of wearing a cap to show an affiliation. The yellow streak is a 'crack' in the IDEUCE KILLERI which is an attempt to cover-up the sign. It was probably put up by a Deuce.

Example 2: In silver are IBPSNI and IBKI which means 'Black Peace Stone Nation' and 'Deuce Killer.' Also in silver is a Ipyramid and starl which means Peace Stone. In black are IBOS/(Brothers of Soul) which is painted over, cracks, a silver
/ALLAH/, /pyramid with star/ and /STONE WORLD/. /MGDN/ indexes the 'Maniac Gangster Disciple Nation.' and the /six-pointed star/ indexes 'Gangsters' or 'Folks.' The /cross/ points to the 'Home-Boys.'

Example 3: This is the same area as in Example 2 but it shows the diachronic nature of graffiti. A /K/ is added to the /BOS/ for it now to mean 'Brothers of Soul Killers.' The /six-pointed star/ has been cracked by gold (probably the same that cracked the /DEUCE/ in Example 1. /UK/ and /KINGS LOVE/ have been added which both mean 'Latin Kings.'

Example 4: /GDN/ means 'Gangster Disciple Nation,' and /PEOPLE KILLER/ refers to 'Folks.' The gangs are split into two warring confederations; People and Folks/Gangsters. The /six-pointed star/ over the /GDN/ refers to 'Folks.' There is also a black crack across three gold Latin King signs. /crown/, inverted /fork/ (the Latin Kings are 'Gangster killers'), and /LKN/ ('Latin King Nation').

Example 5: There is an iconic representation of a fist with a ring which says "Joker." The /$/189/, as well as /H.F./ are all tags as well. The /H.B.!! means 'Home-Boys,' and /SDK/ is 'Spanish Disciple Killers' which are the Home-Boys. The /gravestone/ has a name on it and means that person is either dead or is marked to be killed (probably the latter).

Example 6: The inverted /crown/ and /K.K.!! mean 'King Killer,' and by the /H.B.!! ('Home-Boys') we can deduce that the Home-Boys put up the 'King Killer' signs.

The last two examples are in close geographic proximity to each other. Interestingly enough, Joker was a Latin King who was killed a few years ago, quite possibly in 1989. The /gravestone/ has initials on it which are somewhat unintelligible, however, they may be the initials of Joker. If this is true, then this piece of graffiti is very important to the overall understanding of the graffiti-system. The graffiti reflects the local climate and in a way reports on the happenings. At the very least, we can tell which gangs are warring. However, these two example show that the graffiti may depict something more. Perhaps something like a murder. There
are problems with this interpretation. The graffiti cannot be dated, so common color
does not mean it was produced by the same person.

The above is a simple understanding of the semantics of the graffiti signs as
gang members understand them. The Question still remains as to the structure of
graffiti and how it comes to have meaning.

When I first encountered the graffiti sign system, I wanted to classify it as a
language of sorts. It would have fit into the framework of Claude Levi-Strauss who
suggested all cultural phenomena are in fact languages, and there is a "universal
language (Eco, 1976A:229)." However, graffiti really cannot be understood as a
language. If we hold graffiti against Sauserrean syntagm and paradigm, calling graffiti
a language is not valid. Each sign, or graffito, needs to be interpreted in itself. A
string of graffiti holds no meaning aside from the individual signs. On a wall, /crown/.
/DEUCES/, and /MGDN/ do not have any meaning as a sentence; syntagmatic roles
are not filled. If the syntagm "is a combination of signs, which has space as its
support," then "two signs cannot be spoken at the same time (Barthes, 1990:58)."
However, in the case of graffiti that is not the case. One, two, or ten signs can fill
a wall with no relation to each, aside from that brought to it by the interpretant in the
form of pragmatics. The paradigm-column, if we call to memory Sauserre's model,
exists in only one slot or syntagm, and there is only one syntactic unit.

There is also a distinctive feature to graffiti which does not exist in language.
Language is enhanced by indexicality. In his article, "Indexicality" in The American
Journal of Semiotics, Sebeok writes that the productiveness of language is within the
framework of the index, and quotes Barwise and Perry as stating the index is "extremely important to the information-carrying capacity of language (Sebeok, 1990:23)," Language, then, can be thought of as indexical-optional, and many theorists have attempted to find a language which is free of the index (Sebeok, 1990:24). As far as graffiti is concerned, such a separation of index and symbol (language) can not happen in its current form. Graffiti is an index.

Languages also exist on the symbolic level. There is a degree of arbitrariness in the words, whereas arbitrariness occurs "when signs are founded not by convention, but by unilateral decision (Barthes, 1990:51)." The word 'man' and a man have no physical resemblance or real contiguity, but yet by the traditions which precede us, 'man' means precisely that. The graffiti signs are not so arbitrary, but instead have been chosen for a specific reason. The /crown/ has come to mean the Latin Kings for societal reasons which are truly evident. With the use of language signs, such as /DEUCES/ to mean the Deuces, it seems that language and symbolism is being employed. However, I suggest the names of the gangs are not arbitrary and the use of the written expression of the name is not symbolic, but instead, iconic of the written representations of the names. The actual names are multifunctionally indexical as well as the signs. The signs point to the gang but also index characteristics of the gang. The Latin Kings use 'Latin' to demonstrate their ethnicity just like the 'Spanish Disciples.' In fact, the names are a rich subject which I will not discuss here for practical reason except when directly pertinent to the graffiti. What then, is graffiti?
Graffiti is a code. In the simplest terms, a code is a sign system. However, graffiti is quite a bit more.

By code we mean a convention which establishes the modality of correlation between the present elements of another system (or systems better correlated to the first) taken as a level of content, which also establishes the rules of combination between the elements of the expressive system so that they are capable of corresponding to the combination of content. Furthermore, the correlated elements (and the systems in which they are inscribed) must be mutually independent and in principal usable for other correlations, and the content elements must be later expressible even in the most analytic form through other expressions, called the interpretants of the first expressions.

(Eco, 19768:51)

In terms of graffiti, this means that it allows for signification and communication to occur between two gangs. The graffiti is meaningless without a language interpretation by a gang member. However, it is impossible for gangs to communicate within normal English on the walls of Angelville. So a graffiti code is established to mediate between gangs.

In order for the graffiti code to have meaning it must thoroughly represent its object-gang. Asign system is the meeting of the expression plane with the content plane, and, in the case of the graffiti code, the sign must be successful in expressing (indexing) the given content (object). The sender of the message is placed in the precarious position as he must "transcribe a plaintext (in principal a conceptual context, in practice a linguistic sequence already preconceived and expressed in some natural language) through a series of substitutions such that through them an addressee who knows the rule of substitution should be able to get the original message again (Eco, 1977:28)." The sender, I would
argue, is also faced with certain contextual guidelines. In terms of graffiti, these guidelines are the field, rival gangs, and the lawlessness of the act. The first is the walls, doors, dumpsters, etc., which are the 'canvas' for the graffiti text. Both rival gangs, building owners, and police are forces which will try to stop the completion of the graffiti act. Hence, the sender must create a sign which in a curt fashion will adequately express the content. These expressions must still be decipherable in its spray-painted medium for receivers (which include other gangs, peripheral gang members, and residents of the same community). Therefore, the linguistic statement "This territory belongs to the Latin Kings" is transcribed as _I crownl_ or one of its equivalents such as _IKINGSI_ or _I5/. When a single sign denotes a longer phrase or sentence structure, it is called a cloak (Eco, 1977:29). Graffiti, in the case of Angelville, cloaks the linguistic phrases which would be exchanged in a conversation between rival gangs. A cloak functions by way of semantic equivalences (Eco, 1977:29). such as _I crescent moon and five pointed starl_ means the Vice Lords.

The graffitist must create a sign which is subject to the graffiti code, but how would such an act be done? Codes provide the rules which generate signs as concrete occurrences in communicative intercourse (Eco 19768:44). The graffitist accomplishes the communicative intercourse by appropriating signs from other discourse and iconically representing them within the framework of graffiti. Code meaning is established through the inception of correlational meanings, and the graffiti achieves correlation through the above method. These correlations come from outside the gang code in most cases and include religious codes, the codes of the English language, and other societal codes all of which could be called 'cultural links' (a term used in similar fashion by Eco). Using an
iconic depiction instead of developing a symbolic system makes more sense in the fact that icons are easier to decipher without formal convention.

If we determine that the signs represent on a correlational level, the correlations must be studied in hand with the signs. "If one examines the mode of production of signs one must not only analyze the mode of production of the signal in itself but also its mode of correlation to its content, the corollary operation being part of its production (Eco, 1976A:191)." In the following I will juggle the notions of representation and function in an attempt to better define the graffiti code (within the aforementioned examples). Paramount to understanding will be the dualism of representation (icon and index), the notion of interpretant, and of appropriation (from culture to subculture).

When Harvey saw a /crown/ he immediately stated its meaning as Latin Kings; the sign indexed the Latin Kings. Why is this so? Why can a crown bearing no resemblance to a king be used to index one? Does the 'graffiti code' allow for this indexation?

A king often wears a crown to denote his royalty and connote his power. It is an indexical match rooted in history (the Kings of England, France, and Spain) and artistic representations (the king in a painting often is depicted with a crown upon his head I Especially think of the portrait of King George III in every student's American History textbook). With the connection of crown and king, the choice of an icon of a crown to represent the Latin Kings is an obvious one. The crown representation occurs in not only the graffiti code but also on the person of a Latin King to show his allegiance. For example, the middle finger of a Latin King has a /crown/ tattoo on it (this /crown/ invariably has three points instead of the five points). A graffiti /crown/ can have either three or five points).
Also, the members of the Latin Kings wear sportswear such as jackets, sweatshirts, and caps of the Los Angeles Kings National Hockey League franchise. The L.A. Kings, too, use a crown in their team logo. For those who fear some sort of gang affiliation in professional hockey, fear not as the L.A. Kings /crown/ and Latin King /crown/ are significantly different in structure and style. However, the differences in the /crown/ display another side of iconicity. An icon does not have to be an exact representation of the object, more importantly, the spirit of the icon has to be similar to the object.

"Icons are culturally coded," Sebeok said in his address on iconicity at the centennial of Johns Hopkins University. He also quoted Peirce who said an iconic representation "is largely conventional (Sebeok, 1976A:1435)." I interpret these statements as meaning that the iconic features are chosen for their importance to the culture. For the Latin Kings, the important features are the three or five points of the crown since they are People and 'almighty under the five.' Each of the points has a meaning which is held secret by the gang and written in The Book. This document is sacred to the gang, and only the leaders see it. In fact, within the text of it, the truest meanings of the colors and the King itself are kept.

The Latin Kings have other pictorial representations aside from the /crown/. One of the most prevalent is that of the lion; chosen for its title as 'king of the jungle.' Certainly, the Latin Kings wish to be the reigning monarchs of Angelville. The lion could be depicted on walls in the form of graffiti, but usually the lion form is expressed in the form of jewelry. Rico, Professor Cintron's Latin King informant, wore a piece of lion jewelry during their meeting. Doc, the forty-one year-old leader of the Kings, too, publicly demonstrates his affiliation by wearing a gold crown.
Two very different gangs are, like the Latin Kings, often represented through icons which have no resemblance to the gang proper. Instead, the signs are iconic to characteristics of the gang such as the king and crown. The Vice Lords and Peace Stone Nation are often depicted by *I crescent moon and a starl*. The Muslim religion uses the same sign to depict it (e.g. flags), and both of the above gangs follow some Muslim traditions such as praying to the sun and Allah and not eating pork. Thus, the icons are linked to the gangs by religion. The Home-Boys, too, use a religious sign, the cross, for representation.

However, the Vice Lords and Peace Stone Nation provide an interesting example because the two gang are warring. The latter belongs to the confederation of 'Folks,' while the former is a member of the 'People.' The fact that despite religious similarity the two gangs do not get along indexes the role of religion in the gang culture, it is dealt with on an individual basis, and gang members are allowed to chose a religion. When a gang takes a religion throughout its ranks, an oddity, the signs of the religion definitely makes sense. Functionally, it does not seem feasible for both gangs, as rivals, to use the same sign, but there is a distinction between the two signs. The Vice Lords use a five-point star, while a Peace Stone Nation sign is a six-point star; called by gang members a 'popcorn star'. The 'five' and 'six' points have some importance as they serve to index which of the two confederations the gangs belong. The 'People' and 'Folks' are known by 'five' and 'six', respectively, for reasons only members know. The subtle differences show how iconic representations are, as stated with the Latin king example, culturally linked.
The Vice Lords and Peace Stone Nation share another sign; the *pyramid and star* which has Muslim significance, as well. Again, the difference with the *Istar* differentiates the two gangs. Therefore with these identical signs it is necessary to dissect the icon into smaller icons in order to better understand it. For a gang member, this extra step makes a rather large difference -- something between safety and harm.

One of the simplest, and most obvious, ways in which the gangs represent themselves on Angelville walls is by posting their names. A Deuce can simply write 'D-E-U-C-E' to achieve the same indexical objective. The written graffito has the same iconic function as the pictorial representations but in a dissimilar manner. Whereas the pictorial representations such as the *crown* and *crescent moon with star* are iconic of tangible objects, *IDEUCE* or *IKINGS* are appropriated from the symbolic code of the English language. If the appropriated code is symbolic, how are these signs iconic? The iconicity is of the written representation of the words as they exist in the English language code. (Their iconicity is doubly important as pictorial representations since a hypothetical illiterate person with gang experience can decipher *IKINGS* as being the 'Latin Kings' by its indexical connection and not the arbitrariness by which the words represent the object.)

These signs are also the most easily deciphered by the largest group of people. Anyone who is familiar with the English language code can understand what the words mean. However, the meaning of the signs as intended by the sign-creator can only be apprehended by a gang member or one fluent in the gang code (see later discussion of the interpretant).
The names of the gangs can be abbreviated by only the first letter within the graffiti code. For example, Deuces, Home-Boys, and Peace Stones can be shortened to 10/, IH.B./, and IP.S./. These abbreviations serve the same purpose as the full word, indexing the gang, and also have a sort of iconicity with the English language code. Again, any passerby can understand the letters, but unless they are a member of the gang community or its peripheral community, the letters are meaningless.

The gang-graffitist utilizes the English language code in at least one other manner: the words INATION/, ILOVE/, and IKILLER/. When looking at Angelvitle graffiti these words often appear after the name of a gang to add emphasis. INATIONI adds more power to the sign IKINGSI because of the connotations associated with the word. Commonly, 'nation' refers to power and solidarity which are two important principles to the gangs. These social organizations are fighting wars which they feel are based on principle; a function reserved for nations. The hierarchy of the gangs resembles nations as we think of them, too. The Vice Lords are led by Generals and Ministers as well as Presidents and VP.s. Also, 'nation' often refers to an ethnic group which acts together like an Indian tribe (the 'Sioux Nation') and a gang can readily be perceived as such. The ILOVEI graffito, too, is positive, and I suspect all pictorial signs in the positive are equivalent to this sign; i.e. 121 = IDEUCE LOVE/. However, the data does not completely confirm this.

At the time of the Angelville graffiti used for this paper, the Latin Kings and Deuces were at war. Across the walls was the sign IDEUCE KILLER/. The sign indexed a gang who 'kills Deuces', and judging by the current climate in Angelville, the producers of this sign were the Latin Kings. However, Gangster, too, may have put up this sign since it
refers to any 'Deuce Killer'. Thus, to understand who placed the sign it must be taken in context with the other signs. If it is coupled with the sign ILATIN KINGSI then most likely they are the 'Deuce Killers'. If a *fork* is within proximity, then a gangster probably placed the sign in Question. Therefore to understand the IDEUCE KILLERI (as well as its counterpart, the inverted sign, i.e. the inverted *crown* in Example 1) sign a certain pragmatic understanding is needed. Such a pragmatic understanding can interpret the deictic IDEUCE KILLERI in terms of who is the sign producer and is brought to the signing process by the interpretant.

I have been using the term appropriation to explain graffiti code-production without much of an explanation as to what I mean. Cultural appropriation, in the sense of graffiti, "is the taking of types from one code and applying it to another code. The resulting token has a different index and generates, through reproduction, a new type. Since codes mediate between two systems, this seems like a natural process. The result is, basically, an overcode to propose a new rule which governs a rarer application of the previous rule (Eco, 19768:155)." For example, a graffiti *crown* still has qualities of a "real" crown, and it still indexes a king. There is still more to this indexical function as it truly indexes the Latin Kings in the graffiti context. The iconic features are then secondary to the more important indexical function; meaning comes from the index. The signs are relations; "they stand for something else, but the problem of their meaning does not concern the 'they' or the 'something,' but the function of standing for. If one studies this function, one has to forget the object to which the sign may sometimes refer (Eco 1975:7)." The icon's importance lies only in providing a cultural line, but, after the link is made, there is a movement from the iconic features to the index and the function of the signs.
Cultural appropriation, then, is using the link understood by mainstream culture and attaching to it another meaning. The wearing of an L.A. Kings jacket may index the hockey team in pop culture, but on the streets of Angelville the sign has been appropriated to index the Latin Kings.

The connection between sign *Ucrown/*, for example) and object (Latin Kings) is made in the interpretant. "A sign stands for something the idea which it produces, or modifies....That for which it stands is called its object; that which it conveys, its meaning; and the idea to which it gives rise, its interpretant (Peirce, 1.339)," As far as this indexical relationship in graffiti is concerned, and for semiosis in general, the interpretant is essential. The problem with appropriating codes is that more people have the ability to make a connection between the sign vehicle and an object, but the connection may not be the desired one. A */crown/* is easily recognized as being so, and the interpretant may even think of a king. The graffito */KINGS/*, too, can be understood by anyone who is familiar with the English language code. However, these signs were placed to index the Latin Kings, and only a few may have the interpretant to make this connection. The ability to make this connection is called the 'ground'. The 'ground' of the graffiti-code requires a knowledge of Angelville gangs. Without this ground, the signs may be interpreted from the code from which they are appropriated. Thus, the code breaks down, and the graffiti melts to gibberish.

What is essential to the interpretant is that the ground upon which the sign is seen to be related to something else as signified, which signified in turn becomes a sign relative to other elements in the experience of the interpreter, "setting in motion the chain of interpretants on which semiosis as a process feeds (Deely, 1990:27)."
The semiosis of gang appropriation.

This diagram shows the semiosis of the graffiti code. "Something is a sign only because it is interpreted by something by some interpreter ... Semiotic, then, is not concerned with the study of a particular kinds of objects in so far (and only in so far) as they participate in semiosis (Morris in Eco, 1975:6)." There is a connection between the first index of /crown/ to 'king' and /crown/ to 'Latin Kings'. The first interpretant makes the first connection (this is the connection the modal persona of Angelville would make), and the graffiti uses the first interpretant (and the new sign vehicle) to signify a gang (the new object). The problem arises when members of the community do not get to the second step of this abbreviated model of semiosis because they do not have experience with the gang system. Misinterpretation results; a threat which exists with any signing process (Ockersse, 1984).
Conclusion

Context is essential to understanding the graffiti code and is apprehended by the interpreter. The image forms part of a 'semiotic field'. "The image is produced and observed in a given spacio-temporal context and simultaneously generates its own semiotic field (Nadin, 1984:347)." In terms of graffiti, the context is the location of the signs as well as which sign it is grouped (It is important to note this is not a syntagmatic relationship). If *icrownl* appears within the known territory of the Latin Kings. Then it is a statement to signify this as 'Latin King territory'. *IOEUCE KILLERI* near a *icrownl* communicated the Latin Kings as Deuce killers. Again, the relationship between these sign is not syntagmatic because no roles for the syntagm exist. The connections are made by the interpreter because of logical assumptions and Peircean abduction. Note the uses of the two words signification and communication in the two different sentences. Context is essential to the notion of signification and communication within the graffiti code. "The latter semiotic field is understood as unity between the field of signification and communication (Nadin, 1984:347)." At once the gang sign points to the gang as 'owner' of the territory, but also indexes the linguistic coding proclaiming 'Latin Kings' and that for which the Kings stand.

Color is a part of the context, too, insofar as the graffiti is concerned. Gangs do have 'colors' which are used for signification such as the Latin Kings use of yellow and black (Kings often wear Iowa Hawkeye sportswear as well as National Football League Pittsburgh Steelers clothing as both have the colors yellow and black), but signs are often not painted in the gang colors. Again, the meaning of these colors is kept in The Book, the King Manifesto. Most times, Harvey said, the color of the sign depended on what's
available. Therefore, it is of more pragmatic use in determining who put up which signs based on similarity of color in a specific string of signs. For instance, *Example 3* has black paint and is pro-Latin Kings and anti-gangster. Both signs are in black and probably put up by the same person.

Once the code is deciphered, the rules extracted, what do we have? I suggest it is a cultural text in which information about the culture is encoded. Cultural texts are, following Lotman and others of the Moscow-Tartu School, viewed as all those messages comprised of signs that are organized by cultural codes (Winner, 1984). Professor Cintron debates between text and conversation, and graffiti proves to have characteristics of both a text and conversation. However, the reading of graffiti compares to reading a book since the sender is absent. However, reading the walls is always a tenuous task. Interpretations vary as to the semantic meanings of some of the signs. The gang-members do appreciate a graffitist with talent, as Rico attests, and at times this style gets to the heart of the gang beliefs. However, here we have something else highlighted -- the act of creating graffiti. After some understanding of the signs is found, where do we go? I think the answer is in the performance of graffiti.

*Signs* instigate action, or something to that effect, is the oft-quoted phrase by Victor Turner (1967). In graffiti this is certainly true. The graffiti is put on the wall, and the next day the reading of these signs instigates more action. Sometimes, it is more graffiti. Signs may be spray-painted which would be positive, or yet others, may be inverted. Still, the new graffiti could 'crack' the existing graffiti. In these performances much of the gang life can be uncovered. For example, the Latin King and Deuce feuding is certainly indexed by the graffiti which shows each throwing the other down (to throw
down, Harvey tells us, is to show disrespect). The killing of Joker, though is still not fully
developed in the graffiti, is certainly depicted to a point in it. If anyone questions the
importance of signs to cause action, one only has to look to a recent article in the
Chicago Tribune on a shooting in Angelville. In it, two gangs started flashing each other
hand signs. This 'repping', as the performance is called, led to a shooting spree. In the
end, an innocent bystander was caught in the cross-fire and hurt. Graffiti is not the only
sign-system in the gang-code. However, it is the one most public. The aim in this paper
was to explain its inner-workings as well as some of its meanings. However, as that
innocent by-stander knows, the end result is the action which occurs. That is the
direction where any discussion on gang sings should head.

A note on conventions used in this document; all signs are enclosed with a slant (/). If a
sign is italicized, it is a description of a pictorial sign, bold indicates a linQuistic sign. This
convention is taken from Eco (Eco, 1977).

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