Painting Without Permission: An Ethnographic Study of Hip-Hop Graffiti Culture

JANICE RAHN

Résumé

Cette étude des graffitis hip-hop s'appuie sur des méthodes ethnographiques d'observation et d'entrevue des participants. Les thèmes qui en ressortent ont trait à l'espace public, à la collectivité et au dialogue. La première partie forme le fondement permettant de comprendre comment les individus participants dévient de la culture traditionnelle du graffiti hip-hop ou s'y conforment. La seconde partie souligne en quoi les attitudes et les activités sociales des individus reflètent les anciennes et nouvelles écoles de pensées. Les paroles des membres du graffiti hip-hop s'entrelacent dans le texte. Même si l'allégeance aux graffitis hip-hop traditionnels est variable selon les personnes participantes, celles-ci partagent un sentiment d'appartenance à une collectivité qui ne menace pas leur autonomie. L'auteure tire de son étude de nombreuses conclusions qui ont des conséquences en éducation, notamment le besoin de structures extérieures aux institutions où adolescents et adolescentes pourraient assumer leur éducation, se former et apprendre avec leurs pairs. La culture du graffiti donne à ces jeunes un sentiment de pouvoir dans une société qui, jusqu'à ce qu'ils deviennent des adultes, ne les prend pas au sérieux.

Abstract

This study of hip-hop graffiti employed ethnographnic methods of participant observation and interviewing. The themes that emerged concerned issues of public space, community and dialogue. Part one forms the foundation to understand how individual participants deviate from or conform to traditional hip-hop grafitti culture. Part two outlines how the attitudes and social activities of the participants reflect old and new schools of thought. The voices of hip-hop graffiti members are woven throughout the text. Although participants varied in their allegiance to traditional hip-hop graffiti, they shared a sense of belonging to a community that did not threaten autonomy. Many conclusions were reached as implications for education, mainly the need for structures outside of institutions for adolescents to take ownership over learning, to mentor and learn with peers. Graffiti culture gives adolescents a sense of power in a society that does not take them seriously until they become adults.

A chance discovery of graffiti mural paintings caused me to begin preliminary research into hip-hop graffiti culture. In the fall of 1995 my husband, Michael, and I noticed graffiti on the outside walls of an abandoned sugar refinery called the Redpath Complex beside the Lachine Canal in Montreal's working class district (Fig. 1). We squeezed through a hole in a barbed-wire chainlink fence that enclosed a series of three buildings around a central courtyard and entered the nearest building through a dark damp store room. Windows were broken. It was as quiet as a church except for pigeons scattering and the drip of water echoing in the high-ceilinged room.

We left this large cold room through a brightened doorway at the far end to enter one of the most remarkable art sites in Montreal. The walls of the outside courtyard and inside much of the three buildings were spray painted with images that completely changed my preconceptions of what graffiti could be. The discovery of bright colours in the sunlight, energetically and tightly drawn, was a wonderful experience.

The ruins of the Redpath complex formed a backdrop that contrasted with the riot of colour covering every available surface around the courtyard. The site had the aura of a past civilization or a bleak futuristic one, especially in winter. Within the decaying buildings, cartoon images peeled off damp walls to layer the sense of time and history. Michael and I returned a few times over 1996, to show it to friends and to photograph new pieces as old favourites became covered with new ones. This was an active, living site though we never saw anyone around.

Before this study, graffiti brought to mind sloppily spray-painted slogans that included racist, sexist, quasi-political and pornographic words and images. Graffiti to me was vandalism, no question about it, and its social value negligible. My awareness changed when I saw the murals at the Redpath warehouse.

Part I: Beginning the Research

The focus of this study was on the motivation for self-directed learning and painting illegally in public space. However, I needed to understand

what hip-hop graffiti *was*, before framing an inquiry into *why*. I knew nothing about the subject before I began this study, which gave me an orientation of not taking anything for granted. For over a year I documented and observed graffiti culture in Montreal, read extensively from the World Wide Web (Art Crimes), sub-culture magazines (*Subculture, Twelve Ounce Prophet, Juxtapose, Graphotism*) and books (Castleman, 1982; Chalfant, 1984; Walsh, 1996).

This essay is written in two parts. The first section is a summary of standard traditional New York hip-hop graffiti culture and includes history, definitions of terminology, influences, tools, practice, skill, and respect. This research from secondary sources maintains an aloof stance that describes generalizations in a clear format. It provided the conceptual framework to form research questions, and to understand how the participants conformed to or deviated from a standard subculture. The second part of this essay layers the voices of nine participants to suggest how the complexities of their specific motivations is dependent on contextual experience.

Ethnographic Research Method

This ethnographic study employed Spradley's method of participant observation to contextualize behaviour and content (Spradley 1980). Ethnographers must empathise with their subject in order to question presuppositions and "to discover questions that seek the relationship among entities that are conceptually meaningful to the people under investigation" (p. 32).

Ethnographic research becomes problematic when the social context and subjectivity of the researcher is ignored and individual viewpoints overlooked for the sake of generalizations (Clifford, 1988; Minh-Ha, 1991). Graffiti and resistance against authority is often oversimplified by mass media, which glosses over the complexities of power structures and individual lives. "The problem is how to get closer to the popular masses so as to understand their forms of resistance, where they are to be found among them and how they find expression, and then work on that" (Freire, 1989, p. 28). I used narrative as a method of inquiry into the lives of the participants and their stories were used as phenomenon to form themes and answer research questions (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990).

So much of who we are comes from our interaction with people and how they interpret our words and actions. The purpose of participant observation is to gain an understanding of the conditions under which idiosyncratic

motivations arise. My interest was peaked when I first entered the graffiti community at a vernissage of graffiti-inspired paintings by a group of thirteen "writers" who were organized into a marketing agency. As an arts educator I was delighted to observe adolescent writers share sketchbooks in a non-authoritative method of self-directed learning. The paintings were simply a backdrop to groups of writers eagerly sketching or passing around black books and photos.

It was easy to meet graffiti writers through the network in their small community. All nine participants in this study had some relationship with each other. They were hospitable, inviting me into their homes to share stories, to tour their neighbourhoods, and to observe them paint walls and railway cars. I chose participants of various race, class and gender to offer various perspectives. Copies of all the transcripts were given to the participants and some of these, with permission, were circulated between them. After the initial interviews, I continued a relationship with many of the participants through phone, e-mail and graffiti events, most recently the convention in Montreal in August, 1998, where writers from across Canada and the United States gathered for a day of painting, DJ-ing and breakdancing.

This essay is an introduction to hip-hop graffiti. First it describes *what* the standard culture is and then summarizes the main issues concerning public space and community.

The Structure of Hip-Hop Graffiti Culture

Brief History
Forms of graffiti have been developed as codes of communication in public places by many marginal groups throughout history. When one thinks in general about spaces where graffiti is found, there is a physical resemblance among them. In writing about graffiti Reisner wrote, "The atmosphere is secret, confining, subterranean and conspiratorial...In circumstances like these, a man is likely to assert himself graphically, a silent means of inscription" (1971, p. 26). There are many examples of past cultures who sought out such spaces. The most obvious are cave wall drawings. Later, Christians inscribed the symbols of their secret faith in catacombs to create a power of ritualistic significance. The phenomenon of the rise of Christianity may have been partly motivated by a desire to belong to a secret society that was in quiet revolt against the overpowering Roman

Empire. (Once it became an authorized institution a different story evolved.)

Hobo signs of the "Dirty Thirties" is another example of conspiratorial, multinarrative symbols developed by a fugitive subculture (Dreyfuss, 1972). These secret codes transmitted practical information about where to find food and shelter without being detected by authorities. Thousands of homeless men riding the rails found a solidarity through their need to help each other survive. They inscribed symbols to communicate a simple language and to signify their presence in the world.

The roots of the hip-hop movement trace back to the mid 1970s to the inner cities of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington D.C. It started in low income Black and Hispanic neighbourhoods and eventually spread into middle-class urban and suburban regions. Each city maintains its claim as the originator of hip-hop music. Two acknowledged "fathers" of hip-hop who pioneered DJ techniques and were instrumental in setting the hip-hop movement in motion are Grandmaster Flash (a New York rap group), and Afrika Bambaataa (Washington D.C.). Both still perform and Bambaataa is especially influential in trying to promote the original hip-hop ethics of unity and non-categorization (Alvi, 1997, p. 13). Today there is still an east coast/west coast rivalry, primarily between Los Angeles and New York, that is highlighted in the rap lyrics and some messages on freight-car graffiti. Although there are still regional differences in attitudes, politics and preferences for styles, hip-hop graffiti has become global with New York writers being viewed next to Los Angeles writers on the Web and in fanzines.

Early graffiti writers who grew out of the hip-hop culture are harder to trace due to the lack of a written history and the short life span of the medium; graffiti tends to be cleaned off by the authorities or painted over by rival artists. Many sources (Chalfant, 1984; Castleman, 1982), cited TAKI 183 in New York as the originator of the *tag*. The tag is a writer's name, which is drawn like a calligraphic symbol, usually with a marker or spraypaint (Fig. 2).

In 1971 the *New York Times* ran a story on TAKI who wrote his name everywhere (Castleman). The article prompted a wave of copycats who also adopted a name/number pseudonym (EVA 62, ELSIE 137). Crudely-drawn, magic-marker tags developed into spray-paint versions, and both types began to cover subway trains under illegal conditions. Eventually each

Fig. 2
*Tag in Old Montreal,
1996. I collected photos
of this tag all over the
city.*

tagger developed his or her own formal style. As tag artists became bolder, the ultimate goal was to spray a commuter train from top to bottom, side to side. As the authorities and transit commission cracked down on graffiti, the emphasis shifted from quantity to quality of the tag. The New York transit commission would instantly pull any car with graffiti off the tracks to be buffed (cleaned by a chemical wash). Gradually large-scale works, and later any graffiti, became rare on subway trains and the more accessible freight cars (fr8s) became the target of choice for contemporary graf artists. The practice of writing on freights, along with the emergence of graffiti fanzines, spread trends quickly and efficiently to urban and rural centres across North America (Jaite, 1996). Evidence of this can be seen in the high quality, large scale graffiti found in small Canadian cities such as Kingston, Ontario and even in Mistassini, a Cree community in Northern Quebec. Freights are enjoying more and more popularity because of their nature of travelling across the continent to be seen and photographed by other writers like a travelling exhibition of artists.

Graf writers switched their focus to painting on walls of buildings and tag artists covered *any* available surface. In New York one can see tags like an uninterrupted city-wide wallpaper pattern on moving vans, street lights, bus windows and buildings. The tag is considered the crudest and most prevalent form of graffiti. Most writers begin as taggers and graduate to larger pieces as they grow bolder and acquire technical skills.

The practice began as "tag" in a game sense in New York City where someone would hit a blank wall and others would follow, respect going to those who covered the most ground. Some gangs would mark their turf with tags but the majority were solo writers (Dunitz, 1993). The tag is a territorial mark that evokes a sense of presence. To the inexperienced viewer, the tag may not mean anything, but to someone in the community it is a personal symbol that signifies the interiority, skills and risk of the writer.

Taggers who never produce large pieces are called *scribblers* and *toys* and have little status. In the mid 1980s graffiti writers set standards and mutually acknowledged a level of skills that had to be reached to merit the title of "writer" rather than the inferior "toy" (Farrell, 1997). A toy is a person who attempts graf without skills or the commitment to learn from other writers. A toy has not paid his dues and is not respected. His or her work is *wack*: lacking in skill and obviously inferior. Writers like to distinguish themselves from taggers. One becomes a *writer* when he or she has developed an individual style — in the hip-hop format — and painting skills to the point where the community accepts his or her presence and work. A *crew* is a loose association of graf writers. One writer may belong to any number of crews. Crews either paint together or acknowledge each other by writing their names around the edges of a graffiti piece. A crew is often mislabeled as a "gang:" a group forms a crew to paint, not for violence. Writers may steal paint if they lack the funds but other illegal activities are avoided. Most sources claim that graffiti provides a non-violent alternative to gangs, where young people could satisfy the same need to belong and identify with the lifestyle of a group (Birk, 1997; Castleman, 1982; Chalfant, 1984; Walsh 1996).

The act of graffiti is called *bombing* as in spray-bombing. Large pieces can be done by a single artist or a crew. A *fanzine* is a magazine devoted to a specific phenomenon. Some examples are *Twelve Ounce Prophet* (hip-hop graffiti), *RIG* (for and by window washers) or *MotorBoot* (Detroit music and news).

Influences

A great deal of reference and reverence is given to graffiti *elders* who invented styles and were the first to practice tagging and piecing (a larger form of graffiti art) in a substantial way. Names that come up often are FUTURA 2000, BLADE, ZEPHYR, PHASE 2 (who came up with a bubble letter style), LADY PINK (one of the few women mentioned), and TAKI 183. These writers set standards and styles that continue to be used and expanded upon today. Beyond these first few names, any attempt to cite a concise genealogy of graffiti quickly becomes convoluted; writers would change their names, adopt multiple names and belong to any number of crews.

As styles were adopted and mastered they spread from city to city, ever-evolving and changing depending upon the individual writers. For example, a current trend in graf is to simulate a three-dimensional effect (Fig. 3). No one graf artist is associated with having developed this method. In its infancy in the late 1970s, graf spread and changed slowly, via artists travelling to or from urban centres to pick up these skills. As the movement caught on, these images appeared in movies and rap music videos. Now influences spread quickly through fanzines, on freight trains crossing the country and especially via Web sites. Graffiti's influence on mainstream modern art goes back to Jean Dubuffet and Picasso who were attracted to graffiti and "outsider" art. Graffiti influenced abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock and Cy Twombly. By the 1980s graffiti had become completely co-opted by the contemporary art world through artists such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat (Snodgrass, 1994), who incorporated graffiti references into their own styles. As well, art dealers had graf artists paint canvases and found a market for them.

Recently specialty stores in urban centres such as Montreal and Toronto, that exclusively cater to a hip-hop clientele with clothing, graffiti equipment and fanzines, have opened. Spray nozzles (caps), which in the past were stolen from other aerosol products for their different spray patterns, are now mass-produced and sold. Ad agencies, such as Murad in Toronto and Montreal, now hire graffiti writers to paint large outdoor murals advertising jeans, beer and movies. The World Wide Web holds an ever-increasing amount of graffiti sites that link cities, names and images like a gallery and reference manual. This gives the appearance of an emerging organizational structure for the culture. Graffiti conventions are being announced and writers are easily located, facilitating a network.

The hip-hop world has established an ethical code that resists the move away from their street-culture roots into the realms of popular culture, commercialization and the internet. This code is known as *keeping it real* and generally snubs any writer who appears to have *sold out*. This accusation might be used to criticize graf that is made for commercial reasons. There seems to be a great deal of posturing

Fig. 3
DISKE *is highly revered within the Montreal graffiti community for his skills in writing his name with a 3-D effect.*

Fig. 4 (right)
Wall painted
collaboratively by writers
at the graffiti convention
in Montreal, 1997,
on Mount Royale at
St Laurent.

Fig. 5
a. (below left) Animé
character (MIST),
Redpath warehouse,
Montreal, 1996

b. (below right) Animé
character (anonymous),
Redpath warehouse,
Montreal, 1996

within the community concerning the preservation of hip-hop ideals. For example, if a writer does not perform illegally, he or she may be criticized for not keeping it real. Some writers point out that Web sites and fanzines made the culture too easy to discover. They want to maintain hip-hop as a street culture where beginners have to learn about tools, techniques, and styles in the streets. However, other writers consider anything that extended appreciation of their art around the world to be great.

Formal Aspects of Graffiti

Tag artists set the example of using letters in an infinite variety of signature styles. The earliest paint renderings involved a simple colour composition and were easy to decipher. Much of current graffiti can be unreadable to the

untrained eye and the colour and formal handling of the paint is sometimes dazzling (Fig. 4). The majority of graf artists work exclusively with their tag name and constantly rework the format and style of the lettering.

Some writers include images within the graffiti piece. A few artists make attempts at photo-realistic rendering but most incorporate a distinct cartoon style. Vaughn Bode (pronounced "bo-day"), an underground comic artist, influenced many graf writers with his organic drawing and lettering style of thick 3-D fonts that overlapped and crowded into each other. Bode characters, ranging from lizards to military characters, show up regularly in the pages of any graf fanzines.

Japanese Animé is another type of image seen more and more in contemporary graffiti. This is a comic and animated movie style of drawing that originated in Japan. One can find it in North American specialty stores (comic and science fiction shops) and even in current children's cartoons such as Sailor Moon. A typical animé style includes huge childlike eyes, teeth that are solid white with a single line separating the upper and lower rows and a small up-turned nose (Fig. 5). It can also be seen in depictions of technology. Animé style tends to be smooth, bubble-like, almost organic, with a few mechanical details. These formal similarities with the graffiti calligraphy aesthetic could account for its popularity with writers.

Tools and Technique

There is a marked difference between murals painted in the late 1970s to the late 1980s and the mid 1990s. Not only have artists' skills improved dramatically, but the tools have been adapted and improved, enabling far superior technique when compared to earlier work (Art Crimes, 1995, http://www.graffiti.org/index/glossary.html). Although some occasionally use spray paint, taggers generally draw with markers of all types. Many construct their own markers or prefer those they can modify. The most popular markers with taggers are the Uni-wide and the Mini-wide, which range from 1-1/2 to 2 inches in width and are refillable. Homemade markers are made from shoe polish bottles with rag tips. Inks are sometimes made from chemically-dissolved carbon paper. Inks that are the most durable, opaque and permanent are prized and sought after.

Krylon spray paint tends to be the brand used most frequently by writers. They are plentiful, have the broadest colour selection and are moderately priced. Krylon logos and cartoon cans even appear in some murals (Fig. 6). Experienced writers talk about preferring one brand over another in terms of consistency and colour range. Two discontinued Krylon colours, Icy Grape and Jungle Green, are highly sought after.

Many interviews (Art Crimes, 1995, http://www.graffiti.org/index/talk.html), with early writers on the net spoke of *racking* or *boosting* spray cans. This means shoplifting to acquire materials. One technique involved a writer distracting a sales clerk while another filled loose pants or a coat with spray cans. Many writers said they liked to exchange artwork for spray-paint, such as in commissions for murals. Writers can go through twenty to forty or more cans for a single mural.

The variety of textures and lines in a large piece comes from altering the spray tips in various ways: cutting into the nozzle in different ways to produce different spray shapes; stealing nozzles from other spray products; or buying lines of *fat caps* and other nozzles sold in graffiti magazines. *Fat* or *skinny caps* (called *stock* caps) are the spray nozzles that come with a standard paint can, which produce only one style of spray and tend to drip. Because of this the stock caps are called *sucker caps* or *sucker tips* because only a "sucker" would use them. Writers would take the caps from other aerosol products such as bug repellent, disinfectant and spray glue and install them on the paint
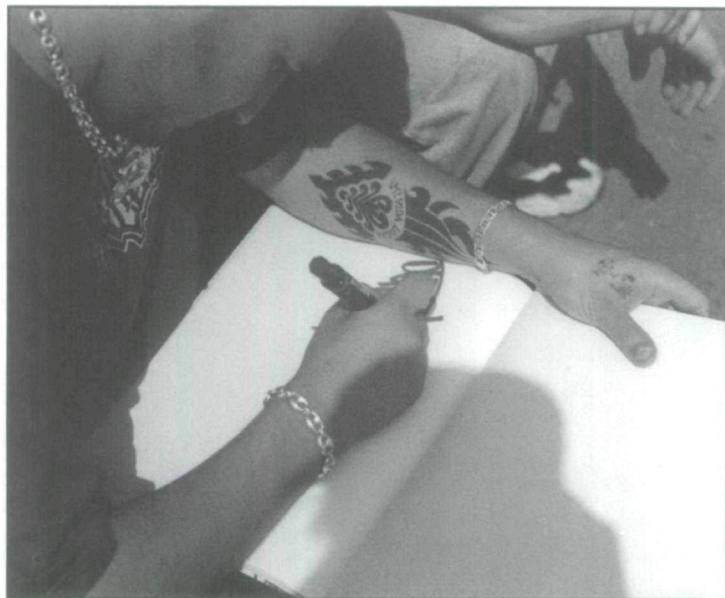
Fig. 6
Drawing of a spray can by DAES, 1997.

Fig. 7 (top)
*Writer at graffiti
convention in Montreal
in 1998, writing his
tag in another writer's
black book.*

Fig. 8 (right)
*SEAZ painting a throw-
up in an alley one bock
east of St Laurent and
one block south of Jean-
Talon, spring 1997.*

The range of Krylon colours are fairly exten-
sive and can be further mixed between cans by
attaching a slender plastic pipe between the
nozzles of two cans to spray into each other.
Only rank amateurs (toys) would use the stock
tip of a spray can (the one it comes with).
Some tips will reduce the amount of paint
emitted, for shading and soft edges. The large
choice of spray patterns allows writers to
achieve an airbrush quality with their work.

Practice
The actual choice of location varies from artist
to artist. Many choose illegal locations from
which they can escape quickly through various
routes. Another priority for the location is high
visibility to the viewing public. The more vis-
ible the piece, the more respect the writer gains
for the risk taken. Nobody wants to be caught
and writers will go to great extremes to escape
from the authorities (Castleman, 1982, p. 165).
Some artists paint rough-ins (the shading and
outlines) at night and return in the very early
dawn when there is enough visibility to finish
details, but few police on patrol.

Each style of mural requires a different
approach. All styles, except a monochromatic
piece, use layers of colour. Writers often work
back and forth between two colours to achieve
the quality of line and form desired. All hip-hop
writers look down upon the use of stencils,
rulers or any other device that might aid the
artist, except for the phat.caps.

Writers keep a black book to sketch ideas
for pieces and to have other writers sign or
sketch their tags (Fig. 7). At gatherings, writers
bring their black books to increase their contacts
with other writers and to show off their skills.
Some writers work from a sketch in their hand
when painting an outdoor piece while others
strictly work from a mental image. Those who
work from their head would still keep a black
book in order to try out different image combi-
nations and approaches. Respect is given to
those who don't need to work from sketches.
Writers are expected to use and develop a free-
handed painting style. If a piece must be
measured in any way, writers tend to use what
is available such as the can itself (12″) or their
outstretched arms. It is remarkable how writers
can intuitively transfer, with accurate dimensions,
a small sketch to fit a large wall (Noah, 1997).

A *throw-up* is a spray-painted work of
graffiti, using lettering only, in one or two
colours. The term is literal, from the ability to
"throw them up" on a wall quickly. A typical

cans allowing for a greater range of "brush"
styles and sizes. The *fan* (spray pattern) is mea-
sured and determined by fingers. A five-finger
fan is larger than the smallest one-finger fan.
Now a variety of caps (called "phat.caps") are
manufactured and sold in bulk at graf shops.

throw-up uses big lettering styles and is simple and quick. If two colours are painted, the background is usually white or silver. The throw-up letters tend to be two or three feet high (Fig. 8). Throw-ups emerged as a quick way to cover large areas (a rival's mural) and rail cars. Many writers consider throw-ups as being too close to tagging and tend to look down on them.

A *large piece* is the standard of hip-hop graffiti, ranging from at least six feet long and four feet high. Large pieces take hours to days, throw-ups take minutes, and tags take seconds. Murals, large pieces, and piecing all describe large multicoloured complex letter combinations that sometimes include cartoon images or portraits (Fig. 9). Some are large enough to be started with ladders, working from the top down. Some large pieces include cartoon images carrying handguns or engaged in the violence often seen in popular culture imagery.

Wildstyle is an extremely complex configuration of lettering resembling Celtic interlace. It is complicated to the point of being indecipherable to the untrained eye. Wildstyle graf resembles interlocking, 3-D mazes with arrows to suggest movement (Fig. 10). Wildstyle is usually only attempted by an accomplished, confident writer for the skill involved is entirely free-hand and very intricate. For example, DONDI claims, "When I write for other writers I use wildstyle, and when I write for the public I use straight letters" (Chalfant, 1984, p. 70).

A writer's focus is on the public exposure and proliferation of their work. *Getting it up* and *getting it out there* are the terms they use to describe this desire. For a community that prizes getting their work into the public eye, the attraction of painting trains is obvious. Painting a commuter train allows one's work to be viewed by an entire city. Freight trains can be seen across the continent. Imagine waiting impatiently at a remote rail crossing when suddenly a large piece passes by. Writers think of the moment when their work takes someone by surprise (TIMER). Writers are careful not to write over the information panels located at the side of every freight car. If the panels are left alone the piece is more likely to be untouched by the rail inspectors (SEAZ).

Skills and Respect
Most writers talk about skills and techniques as a fundamental basis of hip-hop graffiti. A writer who attempts a large piece without the necessary skills will be criticised for polluting the environment and giving hip-hop a bad

reputation. Respect is a word that often comes up. Respect is attained and maintained by honing skills and keeping a high profile by continually getting it up. *Dis* is short for disrespect. A writer *disses* by criticizing or *crossing out* (paint over or disfigure) a piece. A writer is either respected or dissed, based on the large pieces that they have painted; the large piece is the measurement of all writers. If this happens enough times the writer will most likely quit (TIMER). Therefore writers practice in their black books before they consider attempting a large piece.

A writer can lose respect and be dissed for a variety of infractions: selling work or avoiding illegal painting in favour of legal walls,

Fig. 9 (top)
TIMER *shows his piece to Michael Campbell in the Canal Complex, St Henri, Montreal, 1997.*

Fig. 10 (bottom)
An example of "Wildstyle," Redpath warehouse courtyard, spring 1996.

continually crossing out other writers' work with no cause, overtly seeking media attention, and informing on fellow writers to the police. Other ways to lose favour include *biting* (Art Crimes, 1995, glossary) — a writer who copies another's style is biting that style.

Respect is given to previous generations of writers for paying their dues. However, respect can be lost if older writers are perceived to be selling out by commercializing their work or opening a store. The illegal aspect of graffiti gains even more respect as graffiti becomes increasingly commercialized by mainstream culture.

There exists a paradox concerning fame among writers. They desire the notoriety of having their name painted everywhere and wish to receive the recognition for it, but they cannot appear to want this recognition too badly. If a writer is discreet about any media attention, despite the amount, they will retain their standing. Individuals who are perceived to be obsessed with being interviewed and photographed or claim to speak for the graf community at large will eventually be dissed and crossed out.

Writers who are seen as being focused and committed to piecing and acquiring skills while downplaying their fame, are held in the highest esteem. The goal is to be famous within the hip-hop culture and not necessarily outside of it. This is part of keeping it real. This ambiguous phrase has multiple meanings and could be discussed at great length. A simple interpretation is that hip-hop began as a street culture and writers should not forget that. For some hip-hop adherents, keeping it real is a restrictive ethic that reinforces the status quo and disregards innovation.

Language

Various terms are used within hip-hop to describe graf exclusively. A *burner* is an exceptional piece. If a writer beat a competitor with his or her work they *burn* the competition. If the graf is highly regarded it is *dope, fresh* or *the shit*, as in "That throw-up is the shit! It's so amazing!" (DAES).

Some positive hip-hop adjectives include *crazy* (meaning "really" as in "crazy big") and *mad* (quantity, as in "mad graf"). To *front* is to hassle or provoke a fight with a competitor. Graf artists can have a *battle* where each writer fronts the other with painting techniques, although fronting can also refer to violence. If a writer paints or tags a surface they *hit* it. An area that is covered with a large quantity of tags or pieces has been *hit up*. If a writer is extremely prolific they *kill* (Art Crimes, glossary).
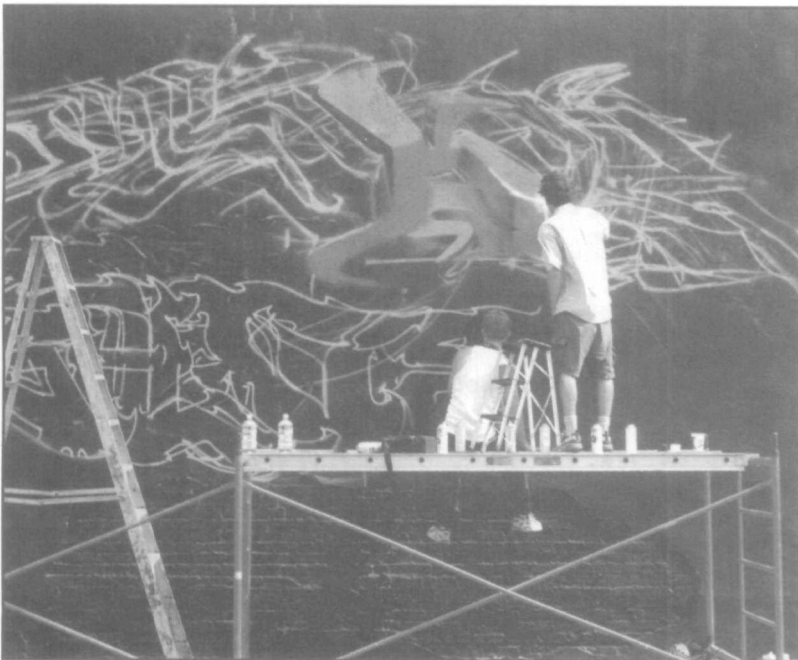
Members of the hip-hop community treat language in the same manner that graf writers adapt the alphabet. English is distorted, adapted, and blurred with other languages to the point that it begins to sound like a code or a new dialect that identifies different schools of thought.

Two terms that are used extensively within hip-hop are *old school* and *new school*. Old school refers to the historical New York hip-hop tradition with no definitive date. An old school graf style may refer to a lettering style from 1971 or 1987. Similar terms for this are *back in the day, old days* and *old style*. Some writers are more ritualistic in their adherence to the old styles and codes of the New York tradition, while others pride themselves on breaking boundaries by being innovative in their *new school* approach to hip-hop. Another term for new school is *new style* (Fig. 11).

Old School

Anyone who is really into traditional hip-hop adheres to the rules down to the way they tie their running shoes. I asked Robert Segovia, a devoted hip-hop breakdancer from 1981 to 1986, what he remembered about shoe laces. He listed the most important things, like fat laces in a variety of colours and his obsessive precision to tie them perfectly (Fig. 12).

Fig. 11
DISKE, graffiti convention, Montreal, 1998

After you laced the pattern, you would cut the extra lace, re-tape or burn the ends and tuck them away somewhere on the shoe so you had a clean look. I remember three patterns of tying the laces.

1. The first pattern is classic military style in straight-across bands. The idea is to have perfect widths, even watching where the lace pokes out of the hole so the laces are even. As well, one watches that the laces overlap slightly — consistently.

2. The second pattern is a V-pattern. The first line at the toe is horizontal, and then all bands make a repeating V pattern...When you do the other shoe, you must remember to reflect or overlap the opposite side so that the two shoes, when placed beside one another, have symmetry. If the outer edge on the right shoe has top overlap, then the outer edge on the left shoe must also have top overlap. Symmetry is very important.

3. The third pattern I remember was the basket weave. This is done by starting the shoe as straight bands, but then taking a second lace and basket weaving a pattern into the shoe. So this style takes four laces, but one can pick complimentary colours, etc. As well, the same rules apply: use symmetry, no loose laces hanging, perfect spacing, etc. Of course after breakin' [breakdancing] you had to fix them all over [e-mail, 1998].

This obsession for order and control is one example of how traditional hip-hop culture is a community defined by ritualistic codes of behaviour, dress, and language. Another paradox of the hip-hop community is this desire for conformity when graffiti is known for its resistance against systems of authority.

This summation of a standard culture caused me to question how idiosyncratic were the motivations of individual writers, or to what degree was their involvement driven by a need to belong to a community and to feel part of a tradition? How were they as individuals acculturated into this community? Can an understanding of how adolescents learn outside of schools lead to more self-directed learning within school systems? Does autonomy and the mastering of technical and networking skills motivate and build self-esteem in adolescents? What are the investigative processes that go on in the conception and implementation of graffiti mural painting?

Part II: The Interviews
The main themes that arose from these questions in the interviews were old and new school
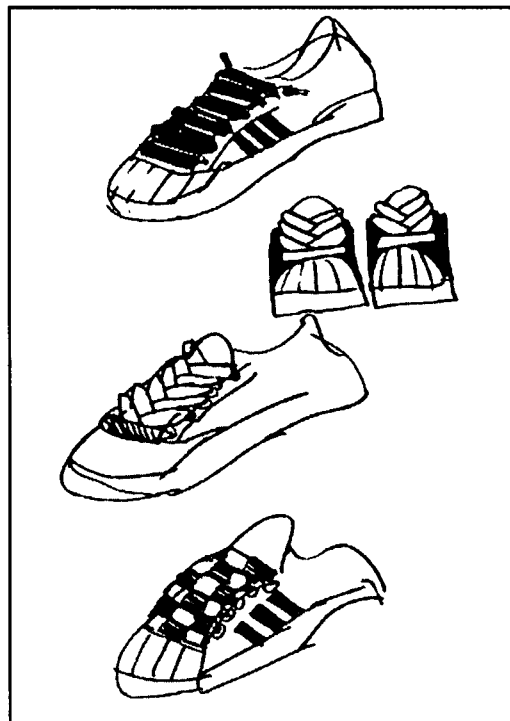

Fig. 12
Lace-tying diagram sent to me by e-mail. (Rob Segovia, 1997)

attitudes towards public space and community. "Community space" (Pocius, 1991), best describes the interchange between community, discussions of specific spaces, and the issues surrounding the illegal use of public space. The following section layers the voices of individual writers who participated in this study. They will be referred to as "participants" or by their tag names.

Community Space: Old and New School Motivations
Early on in the interviews it became clear that DSTRBO, GENE, EVOKE, SINGE and SHANA were considered new school while SEAZ and FLOW followed old school traditional hip-hop standards. DSTRBO was the first to make this distinction.

Like Ottawa is a new school graffiti place. Montreal is an old school graffiti place. When SEAZ says "all those Ottawa boys are arsty," that's what he's talking about. He's saying that they're new school...FLOW...doesn't consider himself an artist. He's textbook old school graffiti. He cares about quantity not quality. And in the same way so does SEAZ. The whole graffiti community in Montreal sort of came out of SEAZ and FLOW...they were so everywhere...but I was an artist first and then I got into graffiti. It's the other way around for

them...With the new school graffiti there's so much room to move. There is so much innovation. It becomes part of the learning experience to break those boundaries, to move outside of it.

GENE, DSTRBO and EVOKE were acculturated into graffiti as a street culture in Ottawa through GOFISH, who was working on a campaign called PUZZLE: "about a hundred puzzle pieces [referring to masterpieces] around the city all numbered." EVOKE, who was six years younger, noticed the PUZZLE campaign as he skateboarded around the city. "I would imitate. I think everyone goes through a period of imitation. Yeah, just seeing the stuff around the city." He began to "hang out" with GOFISH and to mentor him and GENE. EVOKE continued, "Graffiti is a bizarre natural progression from being a skateboarder."

When I asked GENE if his group adopted their own codes within the graffiti community, he answered, "I think so because myself and DSTRBO are strictly image-based...We are not a crew. We don't really care for tags or the whole macho thing about dissing other crews. Our only concern is to make some kind of artistic contribution to the whole context of graf art." New school writers all went to Canterbury, a fine arts high school in Ottawa. GENE, went on to Concordia University to receive a fine arts degree and his friends followed him to Montreal. GENE, was influential in bringing attitudes learned at university into his graffiti community. New school writers enjoyed the rush of painting illegally, but their main motivation was to paint outdoors on walls. They interchanged the term *graffiti* with *mural art*, for they considered what they did as art whether it was illegal or not.

New school talked about being motivated to change their neighbourhood and painted mainly in the area where they lived and frequented. DSTRBO said it gave him a "rush" to look up when he walked down St Laurent Blvd to see a new piece on a rooftop. DSTRBO said, "People find graffiti offensive but I find concrete grey buildings offensive, like we're living in a world where the people with the least amount of imagination make the rules. It's not like I am trying to be some kind of art revolutionary at all. I just like to see my art up in my neighbourhood. I get a rush out of painting outdoors at night and in public." They perceived public space as an alternative to galleries to exhibit their work and to share with peers. They wanted to show in

places accessible to their community, which could also mean cafes and restaurants.

New school writers came from middle-class homes but they expressed a feeling of alienation from their urban environment as a motivation for trying to change it. GENE, said, "it was all about ritualistic transgression and community." This harkens back to a holistic, perhaps ideal image of social harmony where art is intertwined with the beliefs and rituals of a communal society, which is very different from the present-day reality of an impersonal urban culture (Walsh, 1996). New school participants were attracted by the process of change, of making a space hospitable for intersubjective experience. When GENE collaboratively painted the concrete overpass on St Marguerite, west of St Henri metro, he spoke of "bringing a dead space to life." DSTRBO said, "The whole point of PUZZLE was collaboration, making one piece with two people, seeing that dynamic would produce something neither of us would have produced on our own. Beside the fact we were doing it publicly, just artistically, it was an experiment for me."

GENE and DSTRBO started a *peinture en direct* troupe (direct painting troupe) called SPILL. They expanded to five people to paint in collaboration with bands or at parties. The first time they performed was at the Montreal Jazz Festival (1995) in collaboration with four dancers who were doing improvisational contact dance. Afterwards the painting was cut up and given to the audience. The object was not as important as the concept of collaborative performance and audience participation. Sometimes the group painted for a cause under the directorship of Open City Productions, a government funded agency that organized community-based workshops and activities. For example they held the first International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (21 March 1997) where a total of sixteen graffiti writers, accompanied by breakdancers and DJs, painted a total of eleven murals in eight subway stations.

SINGE was a dance student at Concordia University who became motivated to learn about graffiti after seeing SPILL perform. She began to practise her tag and to use breakdancing, collaboration and audience participation in her dance performances. SINGE documented favourite pieces within her neighbourhood to offset her disappointment when they became covered by less favoured ones. She told me stories of changes over the past two

years since she moved there and of the sense of belonging created by this awareness of her surroundings. SHANA, who came from a small town in Ontario to study art at Concordia University, was also attracted to the new school group. She painted in public "to just make the city more of my own place."

EVOKE expressed his attraction to the dynamics of changing public space and the affective significance of objects and physical space at graffiti sites. "You can wander around in them and see where they [former employees] last left a coffee cup on the table. It's nice to be able to work around that." Like an archaeologist, he experienced a wonderful sense of the material world in abandoned warehouses and artifacts of past lives. EVOKE enjoyed the freedom of looking for a site and the inspiration it gave him to work. He was aware of other public artists. "Whenever you alter your environment and you're being creative enough...Have you heard of Andy Goldsworthy? I like that guy a lot. I like also graffiti that is made accidentally like in the subways there are big skid marks made by cars colliding. Those lines are very spontaneous."

Whenever one discusses graffiti as an urban expression and an artistic act to change public space, it becomes an argument concerning different aesthetic biases. Walls for most people are symbolic boundaries for property and its values. Graffiti can symbolize crime against property. The majority's aesthetics associate white walls with middle-class values concerning property, job security, and respect for authority. Graffiti writers do not share this ideal. When I asked ACE if he felt he was making a contribution to the urban environment he answered,

> To do graf I always pick places that I know are not going to annoy people. There was this high school I used to go to. It was a big white building. Very big white building with nothing on it. Going to school was so sad. We started tagging and graffitiing and people were going, "that's really nice." We used to come after school and take pictures and stuff. There's really something about a building that's almost dead and you give it life. And makes it enjoyable to watch instead of watching this big brick wall with nothing on it. A white wall to me is like a sheet of paper. I see a big white wall and I get inspired. It's not really to make the place mine but it's more of sharing my work with the place.

ACE's aesthetic was not appreciated by everyone, however, and the wall was soon whitewashed.
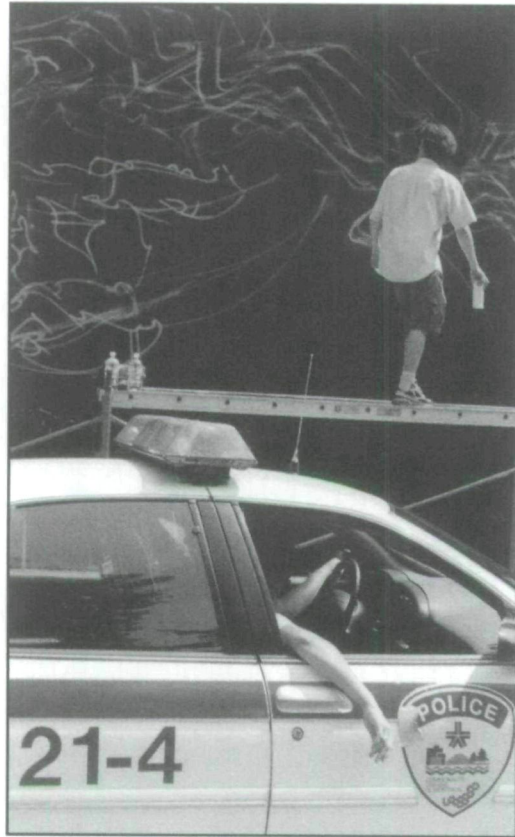
Resistance

New school writers became poetic when they described their motivations while the old school seemed to be more concerned about the thrill of being subversive and the response of peers. SEAZ was my chief informant from old school graffiti culture in Montreal, who modelled himself after traditional New York hip-hop, as outlined in the first half of this article. He came from La Salle, a working class suburb west of Montreal. He talked with anger about his father who was an abusive alcoholic. The "high" or "euphoria" that drove SEAZ to continue painting into his adult life (despite being fined after a year of prolonged, inconvenient court hearings) came from a sense of empowerment at transgressing laws and institutions of power. He identified himself as a vandal, not an artist. SEAZ wrote in his black book,

> It's time we take back what is ours to belong with, in the city. Public property belonging to the city "public" meaning a part of it belongs to me...after all this isn't communist Russia or China nor is this Berlin. Big Brother can't always watch over me even he has to sleep sometimes...

The paradox and irony within the power and authority of law is that without it, there would be no taboo or norm to transgress (Foucault, 1977). In *Getting Up, Subway Graffiti in New York*, Castleman devoted three chapters to the politics of graffiti and the repercussions of the mayor of New York city's anti-graffiti program. The amount of graffiti kept rising along with the costs to clean it up. "In 1970 the MTA's (Metropolitan Transit Authority) graffiti-cleaning costs were estimated to be $300,000; 1971, $600,000; in 1972, $1.3 million and in 1973, $2.7 million, with 'unsatisfactory results'." (Castleman, 1982, p. 149) The more the authorities put up fences, brought in police dogs and graffiti squads, the more the graffiti writers resisted and enjoyed showing how they could outsmart the system.

Does the judicial system encourage that which it sets out to combat? Foucault (1977) called it a closed circuit, an "ensemble" (police, the prison and the delinquent), which supports itself. He argued how the system actually profited from exploiting illegalities such as prostitution, arms trafficking, and the illegal sale of alcohol in prohibition countries. The way politicians profit from graffiti is to use it as a platform to look actively involved in controlling crime. An article in the *Press*

Fig. 13
Police patrolling the graffiti convention, Montreal, 1998.

Republican reports, "former President Jimmy Carter rolls some paint over a mural at an abandoned dwelling...Splashing messy globs of paint on graffiti-scarred walls...helped polish gritty city streets." (Fournier, 1997)

SEAZ said bitterly, "I attack what they claim is so precious and ruin their little glass city which they (politicians) have erected some-how...We've proven that they can find that money to spend (cleaning graffiti); why not spend it on those who need it? At the conventions we had, we gave the money to poor people."

The old school ethic of keeping it real means to value illegal painting as an act of rebellion against institution of power. This game of main-taining resistance is a concrete example of Foucault's idea about the closed circuit ensem-ble. If the resistance was gone who would there be to argue with? SEAZ said, "The people who are against it are your driving force and once people aren't against it then it gets lost. There's no more attention drawn to it." He saw himself as representing the small man against "the sys-tem." More than once he referred to Tianamen square and how young people were always the ones to stand up for freedom against "Big Brother." The solidarity of the marginalized

group gave the individual a sense of personal power and freedom against the authority of power structures.

SINGE said she got a rush out of tagging places like McDonald's, the university and supermalls because she felt helpless against their aggression into her environment and peo-ples' values. Foucault argued "that it is not crime that alienates an individual from society, but that crime is itself due rather to the fact that one is in society as an alien" (1977, p. 276). This is usually the more traditional justification for hip-hop, resisting judicial taboos, which can be traced back to its origins in poverty.

Postmodern critiques of capitalism have opened up the potential for social criticism and a new awareness of our environment. One argu-ment in defense of graffiti is that advertising is compliant with dominant power structures: public space is controlled by those who have the money to buy it (Fig. 14). In a democracy how can society condemn those who have no monetary means to claim their own space and to work towards changing their environment?

A strong socialist sentiment of putting peo-ple before systems came through in all the interviews. Many of the participants began tag-ging in their adolescence when they were looking to change their identity and to associ-ate themselves with a community's lifestyle of their choice. SEAZ began for the sheer pleasure of making his mark but as he became accultur-ated into the community he learned to reflect and to articulate critical concerns. The dialogue surrounding graffiti caused the participants to become politicized about the sharing of public space. Under *art* in the Oxford Dictionary one finds "the art of politics, the art of criticism." Thucydides, the Greek historian of the fifth century B.C., defined *politics* as "activity with other people at every level, from the family, to the neighbourhood, to the broader community, to the city-state" (Shorris, 1997). The essence of education is to empower people to have con-trol over their lives and to affect change within and beyond their community. All of the par-ticipants talked about how graffiti opened doors for them through the people they met and made them aware of issues larger than themselves. Many began out of an adolescent attraction to the thrill of the experiences but then became serious enough to learn what hip-hop was all about. Their desire to communicate and work with peers caused them to pick up skills and knowledge because of their relevance to every-day life.

Courting the Mainstream: Graffiti and Modern Art

In contemporary urban culture many walls are public property where different groups compete for space. Some look like a bricolage of posters, half torn and layered over time to resemble a Schwitter's collage. Many artists look at the banality of everyday life and take to the streets for their inspiration. Rauschenburg gave discarded objects new life in his early assemblages and then began using mass-produced images that surround one daily in media and advertising. Pop art is another reference that could be used to categorize graffiti within the art world. Like pop art, graffiti is influenced by the graphic language and style of advertising. The fact that graffiti murals resemble the style of advertising and contain recycled images from popular culture shows that writers do not merely consume, but synthesize and translate their environment into another medium and context. New school writers had a strong sense of identity and were critically aware of how youth were targeted as a group to buy into consumer culture. GENE graduated from university with a degree in fine art. He disregarded issues of high and low art, mixing images from art history, comics, posters or anything that interested him from his environment as raw material for his paintings.

When I asked GENE what he thought about the criticism that hip-hop graffiti resembled advertising, he was quick to give a well thought out answer.

I think it is indicative of any folk art that comes out of culture…based on the other visual codes we see around us. When we talk about graffiti in public space, one of the things we're being presented beside is advertising which have highly stylized and graphic sensibilities in it. Just as the tradition of mural art have all contributed to the way graffiti presents itself. It's hard to pinpoint where it comes from. But as far as stylized, yeah maybe it is stylized. It is definitely rooted in where it comes from and is not trying to candy-coat scrawls.

ACE said, "Graffiti is like taking simple words and making it into art. You could write anything down the normal way but if you tag it, you do it as graffiti, it's almost like there is new meaning to it. The word has more power. It's being direct and straightforward. Graffiti is like inventing your own letters — the way to personalize your own letters. It's almost like your handwriting." EVOKE said the meaning of words in graffiti was "obliterating any meaning at all, like what the word means…just using it as a reference point, seeing how much you can do with that set." The "set" of letters provides a structure like the forms of musical notation that one masters and then plays with. There is a sense of being part of a tradition that one can learn and then improvise upon. Anyone serious enough to be really involved knows the names of those who have established different styles and works steadily to build upon them.

Hip-hop graffiti can be compared to jazz or folk music, which also plays with the tension between structural order and intuitional improvisation. There is awareness of the standards set by others who have gone on before and the continuity in evolving these. Those really into the culture of hip-hop graffiti honestly acknowledge those who have developed styles and repertoire, and share a work ethic to develop the technical ability to articulate and possibly go beyond existing standards. When a writer feels secure in learning the various styles from past performers, he/she can abandon it to free play in the moment. TIMER said free play was popular right now in hip-hop graffiti. It means you do all your drawing and practising at home so that painting in public can move towards improvisation in the single performance. The letters and styles of past writers provide the structure that, when mastered, disappears into a wild style of indecipherable forms. Now that hip-hop has become popular and derivative, there is often a lack of knowledge about where hip-hop originated. Hip-hop graffiti is still largely by and for its own community, but interaction with the environment brings in new influences that causes it to continually evolve.

Keeping It "Real"
The topic of graffiti being co-opted by advertising came up in every interview. Younger members were highly motivated by the subversive quality of hip-hop graffiti and wanted to maintain its marginal status. DAES, an eighteen-year-old writer, still in high school and living with parents in Canmore, Alberta, argued against hip-hop graffiti becoming commercialized.

DAES: *It's like right now, it's real, it's authentic. But if it starts going down that direction then it'll sort of turn into this generic thing you know.*

Janice: *Maybe what I am doing will actually contribute to that. It's like on one hand seaz likes to have people legitimize what he's doing but as soon as it is legitimized...*

D: *It ruins it sort of.*

J: *But I can't see it being totally legitimized because...*

D: *I hope it never does. I hope it's always against the law, because that just breeds this edge you know to the writers.*

J: *It's like the one thing that can't be co-opted?*

D: *Exactly! Yeah! For sure. Like it's against the law so it adds this flavour to it you know. This is great. I love this. I love talking about this.*

Older writers, like TIMER, accepted hip-hop becoming mainstream as a natural course of events that they were willing to cash in on to make an honest living while staying in the culture by continuing to paint illegally. I was curious to talk to TIMER about this since he was being criticized by others for having sold out. He became very scornful of younger writers who dissed him for not keeping it real. TIMER responded, "That's stupid! They're all buying this stuff from TV. They're kids who still have a curfew and living at their parents' house and their parents are paying for everything and its like, keeping it real! Yeah what's real man...They have adolescence crises, they are focusing on hip-hop and all the culture of it."

Young writers like DAES who were passionate about discovering "this great art form," resented people like TIMER for standardizing hip-hop images on t-shirts and selling them at Cellblock (a store specializing in hip-hop and graffiti products). Old school members like SEAZ and FLOW criticized this store because they wanted to keep graffiti as it was, when one had to be part of street culture to access information. Now anyone can walk into Cellblock to buy different spray caps, magazines, videos and hip-hop clothes. Cellblock is selling a lifestyle to young people and in the process losing hip-hop graffiti's marginal status. However, SEAZ was benefiting from hip-hop's popularity for he earned his living working for his friend's hip-hop clothing manufacturing business.

It is typical for older writers to straddle both the commercial and illegal worlds of hip-hop. GENE, DSTRBO and GOFISH now form a group called HEAVYWEIGHT that contracts mural painting through the Stone Away Gallery in Montreal. SEAZ and his crew have become influenced by this group, forming their own commercial mural company called URBAN EXPRESSION. Recently they painted a large mural of a western scene on Duluth Street in Montreal, with a phone number beneath to advertise their services. However, both groups still take pride in their illegal activities. They have to make a living but still want to keep it real. EVOKE said, "when pieces are legal they don't have that same feel anymore. That's what I'm afraid of. I don't want to lose that feel of

graffiti on walls." All of the participants, when questioned about the significance of the illegal act of writing, tried to express the illusive *feel* of the "real" experience. Like any marginal group, graffiti is distinquished by it's resistance to the norm of social consciousness and social order. It is built into the culture to resist complete assimilation by cultivating a disdain for the trivialization of commercialization.

All the participants spoke of their respect for the arena of public space and for those who took it seriously. Both old and new school enjoyed painting illegally in a public space. This gave the work a performative — "I was here" — resonance that was often felt only by those who participated; the tension and euphoria felt while painting was communicated to peers who had similar experiences. GENE said, "they (writers) know what that means...to produce on the spot under pressure." Peers can re-create and share the significance of the action while an outsider would only see the end product.

Implications for Education
Hip-hop graffiti is not an object that can be clearly defined and catalogued, for it is difficult to describe something so wrapped up in the experience of the temporal environment and driven by individual motivation. Hip-hop graffiti is more about the action of performance and the potential to affect change in one's personal evolution and environment than the finished product. The artist Joseph Beuys believed in public redemption for both the artist and audience who participated in the performance of art. I found this faith in the possibilities for personal change through active participation to be at the core of graffiti culture. SEAZ said it gave them something to *live* for, "it gave content to their lives." DSTRBO echoed, "My greatest fear is to become caught in some nine-to-five job that doesn't do anything but put my brain through a blender."

Institutions reward mainly those who follow the rules and the status quo. Students who become unmotivated by a grading system or to please a teacher they don't respect often become labelled in some way as deviants. This leaves little room for students to find a constructive outlet for rebellion and the legitimate questioning of authority. There are not enough structures outside of institutions for adolescents to actively learn and to network within a community of peers (Fig. 15). Hip-hop graffiti provides a structure of self-directed learning where members feel in control and can achieve

a sense of accomplishment. Writers varied in their allegiance to traditional hip-hop graffiti culture but all saw it as something larger than themselves to which they could make a contribution. The graffiti community provides a support system of peers, mentors and tradition without threatening one's autonomy. DSTRBO said, "Graffiti is the most DIY (do it yourself) kind of art I can do. That could be what every graffiti artist has in common...individual drive to do something on your own, under your own power."
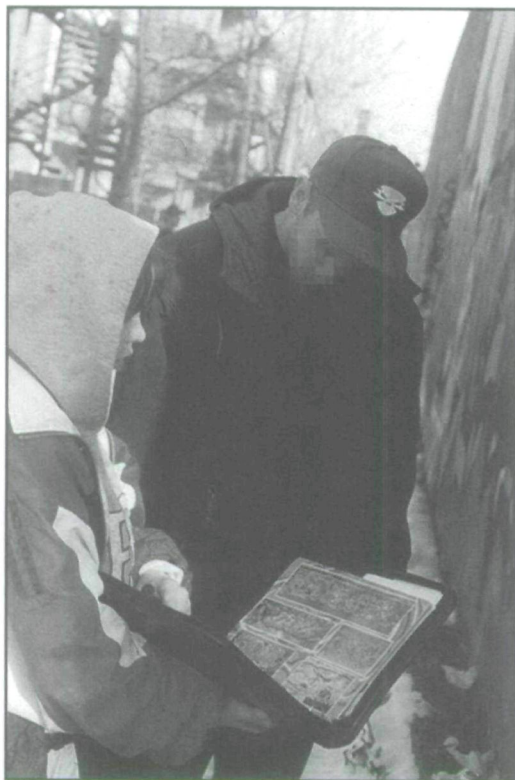
The strongest message that came out of this study is the longing for a sense of community, identification and belonging among young people, yet a need for autonomy. The paradox is that hip-hop graffiti creates a common ground of comics, music and codes of behaviour, but also allows for individual differences and acceptance of marginal status. There seems to be a need, within a generation of fragmented subcultures, for a common culture, but also for something unique and authentic that has not been co-opted by the fashion industry, the mainstream with which they do not identify.

In hip-hop graffiti there is an emphasis on learning from peers and reaching out through word of mouth to become part of an empowering network. The power of youth culture is a phenomenon that can have devastating effects, causing youth to become involved in hate groups or being drawn into self-destructive habits. Dominant media often reports negative aspects of adolescent peer influence and popular culture. This can be turned into something positive by acknowledging what students already know and inspiring them to build upon that.

Foucault (1977) identified the school system as originating in the military for the purpose of controlling large groups of people. As classrooms become larger, due to economics, the tendency is to return to a militant regime that is more about controlling large groups than about education. Many students fall through the cracks of the education system at every level, for various reasons (including the self-satisfied politics of academia). Consequently, they lose their place in a society that classifies them as "problem students." This encourages a negative self-image that spirals further into lack of motivation. "The most common resistances to oppressive schooling (non-performance, truancy, disruptive behavior) generally culminate in academic failure, thus giving the system the last word...The teacher's job, then, becomes one of unraveling motivations for student

Fig. 15
FLOW (who did not want his face identified) acts as mentor to a young writer who spent the day watching him paint. Here the younger writer shows his black book, which includes a collection of stickers, photos and tags of older respected writers.

behavior in order to facilitate a productive revolution" (Trard, 1992, p. 151).

Some students need to receive the acknowledgement that they are valuable as they are and to realize how to exercise their political powers. ACE and SEAZ were considered failures at school, yet they became energized and self-motivated to work long hours on their own projects. Likewise, the participants took pride in their marginal status to become self-disciplined and self-directed in acquiring networking and studio skills. They created an alternative space where they could be successful and where they could question dominant power structures.

The collective and individual nature of hip-hop graffiti suggests that public and private do not have to be polarities. The participants were motivated to practice in private in preparation for their performance in public space. They enjoyed becoming part of the ambient space within their neighborhoods and delighted in provoking a response from their peers and the involuntary viewer. They enjoyed the elastic nature of hip-hop graffiti, that caused it to be continually revised by new work and defined as either vandalism or public art. They honestly acknowledged the influence of mentors, yet felt free to build upon that with their own history. In this era of failed ideologies the young people I interviewed found something to believe in, on their own terms.

Conclusion

Hip-hop graffiti has evolved so quickly in its short history. Now that this subculture has become even more of a global community via the internet and magazines, I question whether it will suffer from the loss of the physical reality of its local community. The more I analysed the interviews, the more I saw the diversity of individual motivations and the importance of a physical response to space. Further research could follow the influence of the internet and magazines on the diverse enclaves within the global community of hip-hop graffiti. Already it has become less of an urban street culture and one that can be learned in isolated rural areas such as Mistassini, Quebec, and Canmore, Alberta.

This study of hip-hop graffiti broadened my awareness of other adolescent obsessions for future research. Skateboarding designs and homemade bicycles are examples of folk art that have a core of adolescent followers similar to graffiti, and are becoming popularized. This research has shown me the importance of collecting educational resources that broaden the definition of art to include activities that students already participate in, or have some experience with. The teacher can use that experience as a base to synthesize with new knowledge. Students can explore ways to develop their obsessions, to change their environment, and to make their work public. This, in turn, can motivate critical reflection and opportunities for self-realization; they can be encouraged to question, to reflect, to reach out to larger communities, and to grow beyond the narcissism of similarity. Students can become addicted to actualizing their ideas through meaningful relationships with peers. All of this can be valued for the benefits it offers a society.

REFERENCES

Alvi, S. "Afrika Bambaataa: The Godfather of Hip-Hop." *Vice* (March 1997): 13–34.

Art Crimes (1995). Interviews, http://www.graffiti.org/index/talk.html

Art Crimes (1995). Glossary, http://www.graffiti.org/index/glossary.html

Bird, D., ed. *Graphotism International*, Issue 8. Surrey, England: Visual Grafix Video, 1997.

Birk, S. (1997). Miami, *Juxtapose*, 3 (2).

Blandy, Douglas E. and Congdon, Kristen G., eds. *Art in a Democracy*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1996.

Bruffee, Kenneth A. *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education: Interdependence and the Authority of Knowledge*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987.

Bruner, Jerome S. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Cahan, Susan and Zoya Kocur, eds. *Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education*. New York: The New York Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996.

Castleman, Craig. *Getting Up: Subway Grafitti Art in New York*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982.

Chalfant, Henry, and Martha Cooper. *Subway Art*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1984.

Chalmers, F. Graeme. "Culturally Based Versus Universally Based Understanding of Art." *Art in a Democracy*, edited by Douglas E. Blandy and Kristen G. Congdon, 4–11. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.

Clandinin, Jean D. and F. Michael Connelly. "Stories of Narrative Experience." *Educational Researcher*, (June–July, 1990): 2–14.

Clandinin, Jean D. and F. Michael Connelly. *Teachers as Curriculum Planners: Narratives of Experience*. New York: Teachers College Press., 1988.

Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Coles, Robert. *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.

Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonne S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications, 1994.

Dissanayake, Ellen. *What is Art For?* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988.

Dreyfuss, Henry. *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphics Symbols*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1972.

Dunitz, Robin J. (1993). Aerosol Art aka Graffiti Art, http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/murals/dunitz/aerosol.html

Farrell, Susan. (1997). Graffiti Q & A, http://calligrafix.co.uk/musee/grafitti/question.html; pp. 1–6.

Foucault, Michael. *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977.

Fournier, R. "Erasing a Wall of Apathy." *Press-Republican* (23 April 1997): A1, A10.

Freire, Paulo. *Education For Critical Consciousness*. New York: Seabury Press, 1973.

Freire, Paulo and Antonio Faundez. *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation*. New York: Continuum, 1989.

Hooks, Bell. *Teaching To Transgress*, New York: Routledge, 1994.

Jaite. "The Place Subway Where Fresh is Ket: An Interview with New York's Subway Destroyer, Ket One." *Subculture* (Winter 1996): 30–33.

Kim, Solin. *Chicano Graffiti and Murals: The Neighbourhood Art of Peter Quezada*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995.

Mesa-Bains, Amalia. "Teaching Students the Way They Learn." In *Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education*, edited by Susan Cahan and Zoya Kocur, 31–39. New York: New York Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996.

Minh-Ha, Trinh T. *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Neperud, Ronald W. "Texture of Community: An Environmental Design Education." In *Context, Content and Community in Art Education: Beyond Postmodernism*, edited by R. W. Neperud, 222–247. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.

Newcomb, Theodore M. "Student Peer-Group Influence." In *The American College: A Psychological and Social Interpretation of Higher Learning*, edited by Nevitt Sanford, 485. New York: John Wiley, 1962.

Noah, Josephine (1997). Street Math in Wildstyle Graffiti Art. josenoah@uclink4.berkeley.edu

Parks, Michael E. "The Art of Pedagogy: Artistic Behaviour as a Model for Teaching." *Art Education* (September, 1992): 51–57.

Phillips, Susan A. (1996). Graffiti Definition: *Grove's Dictionary of Art*, phillip@ucla.edu

Pocius, Gerald. *A Place to Belong: Community Order and Everyday Space In Calvert, Newfoundland*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991.

Reisner, Robert George. *Graffiti: Two Thousand Years of Wall Writing*. Chicago: H. Regnery, 1971.

Savard, C. "This Art Is Illegal." *Fringe Arts* (4 October 1997): 9–10.

Shorris, Earl. "As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor (On the Uses of a Liberal Education)." *Harpers* (September 1997): 50–59.

Snodgrass, Susan. "Art In the Hood." *Interrbobang: The School*. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1994.

Spradley, James P. *Participant Observation*. New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1980.

Spradley, James P. *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1979.

Stake, Robert E. "Case Studies." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by K. Norman Denzin, and Yvonne S. Lincoln, Ch. 14. London: Sage Publications, 1994.

Trard, David. *Cultural Pedagogy: Art, Education, Politics*. New York: Bergair and Garvey Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992.

Van Manen, Max. *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. London: The Althouse Press (University of Western Ontario), 1980.

Walsh, Michael. *Graffito*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1996.

Zurmuehlen, Marilyn. *Studio Art: Praxis, Symbol, Presence*. Reston, Va.: National Art Education Association, 1990.