LIRC 2012 Seminar Series
You are invited to a Legal Intersections Research Centre Seminar by:

Professor Alison Young
Social and Political Sciences
University of Melbourne

Wednesday 1 August 2012
4:30 – 6:00 pm
Location: University of Wollongong
Building 25 Room G05
RSVP: 25/7/2012 fmartin@uow.edu.au
(wine and light refreshments provided)

Crime and the Uncommissioned Image: Street Art, Public Space, and Criminal Justice

Abstract: Cities are sites of cultural and aesthetic production, engaged in a continual process through which they refine their self-image. They do so through aesthetic practices such as architectural innovation, statuary, signage, advertising, and public art. Such urban cultural production is underpinned by a network of planning regulations, local and municipal laws, and public order law. One urban intervention that inspires resort to the criminal law, through the criminalisation of its practitioners, is the production of uncommissioned urban images in the form of graffiti writing and street art.

This paper is based on a four-year research project, which studied street art in cities such as Berlin, London, Melbourne, New York and Paris. It examined the range of ways in which citizens encounter uncommissioned images, including the enactment of legislation against graffiti and street art by governments and the oftentimes harsh sentences handed down by courts. It also examines why street art occurs, drawing on interviews with 71 street artists about their reasons for placing artwork on private property in public places.

In this paper, I will address the tensions arising in the criminal justice system’s encounter with the uncommissioned artwork and examine them in the context of street artists’ motivations for their actions. What can the encounter between illicit art and the criminal law tell us about cultural criminology, about private property, and about the authority of the criminal law?

Alison Young is a Professor of Criminology in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. She has an LLB (Hons) from Edinburgh University and a Masters and PhD in Criminology from Cambridge University. She is the author of The Scene of Violence (2010), Street/Studio (2010), Judging the Image (2005) and Imagining Crime (1996), as well as numerous articles on the intersections of law, crime and culture. Her key research areas are law, art and public culture; cinema and crime; and image studies generally. She has recently completed an ARC Discovery Project on the emergence of street art as a distinctive cultural practice and socio-legal responses to it in a range of cities. From 2012-2014, she is carrying out an ARC Discovery Project examining the reception of street art in the cultural field, focusing upon its transformative potential in urban space; its reception and interpretation in the domain of fine arts; its impact upon the socio-legal regulation of public spaces. She has served as Editor or Associate Editor of a number of journals, including Social and Legal Studies, Feminist Theory, Australian Feminist Law Journal, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology, and Griffith Law Review.