URBAN EXPRESSION... URBAN ASSAULT... URBAN WILDSTYLE... NEW YORK CITY GRAFFITI. PAMELA DENNANT THAMES VALLEY UNIVERSITY (LONDON) BA (HONS) HUMANITIES AMERICAN STUDIES PROJECT 1997

[from Hip Hop Network](http://www.hiphop-network.com/articles/graffitiarticles/emergenceofnycitygraffiti.asp)

CONTENTS

Introduction 1. The Emergence of Graffiti in New York City 2. Graffiti's Social and Cultural Climate 3. Urban Resistance to Graffiti 4. Representing the Females - Women in Graffiti 5. From Underground to Overground - The Writing On Gallery Walls 6. Graffiti in the '90's - The End of an Urban Phenomenon? Conclusion Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

Graffiti - the term comes from both the Greek term "Graphein" meaning 'to write' and the word 'graffiti' is plural of the Italian word "Graffito" meaning 'scratch' and its history can be dated back to prehistoric cave man wall drawings, it can be seen as a human 'need' for communication - "Graffiti represents man's desire to communicate" (Wechsler vi).

Graffiti has become a prominent force in urban settings in the late 20th century and mention of the word conjures up many different images in people's minds - is it art or is it vandalism? a cause of the urban decay or a product from it? The scope of attitudes towards graffiti is wide and controversial. It should be asserted here that many graffiti writers do not call their work graffiti, but rather writing. Iz the Wiz, a writer explains that "graffiti is some social term that was developed (for the culture) somewhere in the 70's" (Writing From The Style Underground 6). Therefore, throughout this project when I use the term graffiti, it will mean writing.

This project is concerned with a specific genre of graffiti that emerged in the late 1960's/early 1970's in New York City - a phenomenon known as the hip-hop graffiti movement: a complex, highly formulated way of imprinting the urban landscape. Hip-hop, a term encompassing rap, DJing, breakdancing and graffiti emerged as ghetto expression' for the poor, urban youth of the city, which really came into its own in the 1980's. The hip-hop scene is a subculture of our times, and an important one, but in order to complete an in-depth coverage of this subculture, I will focus on the graffiti aspect of it because although graffiti is an inter linking factor to the hip-hop whole, it can also be studied as its own entity, just as rap could. Graffiti emerged as its own force, gradually merging into the hip-hop equation, spreading its wings from its roots in New York City to influence other urban settings in the USA and other parts of the world. Graffiti can be seen as an artistic form of resistance to authority and at the same time a means of expression and connectedness to its own subculture.

...

Pamela Dennant - New York City & London - 1997.

CHAPTER 1: THE EMERGENCE OF GRAFFITI IN NEW YORK CITY

"How many people can walk through a city and prove they were there? It's a sign I was here. My hand made this mark. I'm fucking alive! " OMAR, NEW YORK (Walsh 34-35).

The start of New York City graffiti is a concise one and can be traced back to the late 1960's, when a youth, Julio, who apparently lived on 204th street (borough of the city unknown), began to write his "tag" (nickname; pseudonym) Julio 204 on the subway system. By 1968, his tag could be found all over the city. But the phenomenon of writing graffiti actually took hold in a big way when a seventeen year old Greek youth, called Demitrios, from the Washington Heights area x of Manhattan, 'tagged' Taki 183 all over the New York City, and especially the subway. In 1971, eager to determine the meaning in the message, a 'New York Times' reporter found and interviewed Taki 183. The article, entitled 'Taki 183 spawns pen pals' was the first of its kind.

Within a year of the emergence of Taki 183 - and the subsequent 'Times' article - the phenomenon of hundreds of youth seeking to express themselves via the subway system was spawned and the movement that was later to be termed hip-hop graffiti.

The history of graffiti was asserted at this point, and has been laid down many times in various media. However, as it progressed and became a major aspect of popular culture, the narrative disperses. As Haze explains:

"there is no one history of graffiti. It depends what borough you lived in, what year you were born in, what lines you rode...the best you will ever get is a personal history of graffiti" (Molotov Cocktail 4).

THE NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY

Writers and trains have an almost spiritual connection to one another as this is where hip hop graffiti was first conceived.The subway system was seen as a network system for graffiti, it was an icon for graffiti writers to get their work displayed to the public and especially to other 'writers'. As Smith stated:

"Other writers - that's the only thing that matters".(Chalfant & Prigoff 28).

Phase 2 expands on this and affirms that:

"Ours was a world where acknowledgement from one's peers was the singularly ultimate gratification. Never has there been an urgency to be accepted by the public or anyone else" (Phase 2 in rap pages 55).

Therefore, it can be suggested that graffiti writing creates "an alternative system of public communication for kids who otherwise have little access to avenues of urban information" (Ferrell 83).

Writers had particular lines that they preferred, depending on the surface of the train and its route. The greatest writers of the city have always seen the "twos 'n fives" (number 5 Lexington Avenue Express and the number 2) as the superior trains to create their work on, as they span vast areas of the city. This leads to greater recognition and "fame". (see appendix 2 for NYC subway map). The perils of the subway - the danger of the "3rd rail" (the live rail), being arrested, and other hazards all added to the adrenalin rush of 'getting up'.

Graffiti was also produced on walls and buildings, etc but the subway had huge advantages to it that could not be rivalled - "High visibility, the huge potential audience and the link with other like-minded kids throughout the city" (Chalfant & Prigoff 8). The subway also signifies movement and direction - which is very hard to achieve on walls:

"Yes, the graffiti not only the feel and all the superpowered whoosh and impact of all the bubble letters in all the mad comic strips, but the zoom, the aghr, and the ahhr, of screeching rails, the fast motion of subways roaring into stations, the comic strips come to life" (Mailer).

FORMS

There are 7 fundamental forms of graffiti and although there are many, over a hundred, different styles, the forms are consistently recognisable among graffiti writers. The forms are characterised by their complexities, placements and their size. The seven forms will now be described to assert to the reader the vast array of graffiti and the hierarchial order of graffiti form. (Photographic examples of the different forms are provided in the appendices 7 - 9).

TAGS - as already mentioned tags are the graffiti writer's nickname, a pseudonym signature, and they are the simplest form of graffiti. Tags are used to "get up" (put on display) the writers' name as much as possible in order to gain recognition and, hopefully, 'fame'. Although to many the tags may look the same, to an insider of the subculture, the tag is like a fingerprint - a unique blending of various elements of the writer. As Futura 2000 states:

"The name and the tag are one, that's what graffiti means: it's about identification, about a personal icon. It's a way of presenting yourself to the world, something like: 'here I am'" (Wagstaff).

A writer will "bomb" (tag as much as possible), but if a writer only experiments with tags, and uses no other form, they will carry little scope, and therefore, the writer will be ranked low among other graffiti writers. They may subsequently be labelled as a "toy" (inferior or inexperienced) by other writers.

THROW-UPS - a throw-up is the evolved tag, they are usually sprayed quickly with a spraycan on the outside of trains, or walls, etc. The writer will usually use bubble letters to throw up their 2-3 letter name. Usually 2 colours are used, one for the outline and the other as a rough fill-in. They are the quickest way to create a large piece of work.

PIECES - 'pieces is the term used for masterpieces. Pieces are considered the most eminent development of hip-hop graffiti. Pieces usually use more letters than throw-ups and are more elaborate. Super Kool 223 is credited with creating the first masterpiece in 1972, this was helped by the technology of the 'fat cap'. Super Kool realised that replacing the spraycan cap with that of a fat cap from spray foam/starch he could cover a large area quickly and smoothly. Technological innovations have always been a subsidiary in the metamorphosis of graffiti into a more worldly wise form of art. When on the side of a subway car, a piece that extends more than the length of the car and covers windows, becomes another form:

TOP TO BOTTOMS - This term refers to pieces that cover the top to the bottom of the subway car but not its length.

END TO ENDS - as the name implies, these are creations that cover one end of a subway car to another, but not the entire car.

WHOLE CARS - This is the whole subway car - end to end, top to bottom (including the windows). The first whole car was painted in 1973 by Flint 707, it was doubly amazing because it was also a 3-D piece. The whole car is extensive coverage, it is 20 feet long and 12 feet high, maybe using 20 spraycans, and takes 8 hour or more. So the work would often be shared by groups or 'crews'. Who paints what part of the piece would be divided according to the skill and hierarchial ranking of the writer. The design (outline and colours) would be planned out in advance in writers' "black books" (artists sketch pads; carried everywhere). Because of the vast amount of spray paint needed, the writers would often "rack" (steal) the paint needed to create their artwork.

Writers who did whole cars were well respected among other writers, especially when the whole car also had good style. By the mid 1970's whole car murals truly had become graffiti masterpieces on the sides of trains, with caricatures, backgrounds, messages (some involving social criticism, such as, Lee's piece "Stop the Bomb" in 1972), scenes and well-known cartoon characters taken from American popular culture. The underground comic artist, Vaughn Bode (1941-1975), was a great influence to many writers who used his characters in their pieces.

WHOLE TRAINS - Before the first whole train "the freedom train" was painted on July 4th 1976 by Caine, Mad 103 and Flame One, the whole car was considered by most to be the most superior form of graffiti that could be achieved. The Freedom Train's life was short lived - it was taken out of regular service and repainted just one day after it was painted. Lee, of 'the Fabulous Five' crew suggested that this move by authority was "...stupid. They did something for the United States and somebody dropped a dime (informed) on them and they busted them." (Castleman 36). The second whole train created was "The Christmas Train" in 1977 by members of The Fabulous Five, Lee, Mono, Doc and Slave. Lee, describes the exhilaration of seeing "The Christmas Train" on public display in an interview with Craig Castleman:

"... All the writers were there...So the whole side of the station was packed and I know that it was a shock to all these Wall Street Journals with their classy suits...they saw the whole train a and everybody's going like 'oh shit!'...They probably didn't know it was graffiti; they probably thought the city was doing something good for a change. They probably thought they paid some muralist to do it." (castleman 10-12).

However,the whole trains were rare, mostly 2-car murals (known as "worms") were the main focus of the writers' creative efforts in their search for fame.

STYLE

As more and more youth began getting their tags up, it was necessary to develop a unique style, different sizes and colours that would stand out and distinguish one piece of work from another's work. Vulcan expresses that:

"Style is the most important thing! It defines who you are. (Writing From The Style Underground 5).

By the mid 1970's, extreme styles of lettering became the main focus of writers - this became especially relevant after a Philadelphia writer, T 9op Cat 126 arrived in Manhattan, bringing with him the prolific letter styles he had adopted from another writer, the legendary Cornbread. In competition, many of Manhattan's writers subsequently adopted this style of "long, thin, closely packed letters that stood on little platforms...dubbing it 'Broadway Elegant'" (castleman 55).

The other boroughs of New York City, also developed their own styles, that could determine to a keen eyed writer where the artist was from in the city.

Other writers preferred to create their own styles, giving them elaborate names. If Super Kool 223 created the first master piece as a form, then it was Phase II who developed it beyond its basic confines to create different styles with his "bubble letters" (which he called "softie letters") and subsequent names for the variations he designed. ie/ "Phasemagorical phantastic" (with stars), "bubble cloud" (with clouds), etc.

Phase II says of his constant creations in his "Guide to Reality":

"For me this was a sport that belonged to me/us and rules and regulations were all regulated by who ever had the knack to create and innovate within it" (Phase II).

A 'style wars' began among writers, and this was an exciting time in the world of graffiti as the competition was fierce with so many ideas flooding in to the ever-expanding scene. Writers were highly critical of each others work. Originality, flow of letters, care of spraying, outline sharpness and use of details all add to the creation of a "burner" (an excellent piece).

Styles and techniques used by writers include wildstyle (almost unreadable; interlocking letters, signifying direction; a flow of movement), 3D, fading (blending colours), cracked letters, gothic, computer lettering (developed by Kase 2), and new modifications to old styles, like shadow 3-D S. The wildstyle lettering was often illegible to those outside of the graffiti subculture. This, for many writers, added to its beauty giving a more unified feel to the subculture. Dondi, an early writer, extends this view in subway art and says that, "when he writes for other writers, he uses wildstyle, and when he writes for the public, he uses straight letters" (Chalfant & Cooper 70-71).

Original ideas were always been sought by writers, no writer wanted to be known for "biting" (basically artistic plagiarism). Conflicts would arises between writers, where one would accuse the other of biting. Writers would also deliberately go over another writers work ("going over"), which is seen as a great mark of disrespect in the graffiti world. This would often lead to clashes between writers or crews. Writers go over others' work for various reasons, for instance - to challenge; because there is limited space; as payback for previous going overs or for dropping a dime on them. The infamous Cap, featured in the documentary film, Style Wars, was well known for going over many writer's pieces, just for the fun of it. Lee, an early writer, says of him: "at one time I thought cap was a fuckin' government official planted to stir shit up" (Rock. A. Party 41).

Many new writers would seek to be 'adopted' by a more well-known established writer, where they were taught about all aspects of graffiti - from the "lay-up" (train yard) through to style. This teacher student relationship was fairly common in the graffiti world. For the new graffiti writer "the best way to learn is through recapitulating the entire history of graffiti art, from the simple to the complex" (Chalfant & Cooper 32). The originators of graffiti, such as Taki 183, Phase II, Stayhigh 149, Blade, Seen, Lee, Bama, Kase 2, and others are remembered and well respected by later writers, seen almost in a mythical light. "Stories about them, their contemporaries, and their achievements comprise a body of graffiti folklaw". (Chalfant & Cooper 17).

FAME

Fame can come to graffiti writers in many ways - a writer may get instant fame if their work gets media attention (interviewed, photos in newspapers, their work in a film clip, etc). Taki 183 was the first to receive media fame.

Writers who have fame are considered the Kings. Writers with fame may be labelled the 'King of Style'; 'King of the Insides'; 'King of the Line' etc. 1

Fame is ever moving, therefore, the title of king changes often. IN, who went 'all city' bombing the subways, was proclaimed as the 'King of Everything' by some writers.

Even though style, colour, size and form were important, 'getting up' was the first factor to work on. As writer Tracy 168 explains:

"style don't mean nothing if you don't get up. If people don't see your pieces, how are they gonna know if you've got style?" (Castleman 20).

The 1970's were salient years of graffiti bombing - these were the invention years. They were the years that begun the history of graffiti and led to its development to the present day.

CHAPTER 2: GRAFFITI'S SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CLIMATE

"People will never really understand what graffiti is unless they go to New York to live surrounded by abandoned buildings and cars that are burnt and stripped and the city comes out saying graffiti is terrible, but then you look around the neighbourhood and you've got all this rubble & shit, and yet you come out of there with the attitude toward life that you can create something positive" BRIM (Chalfant & Prigoff 17)

Graffiti is of interest to socialists, anthropologists, psychologists, criminologists, artists and others. They seek to find out why people write graffiti, what motivates them and what aids to its continuance. Diverse subcultures, like the hip hop one, are seen by British Marxist scholars as "symbolic forms of resistance" (Hebdige in 'Subculture: The Meaning Of Style' 80). Haze, a writer, looks at the meaning of graffiti in simple terms: He states that:

"alot of people get caught up in the meaning of graffiti. I don't think graffiti was originally meant to mean anything" (Molotov cocktail 5).

WRITERS AND CREWS

Writers span across all ethnic and economic boundaries, although when graffiti first emerged it was predominantly Puerto Rican youth. As it evolved it was poor Hispanic, black and sometimes white youths who wrote. Working class whites who lived the working class life identified with the hip hop subculture because they were also uninvited into the dominant middle class (the WASP - White Anglo Saxon Protestants) society. As graffiti expanded it attracted youth from more affluent backgrounds who were allured by graffiti's danger and excitement. It "reached out to the substantial hip white audience that...identify with its raw, outlaw attitude" (George 54).

Most writers begin young - 10 or 11 years old, and many stop writing by the time they are 16. However, this is not always the case, many writers continue into their twenties and if they cross the boundary into the art worlds, they will go on producing graffiti longer still. The reasons why writers write varies widely. For older writers, it is a "way of life, something that is part of their everyday thinking and routine" (Walsh 12).

Devon. D. Brewer, a Sociologist, has extensively researched inner city graffiti and he concludes that the motives for graffiti are an important issue. He argues:

"There are four major values in hip hop graffiti: fame, artistic expression, power and rebellion" (188).

Psychologists who have studied graffiti writers have concluded that "a desire for individual-group recognition and rebellion against authority probably account for this phenomenon" (Legendre 730).

You could, therefore, ask that if the writer was honoured by the society they reject and are rebelling against, would they still do it? They probably would, as fame and artistic expression are two strong factors.

But what is the social function of graffiti as expression? Feldman, in his book 'Varieties of Visual Expression' argues that this social function is achieved when: "(1) it influences the collective behaviour of people (2) it is created to be seen or used in primarily public situations (3) it expresses or describes collective aspects of existences as opposed to individual and personal kinds of experience" (qtd in Element). If we consider it an artistic expression, we can see that "all works of art perform a social function, since they are created for an audience" (Feldman qtd in Element).

Writers will often form or join crews. Crews take graffiti from individual expression to collective expression with a creative aim, which is getting up. A crew, according to T-Kid:

"is a unit of dudes who work together to achieve a goal: to get up and go all city" (Chalfant & Cooper 50).

They see graffiti as making the city a brighter place to be- "a public service" (Castleman 71). Parents of the writers were often not as positive about their child's 'hobby'. Skeme's mum, featured in the documentary film Style Wars, sighs:

"what you got is a whole miserable subculture." (Stylewars).

Writers' corners began to crop up all over New York City as the graffiti phenomenon spread across the city -writers would congregate in these spots around the city. The first one was formed in 1972 at 188st and Audubon Ave in Manhattan. The best and most prestigious writers would sign 'W.C.188' after their piece. There was also the 'coffee shop' in the Bronx; Brooklyn Bridge; and the writers bench at the concourse (subway at 149st and grand concourse in the Bronx).

...

ORGANISATIONS

In 1972 graffiti took on a new perspective. A group was formed by a sociology student, Hugo Martinez, called United Graffiti Artists ( UGA). Martinez set the group up to advance graffiti as a legitimate art form, especially among Puerto Ricans. Martinez's aim was to lead these youth away from the deviance of graffiti to a more accepted positive direction. The group, which included the most prestigious writers of the time, organised exhibitions and obtained various commissions, including painting the backdrops to the ballet 'Deuce Coupe'. The group, however, experienced many problems, including racial tension - Hugo Martinez was accused of being pro-Puerto Rican and excluding other races. The UGA eventually broke up, which led to graffiti holding a low profile for a time.

Another group, the National Organisation of Graffiti Artists (NOGA) was established in mid 1974 by Jack Peslinger (a theatre director). They held exhibitions but they experienced money problems from early on. They were rejected by the MTA, when they offered to repaint the trains for $150 per car, in order to raise money for their organisation. (The MTA's own cost is $1,500 per car).

POLITICS

As graffiti on the subway grew, it became a hotly debated issue among officials of the city. It, therefore, became a political issue. Mayor Lindsay described the writers as "'insecure cowards' seeking recognition" (Castleman 137). However, Taki 183 had seen it in another way. In the original Times article he had asked:

"why do they go after the little guy? Why not the campaign organisations that put stickers all over the subway at election time? (Hager 15).

Richard Goldstein, in an article in New York Magazine in 1973 asserted that graffiti is "the first genuine teenage street culture since the fifties..." (qtd in Castleman 141).

The New York Times and New York Magazine became antagonistic in their opposite views to graffiti, not unlike the Republican and Democrats. After 1975 media attention to graffiti slowed right down and did not pick up again until the hip hop blast of the 1980's.

HIP HOP

Hip hop emerged in New York City, which could be described as an "urban world of physical and psychological violence" (Frank and McKenzie 43). Hip hop graffiti emerged from the social, cultural and political inequalities regular to the U.S. and graffiti can be seen as the "personal expression of an oppressed and disenfranchised people" (starr 132).

Graffiti is one element within the subculture known as hip-hop, which comprises rap music, DJing, breakdancing and graffiti. At the hip-hop core is a hard edged attitude reflecting the hard edged society in which it emerged. Graffiti and rap "were especially aggressively public displays of counter presence and voice. Each asserted the right to write" (Rose 59).

The Bronx borough on New York conceived hip hop culture and the graffiti that was created in the Bronx train yards was always representative of the inventiveness of the Bronx youth.

Hip hop artists have evolved into "an underground subculture...with an art form, value system and language all of its own" (Howorth 553). In fact, hip hop has always negotiated its power to exist within the larger capitalist American system "by drawing on the particular experiences and customs of their communities, ethnic groups and age cohorts" (Lachmann 232). Therefore, hip hop disputes hegemony; proving its valid existence within and different from the dominant society's thinking.

Graffiti and hip hop fused in the urban underground, but:

"it is Hollywood who originated the 'hip hop de hippy hop the body rock' that led to the rap-breaking-graffiti scene being labelled hip hop" (George 50).

Therefore, the term hip hop is a label that was given to describe the collective whole of the four connected but distinct elements that make hip hop what it is. It is a term that was given by those outside of the subculture. The elements within hip hop, however, did "develop in relation to one another and in relation to the larger society" (Rose 27).

Hip hop exploded into the popular urban consciousness in the early 1980's, after the release of The Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" in 1979. It took graffiti with it - taking the phenomenon to a whole new dimension of youth street culture.

Hip hop also hit the cinema screens, with 'Wildstyle', 'Beat Street' and 'Style Wars'. These films featured many well-known icons of the hip hop scene, and therefore added to its promotion. Wildstyle featured Lee and Lady Pink, two of the "old School" (originators of the scene) graffiti writers, plus breakdancers, rappers and hip hop DJs. Style wars featured Seen, Skeme, Dondi, Shy147, Noc, Iz the Wiz and the legendary one-armed kase 2 - all graffiti originators.

Graffiti fused with rap, DJing and breakdancing in a number of ways: graffiti writers often rapped, breakdanced or produced records. The infamous DJ Kool Herc and Fab Five Freddy were graffiti writers before becoming DJs.

Futura 2000, a graffiti writer, paid homage to Kurtis Blow's rap 'The Breaks' with a whole car piece of the same name. Rappers wore graffiti adorned jackets, and writers painted backdrops for rap shows.

Prominent writers also recorded rap records ie/Phase 2 and Futura, while Breakdancing crews, like the infamous Rock Steady Crew, would perform with a graffiti backdrop and a 'boombox' blasting rap. All of this created a prevailing mood of community and solidarity among the four genres.

Afrika Bambaataa - a nominal leader for hip hop and the creator of the "Zulu Nation" asserts that:

"it's about survival, economics and keeping our people moving on...a sense of community can be created within the community rather than being imposed by people coming from outside" (qtd in Hebdige 'Cut 'N' Mix' 139).

The harshness of inner city life was often reflected in their work. In 1982, Grandmaster Flash and The furious five's 'The Message' delivered its reality-hitting lyrics into the urban consciousness. (see appendix 4 for lyrics). However, rap music was not the only influence to graffiti writers. Influences also came from punk rock of the 1980s and rock 'n' roll.

...

CHAPTER 3 URBAN RESISTANCE TO GRAFFITI

"I think graffiti is vandalism...they think they're artists and have some right like free speech to express their individualism or artistry...graffiti might look good to them and their buddies, but the majority of people don't want to look at that crap every day" Gary Doyle - Public Works Officer, Nuisance Crime Abatement Unit (Walsh backcover)

Since the New York graffiti phenomenon began in the late 60s, resistance began against it. graffiti is often seen in disastrous terms, symbolising and reflecting the deterioration of a society. As Kriegel suggests "the spread of graffiti is as accurate a barometer of the decline of urban civility as anything else one can think of" (432). Government officials, etc, were faced with a serious issue. This issue was can graffiti actually be controlled and if it can how. The public, the media, New York City Government, the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and the New York City Transit Police Department (TP), have all 'declared war' in some way or another on what was considered by Sanford Garelik (City Council President) in 1972 as "one of the worst forms of pollution we have to combat" (Castleman x).

The resistance to graffiti, especially police tactics, was brought into question and controversial debate, with the death of alleged graffiti writer Michael Stewart in the hands of police in 1973.

RESISTANCE

Between 1970 and 1974 graffiti on the subway was cleaned off by manual labour. Technological advances had not yet been reached regarding a cleaning solvent that actually worked. A chemist was even employed by the MTA to try to 'mix' the magical solution.

The cost of all the labour and materials needed to repaint the cars (that had to spend four days out of service in the process) was "equivalent to the revenue from [the sale of] 6,000 tokens" (Castleman 149).

It was a vicious cycle, as soon as the trains went back into service clean they were bombed again, which "mocks, as it were, the hapless effort to obscure their predecessors. Thus the signs of official failure are everywhere" (Glazer 4).

From the mid to the late 70s anti graffiti efforts took a major turn because it was seen that graffiti reflected the urban decay of the city. Graffiti on the subways 'dislocated', especially when the windows were completely covered, making the public feel "uneasy...when it became difficult to tell which station a train was pulling into" (Henderson 43). Officials worried about gang involvement and property owners felt violated. The public felt uneasy, graffiti was seen as taking away the feeling of security. Jared Lebow (spokesman for the New York City Transit) asserted:

"the impression graffiti gave was that the subway system was out of control...if vandals have a free reign, then criminals have a free reign" (Henderson 44).

...

Officially, subway graffiti died on May 12 1989, but it was far too evolved to be stopped. It was a massive subculture that had gone around the world, and as every writer knows, many still got up on the subway, it was just buffed before it could be seen.

While every authority was passing the buck for the problem that was graffiti, Chairman Yunich seemed to respond with the most viable answer that:

"graffiti is a sociological problem that has defied solution" (Castleman 151).

Graffiti is in your face, an attack on the visuals. The attempt to exterminate graffiti, meant that people were 'listening' - namely the authorities that graffiti was rebelling against. The approach taken by authority (to declare all out war) seemed to fail, costing the city billions of dollars in revenue.

Brewer even suggests that the anti-graffiti tactics used by the city:

"may have actually worked to entrench the illegal focus of writers there" (194).

It was an outdated method of resistance and accomplished little in eradicating the problem. It did not address the dilemma of the urban decay surrounding these youths, of what motivates the youth to do it, the larger societal problems. The authorities could not see, either, that graffiti writing was a way for the youths to express their energies the only way they knew how: on the side of a subway car, or a on wall.

Resistance to graffiti still does not work as "since 1989, graffiti has wound up costing the United States Government over $4,000,000,000 per annum and this figure is escalating" (Beatty & Cray qtd in Element).

CHAPTER 4: REPRESENTING THE FEMALES - WOMEN IN GRAFFITI

"Even if it seems like a stereotyped name for a woman, that was far from being true since you could see my name on subway cars next to all the male writer's names. I was a feminist speaking for women's rights even before I ever heard about anything like that" LADY PINK (Molotov cocktail 19)

Males have always dominated all aspects of hip hop, and graffiti is no exception. However there have always been a small but significant number of women who are represented in the scene. This chapter, although short, will investigate the females, who played true to the game. Like Lady Pink, one of the most well known of the female writers, who still writes to this day - legally and sometimes illegally.

Females have a harder time achieving fame in this predominately male genre. Some of the best and most well - known female writers - Barbara62, Eva 62, Lady Pink, Charmin, Stoney, lady Heart to name some, have played a role in changing the male dominated shape of the graffiti world. Charmin, for instance, gained he 9r fame by tagging the statue of liberty - the first writer to do this, male or female, earned her the respect she sought.

Barbara 62 and Eva 62 were early writers - in the same era as Taki 183 - and they usually wrote in a pair. Many female writers used male names - the reason for this could be inferred as a way to gain acceptance before a stereotype could be attached.

Many male writers resented female writers. They did not want them to come to train yards, they say, "cause if they get hurt we'll feel responsible" (Castleman 69). Another female writer of the early days, Kathy 161 would go to the train yards but most female writers attempted to gain their fame via walls, handball courts and tagging the insides of trains.

...

"As a female writer your sexual reputation is run through the dirt. Boys will not tell each other that a girl said no to them. People were saying crazy things about how I wasn't doing my own pieces and so on...So I went painting with guys in the Bronx and all the way down to Brooklyn... they saw that I was serious" (Molotov Cocktail 19).

This can be seen as an attempt to intimidate females from partaking in the subculture, and it did deter many females. However, according to Lady heart:

"although it was sometimes an effective strategy, fear of family reprisals and the physical risks in train yards were much greater deterrents against female participation" (Rose 44).

Female style of graffiti was similar to males, although females often painted more feminine, using less blacks, more colour and more visually pleasing characters and backgrounds. By using more gender role colours, etc, while still maintaining style and technique, these women individualised their work asserting the fact that they were females in a male field, but that they could be as good and sometimes better than the boys.

CHAPTER 5: FROM UNDERGROUND TO OVERGROUND - THE WRITING ON GALLERY WALLS

"'You're mad,' cried one, 'it is not art, it is never art.' 'No,' said the other, 'I think it's valid'" (Mailer)

The question as to whether graffiti can be considered art is a controversial one to say the least. This is especially salient in the views of the general public and gallery owners alike. It can be asked: is it vandalism when it is illegal on the streets or on the side of a subway car and art when it is on a canvas on someone's wall or on a legitimate advertisement - what is the difference? What is art, what is vandalism, what is graffiti writing...

It can be suggested that "deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label" (Becker qtd in Lachmann 230). In other words, graffiti writing was labelled as vandalism and rejected by the dominant society, until, like a twist of fate, the art world took it in, therefore making it more acceptable. The deviance was left as the appeal. Another important question that has arisen through this, is whether graffiti should cross over to the mainstream. This has caused great debate, especially among the writers themselves. Haze, puts it like this:

"It's very tricky to call graffiti art because it was born to operate outside the system, and art has a system. So when you put graffiti in a gallery, you are taking an outsider and putting it inside. It's like putting an animal in a cage" (Molotov Cocktail 7).

However, Lady pink, a prolific writer, states simply that:

"it can no longer be called graffiti but art, and is accepted as such" (Wagstaff).

GOING OVERGROUND

Graffiti came to the attention of the art mainstream twice: In late 1972 and again in 1980. The biggest art 'movement' of the 70s - Minimalism - was dying out and a new art interest was sought.

"The original graffiti muralists could be viewed as naive artists in that they lacked any sort of training yet produced new forms of art that incorporated diverse elements of mass culture" (Lachmann 242). In other words, the graffiti artists did not emerge from other art worlds. Although, Robinson & McCormick express that "graffiti shares many of the stylistic elements seen in East Village art (Neo-Expressionism) - an obsession with trademarks ("tags"), the use of motifs borrowed from the comics and popular culture and adolescent taste for dramatic, lowbrow imagery" (qtd in crane 79).

In 1972, the United Graffiti Artists (UGA) held a show in the Razor gallery. It was featured in Newsweek and in 1974 the first 'historical reference' of graffiti was published - a book by Norman mailer 'The Faith of Graffiti' which put forth the "creative power of graffiti" (Edmand 495).

The Art Space Gallery in SoHo opened with a graffiti art exhibition in 1975. Phase and Bama were there, their work selling from $1,000 - $3,000. Prices remained low for graffiti writing on canvas, this was because as a new aesthetic, it could not be categorised in the same sphere as 'elite', conventional art. However, the show did not receive the vast media coverage that it needed.

In February 1979, Fred Braithwaite (A.K.A. Fab five Freddy; later as Freddy Love) was featured in the 'Scenes' Column of the Village Voice paper.

In the article, he boldly stated:

"I think it's time everyone realised graffiti is the purest form of New York art. What else has evolved from the streets" (Hager 63).

Following the article, Fred received a number of phone calls. One in particular, from the Italian art dealer Claudio Bruni, led Fred and Lee (another member of the Fabulous five) to a show in Rome.

Freddy became the voice of graffiti, much like Afrika Bambaataa became the voice for hip hop (in particular rap).

...

GRAFFITI AS A COMMODITY

Graffiti writers came out where the modern media tried to crush them. The 90s is a time where the cultural value is that of a media junkie - images and messages are consumed by the public. They are put there for mass consumption. The capitalist system saw how graffiti "screams your ego across the city" (Mailer), and they consumed this and reproduced it as a commodity form. Therefore, much of graffiti as a raw street art has been absorbed. Despite the fact that it is not in the interest of this capitalist system to have vocal contrary viewpoints, such as those you would find within the graffiti subculture, they are allowed to exist via a negotiated balance of power and graffiti in advertising is one way of redressing the balance. Graffiti writers are increasingly influencing the styles, colours, etc of advertising for major companies where the scope of art is being tested. The Fila advertisements in appendix 15 are prime example of graffiti as a mass produced commodity. The words 'confidence' and 'fearless' are raw, in your face, tag-like structures, currently seen on the front of all the city's buses. If those words were written by a writer without permission, it would be vandalism, but because a massive company like Fila has made the writing into an advertisement, it is now called business.

As Eskae reminds us:

"people with money can put up signs...if you don't have the money you're marginalised...you're not allowed to express yourself or to put up words that you think other people should see. Camel, they're up all over the country and look at the message Camel is sending and companies like them. ...they're just trying to keep the masses paralysed so they can go about their business with little resistance" (Walsh 25).

...

THE INTERNET

The internet has become a major force for graffiti. It can be seen as the new 'writers corner' of the 90s, a place where writers can connect, swap addresses to trade their photographs or even scan them via electronic mail. In the chat rooms of 'America On Line' there is always a busy graffiti room where writers from across the country (and sometimes the world) discuss all aspects of graffiti. In many ways the mouse has replaced the spraycan as a writing tool. Many writers have mixed feelings about graffiti on the internet. Reas expresses his view in an interview in rap pages:

"graffiti when I was doing it, wasn't in magazines. it wasn't on the internet. It was on a train...it was free. Now everything costs money. graf is marketed. I don't know if it's right or wrong. I just know that it's different (Rock. A. Party 42).

Of all the graffiti sites on the World Wide Web, the biggest and best known is 'Art Crimes' (http://www.graffiti.org). It is constantly being updated with scanned photographs, articles, events, etc. There is also a link system that can take you to other graffiti sites.

So, is this the end of the phenomenon? Some say no, others yes. Futura, who was there in the beginning and has evolved his style notes that:

"back then I don't think anyone ever thought about the future of the movement and where it was going - surely I didn't. It was a passing fancy, a fad, a sign of the times" (Futura 2000).

...

Ovie/KD argues:

"End graffiti? I don't think so. Everyday another writer is born" ("Legal Graffiti? The Police Voice dissent" 61).

...

[see full article](http://www.hiphop-network.com/articles/graffitiarticles/emergenceofnycitygraffiti.asp))

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Art Crimes. http://www.graffiti.org/ Baker, Houston.A.Jr. Black studies - Rap And The academy. U.S.: The University of Chicago press, 1993. Brewer, Devon. D. "Hip Hop graffiti Writers' evaluation of Strategies to Control Illegal Graffiti." Human Organisation, 2 (1992): 188-189. Castleman, Craig. Getting Up: Subway graffiti in New York, New York: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1982. Chalfant, Henry and Martha Cooper. Subway Art, London:Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1984. Chalfant, Henry & James Prigoff. Spraycan Art, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1987. Cooper, Martha and Joseph Sciorra. R.I.P.: New York Spraycan Memorials, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994. Cooper, Susan. "Fantasy in the Real World." The Horn Book Magazine. May/June 1990: 306-307. Crane, Diana. The Transformation of the Avant-Garde - The New York Art World, 1940- 1985. U.S.: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Edmand, Brenda. "Graffiti." The Encyclopedia of New York city. ed. Kenneth T. Jackson. U.S.:The New York Historical society. Yale University Press. 495-496. Element, Kevin. "Hard Hitting Modern Perspective on Hip hop Graffiti" Art Crimes. (1996): n. pag. Online. Internet. 27 Sept. 1996. Fernando, S.H. Jr. The New Beats - Exploring The Music, Culture & Attitudes of Hip hop. U.K.: Payback Press, 1994. Ferrell, Jeff. "Urban Graffiti - Crime, Control, Resistance". Youth and society, 27 (September 1995), 73-92. Frank, Peter and Michael McKenzie. New , Used & Improved - Art for the 80's, New York: Abbeville press, 1987. Fridge. Issue number 001. winter 1996. Futura 2000. "Futura Speaks." Art Crimes. (1996): n. pag. Online. Internet. 28 Sept. 1996. George, Nelson. Buppies, B-Boys, Baps and Bohos, Harper Collins (Harpers perennial), 1994. Glazer, Nathan. "On Subway graffiti in new York." The Public Interest. 54. Winter (1979): 3-11. Hager, Steven. Hip Hop: The Illustrated History of Breakdancing, Rap Music & Graffiti, New York: St. Martin's press, 1982. Haskins, James. Street gangs. New York: Hastings House, 1974. Hebdige, Dick. Subculture: The Meaning of Style. London: Methuen, 1979. Hebdige, Dick. Cut 'n' Mix, London: Routledge, 1990. Henderson, Andre. "Graffiti." Governing, 7 (Aug 1994): 40-44. Howorth, Lisa.N. "Graffiti." Handbook of American Popular culture, ed. M. Thomas Inge. Connecticut: Greenwood, 1989. I Can Fly (ICF). Art Crimes. http://www.graffiti.org/icf (1997): n. pag. Online. Internet. 8 Jan. 1997. Kriegel, Leonard. "Graffiti: Tunnel notes of a New Yorker." American Scholar. 62. (Summer 1993): 431-436. Lachmann, Richard. "Graffiti as Career and Ideology". American Journal of Sociology, 94.2 (Sept 1988), 229-250. "Legal graffiti? The Police Voice Dissent." New York Times. 11 Sept. 1996: 61. Legendre, Caroline. "Street delirium". Psychologie Medicale, 21.6 (May 1989), 727-731. Luna, Jeremiah. "Eradicating the Stain: Graffiti and Advertising in Our Public Spaces". Art Crimes (1997): n.pag. Online. Internet. 20 January 1997. Mailer, Norman. The Faith of Graffiti, New York: Praeger Publishers Inc, 1974. Mailer, Norman. "War of the Oxy Morons". George, November 1996: 35. McRobbie, Angela. ed. Zoot Suits and Second Hand Dresses. An Anthology of Fashion & Music. London: Macmillan, 1989. 156-168. Molotov Cocktail: The Savoir Faire Of The Finest, New York Special Number 3. Phase 2. "Guide to reality II Part". Art Crimes, (1996): n. pag. Online. Internet. 23 November 1996. Phase 2. "Seeing Beyond The Vapors." Rap Pages, 5.1 (Feb 1996), 55. Rap Pages. "Special Graf Pages Spotlight Issue" 5.1 Feb 1996. Rock. A. Party. "Contents Under Pressure." Rap Pages, 5.1 (Feb 1996): 38-47. Roke. Personal interview Conducted Through Electronic Mail. 22 Jan 1997. Rose, Tricia. Black Noise - Rap Music & Black Culture in Contemporary America, U.S.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994. Stanley, Lawrence. A. ed. Rap the Lyrics. London: Penguin Books, 1992. Starr, Roger. "Writers and Rogues." The Public Interest, 70 (1983): 132-134. Style Wars. Produced by Tony Silver & Henry Chalfant; Directed by Tony Silver. 1983. Tomkins, Calvin. "The Time Of His Life." The New Yorker, 8 July 1996: 66. Toop, David. The Rap Attack - African Jive To New York Hip Hop, Pluto Press, 1984. Wagstaff, Sheena. "The Name Gone By." Illustrators Magazine 49. (1997): Digital Jungle. n.pag. Online. Internet. 20 Jan 1997. Walsh, Michael. Graffito, Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1996. Wechsler, Lorraine. Introduction to Encyclopedia of Graffiti, New York: Macmillan, 1974. Writing From The Style Underground - (R)evolutions of Aerosol Linguistics. Italy & New York:Stampa Alternativa in Association with IG Times, 1996. Xylene. "Major Writers's Meeting In New York city In The Year 2000." (1995).