Almost twenty years ago, a stylistic kind of graffiti originated in New York City and has since spread to many major cities in the United States, Canada, and other industrialized nations. This type of graffiti, known as "Hip Hop" graffiti (HHG) outside of New York City, accounts for a large share of graffiti in U.S. urban areas. It is found on buses, subways, trains, buildings, bridges, and innumerable other surfaces and ranges from signature "tags," typically written with ink marker or spray paint, to elaborate, polychrome spray-painted murals. This article, based on ethnographic research conducted in Seattle, first introduces the types of HHG and the social characteristics of writers, and then focuses on writers' social organization and values—the two key elements to understanding the proliferation of this graffiti. The paper concludes with several observations on social policies designed to curtail the production of graffiti.

Over the past two decades, graffiti has arisen as a growing urban problem for many cities in industrialized nations (Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987). Municipal governments, community groups, and private citizens have gone to great lengths in attempts to eradicate illegal graffiti. Often, considerable sums are expended in these largely unsuccessful measures. For example, in 1989, Los Angeles County and the cities of New York and San Francisco spent $50 million, $55 million, and $2 million, respectively, to fight graffiti; the cost for graffiti removal nationwide is estimated to exceed $4 billion annually.

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This article draws upon a paper presented at the “International Symposium on Vandalism: Research, Prevention, and Social Policy” sponsored by the United States Forest Service 20-22 April, 1988, Seattle, Washington. The authors express their gratitude to Yanqui Junkie at the International GetHip Times for facilitating contact and rapport with HHG writers; to Kathy Brewer for assistance in all phases of field work; to Harriet Christensen for solid advice and encouragement; to Xeronimo Kirk and Jim Prigoff for sage comments on drafts of this article; and to all of the writers who helped two outsiders understand a fascinating milieu.

Prigoff (personal communication, 1990) prefers to distinguish between permission and non-permission HHG. We use the legal-illegal distinction for clarity and in no way do we intend to imply positive or negative judgment on either legal or illegal HHG.
(Demoro, 1989; Martinez, 1989; Beaty, 1990). The major reason why these measures have failed is that most anti-graffiti programs ignore the social and cultural aspects of graffiti production.

Several formal and informal ethnographic studies have described and analyzed graffiti subculture in New York City and elsewhere (Kurlansky, Mailer, and Naar, 1974; Castleman, 1982; Feiner and Klein 1982; Cooper and Chalfant, 1984; Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987; and Lachmann, 1988). While graffiti in New York has developed as an independent tradition, it was exported nation- and world-wide from New York City via the "Hip Hop" popular culture explosion in the early 1980s (George, Banes, Flinkler, and Romanowski, 1985). Consequently, graffiti writers on the West Coast have come to identify themselves with a three pillared Hip Hop subculture involving rap music, breakdancing, and graffiti. For these reasons, we refer to the unique kind of graffiti that is the subject of this article as Hip Hop graffiti (HHG).

In that New York City was the birthplace of HHG and remains the center of the HHG community, academic studies of HHG writers have focused on the subculture in that setting. Castleman's (1982) landmark book gives an overall and detailed account of the New York City scene during the 1970s, while Feiner and Klein (1982) have examined the subculture from a human development perspective. More recently, Lachmann (1988) has discussed recruitment and socialization into the subculture and kinds of writing careers, among other related topics.

The present study replicates and extends this scholarly research and stands as the first formal and in-depth ethnographic investigation of the HHG subculture outside of New York City. We first delineate the fieldwork strategies used to obtain data. Then, we briefly introduce the basic types of HHG and the social characteristics of writers. Next, we examine HHG subculture social organization and values. Finally, we remark on urban policies designed to eliminate graffiti.

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2 For discussions on the history of HHG and graffiti in New York City, see Castleman (1982), Feiner and Klein (1982), Cooper and Chalfant (1984), Chalfant and Prigoff (1987), George, et al. (1985), and Brewer, Christensen, and Miller (in press). Campbell and Muncer (1989) distinguish between gangs and subcultures, and in their framework, HHG writers are part of a subculture and not gangs. This is demonstrated not only by writers' social organization and values, but also by the fact that HHG has become popular internationally, flourishing in countries (e.g., England) that apparently have little experience with true gangs.

3 Slovenz (1988) also uses the "Hip Hop" term to refer to this type of graffiti. The word graffiti is employed here as a descriptive, neutral and technical term -- no negative connotations are intended.

4 This research is concerned purely with description and policy implications. For relevant theoretical discussions of deviant subcultures, see, among others, Cohen (1955), Cloward and Ohlin (1960), Becker (1963), Hirschi (1969), Best and Luckenbill (1982), Catalano and Hawkins (1986) and Katz (1988). The HHG subculture can also be considered as an "art world" (see Becker, 1982).
Methods

Multi-faceted fieldwork consisting of in-depth interviewing, participant observation, photographing, and advocacy activities, was conducted by the lead author between May 1987 and June 1989. The first four months of the research consisted of exploring several Seattle neighborhoods with high concentrations of HHG in order to photograph examples of HHG. During this period, the ethnographer encountered and conversed with a couple groups of writers who were writing graffiti on public buses, but was unable to establish further contact with them.

In early fall 1987, the address of a HHG magazine from New York City -- the International Get Hip Times (IGT; formerly the International Graffiti Times) -- was obtained. After receiving two correspondences describing the proposed research and requesting help in contacting Seattle writers, the editor of IGT provided the addresses of the only two Seattle subscribers to the magazine. Letters were subsequently sent to these Seattle writers, introducing the field researcher, explaining the study, and proposing a meeting. Both writers responded and initial informal interviews were accomplished. Throughout the rest of the research period, additional writers were recruited after face-to-face introductions were made by the first writers contacted. The lead author then conducted multiple, in-depth, unstructured interviews, from one to four hours in length with twelve writers (nine from Seattle, two from the San Francisco Bay Area, and one from Vancouver, British Columbia). Field notes were recorded during and after all interviews, and some interviews were taped. Important data was also obtained through a great many open-ended in-person and telephone conversations with approximately forty Seattle writers (including those most thoroughly interviewed). Moreover, correspondence was maintained with two writers who moved away part way through the fieldwork period, the editors of two major U.S. HHG magazines, IGT and Ghetto Art, and Henry Chalfant (see below).

The lead author behaved in the roles of ethnographer and photographer during the span of fieldwork. Participant observation was fashioned after that of Henry Chalfant, famous to HHG writers everywhere as the subculture’s primary photo-documenter and highly ethnographic author (see Cooper and Chalfant, 1984; Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987). This strategy allowed the lead author not only opportunities to ask questions and talk with writers when they were “hanging out,” but also chances to accompany them on dozens of legal and illegal writing expeditions. Field notes were taken both during and after the periods of interaction with writers, depending on the specific circumstances. It was the ethnographic policy to give writers copies of prints of their writing which had been photographed. During the research period, in excess of 600 photographs were taken of HHG and writers applying their trade. The majority of the photographs were of HHG in Seattle. Pictures of HHG in Phoenix (1987), Spokane (1987), Vancouver, B.C. (1989), and Portland (1989) were also taken after searching traditional

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5Our methodological stance holds that ethnography can be conducted scientifically. Our methodological sources are Agar (1980), Spradley (1980), and Kirk and Miller (1986).
areas for HHG in these cities and asking local residents, school officials, and writers from other cities about locations of HHG.

Finally, between February 1988 and June 1989, the lead author acted, by request, as an intermediary and agent-advocate for several writers in more than a dozen legal painting ventures and public fora concerning HHG. Specifically, this permitted the study of writers' reactions to conventional business practices as well as their presentations of self to the general public.

Types of Hip Hop Graffiti

Hip Hop graffiti should not be confused with graffiti written by Cholo, drug, or other formal gangs (cf., Barnett, 1984; Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974; and Romotsky and Romotsky, 1976) or other kinds of graffiti, such as "latrinalia," or bathroom graffiti (Schwartz and Dovido, 1984). HHG, in contrast, is distinct in both form and function and has three basic types—tags, throw-ups, and pieces.

1. Tags

Tags -- the simplest and most elemental form and most prevalent kind of HHG -- are stylized signatures written in marker, spray paint, grease pencil, paint stick, or shoe polish; they represent the writer's chosen, self-fashioned street name (Figure 1). Tags are commonly found on outdoor walls, signs, bus shelters, buses, freeway overpasses, bulkheads, and numerous other surfaces (generally in inner-city areas). Because they are written quickly, they can be generated in semipublic places and situations, such as the inside of a partially occupied bus. Variations include tags written on stickers, which are used for furtive writing, and "engravings" (scratches made with sharp rocks or metal objects, typically on glass and metal surfaces), which are valued for their permanence despite their low visibility.

Tags may incorporate symbols such as crosses, crowns, stars, arrows, dollar signs, underlines, halos, and copyright symbols with the current year. Some Seattle writers occasionally draw simple self-portraits next to their tags. Tags are often accompanied by abbreviations of the names of the "crew(s)" (i.e., writing group[s]) to which the writer belongs.

Writers strive to create a tag in a rapid and fluid motion. Tags should be noticeable and capture the eye of others, as one Seattle writer, Nemo, confirmed: "Nothing beats a thick black tag."

2. Throw-Ups

Throw-ups, the second type of Hip Hop graffiti, are elaborated names formed in bubble, block or similarly expansive styles (Figure 2). Since they are larger than tags and take longer to execute, they generally cannot be done in the open public. Although throw-ups are uncommon in Seattle, some Seattle writers use a throw-up style of tags in which reduced size throw-up outlines are drawn, but not filled in.
Figure 1: Tag

Title: "Kaskade" (Cascade); Crew: "M.K.K."; Year: 1987; City: Seattle
Figure 3: Piece

Title: "K. One"; Writer: "Keep One"; Dedication: "To Glad" (Writer's girlfriend); Signature, Copywright, and Year: "Keep One I.D." (Instant Destruction), "Keep One S.T.C." (Stomp the Comp(letion)), ©Cee Three Productions 1989; City: Seattle
3. Pieces

Pieces (derived from "masterpiece"), or murals, are the most developed form of Hip Hop graffiti. Pieces are large, elaborate, multicolored murals depicting a word or words, (frequently the writer's name) and often include backgrounds, designs, characters, the writer's tag, messages, or comments (Figure 3). Spray painted with at least two colors (but almost always three or more), they range from several feet square (such as 10' by 5' on the side of a building) to several hundred feet wide (such as on wall panels at construction sites). Most pieces require six or more cans of spray paint and one or more hours to complete. Therefore, if pieces are done illegally, as most are, they must be done in places with little, if any, human traffic in order for the writers to avoid arrest and concentrate on painting. Pieces in Seattle are often painted at night and in such areas as alleys, parks, schools, and railroad rights-of-way.

HHG, then, consists of much more than letters. Many pieces also portray "characters" (figures based upon cartoons, Hip Hop fashion, and other sources), city skylines, street scenes, abstract designs, and countless other non-letter subjects. The core text of pieces runs the gamut of human expression, from the celebration of the writer or another person (as in the predominant name piece) to the communication of social, political, emotional, proverbial, or philosophical messages. Writers treat HHG as art. Most make elaborate sketches of their pieces before they execute their paintings, and nearly always take photographs of their finished works. And, it is customary for writers to adorn pieces with their tag signature, a copyright symbol with the current year, and a dedication.

Social Characteristics

With regard to social characteristics, HHG writers in Seattle, as well as in other cities, compose a somewhat diverse group. Writers are overwhelmingly male. In the course of this study, we met but two female writers (and these were only casually involved in the production of HHG) and heard about just two others. Writers roughly range from 12 to 20 years in age, although some writers begin younger, and some writers continue writing into their mid-twenties. In Seattle, most writers live in the inner city; however, some reside in the outer, more suburban areas. Most writers come from lower- and working-class families, although some writers are middle or even upper-middle class. Most writers have ethnic minority backgrounds. Blacks and Latinos are heavily represented; indeed, the whole Hip Hop subculture was created, perpetuated, and received mainly by Black and Latino youth in the United States (George, et al., 1985). Yet, significant numbers of Whites and Asians are also found in the subculture, both in Seattle and elsewhere.

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6DeMott (1988) discusses the Hip Hop subculture as a working-class phenomenon.

7Socially marginal minority youth in general seem to be especially attracted to the Hip Hop subculture. For a discussion of Native American break dancers in Utah and the use of Hip Hop as a marker and affirmation of individual and ethnic identity, see Deyhle (1986).
One key informant, Stash Five captured the feeling that although writers recognize their diversity, they do not emphasize it:

It [HHG] started in the South Bronx, but graffiti has all kinds of influences. There are rich boys doing it and poor boys doing it. In [Hip Hop] graffiti they are all the same.

Social Organization

Writers not only desire, but need social interaction with other writers. Social bonds are responsible for the creation, reinforcement, and continuation of the HHG subculture (Castleman, 1982; Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987). Vancouver, British Columbia writer Crooz, when asked how long he would continue to write, showed that HHG requires an audience of writing peers:

I don't know. It's [writing HHG] so addictive. I guess [I'll continue to write] until everybody quits.

The social framework that supports the writing of HHG consists of four major social structures: classes, crews, networks, and mentor-protege relationships.

1. Classes

Two loosely identifiable classes of writers, here referred to as elite writers and "taggers," differentiate writers at a basic level. These classes are not totally exclusive, and the boundary between them is not completely distinct; thus, some writers straddle this division. Within both classes there are many sublevels of status that are determined by style, proficiency and quantity of output.

The elite writers compose the smaller class, consisting of writers who view themselves as, above all, artists and with this identity see themselves as having a higher status than taggers. Stash Five revealed this attitude of superiority, noting that there were "only fifteen real [elite] writers in Seattle," after he earlier estimated that there were five hundred writers of both classes in the city. Elite writers concentrate on pieces, but may occasionally write throw-ups and tags. For some, tags -- except when they act as signatures on pieces or in "piecebooks" (portfolios with tags and sketches of pieces)--are a symbol of less skilled, hence lower status writers. Shame, an elite Seattle writer, exhibited this point of view:

I'm gonna tag up in your book [piecebook], 'cause I want to get up [have my name] here, but I don't want you to think I'm no tagger.

The writing of tags and throw-ups is the central concern of and main mode of writing for taggers, the majority of writers. Although their numbers are

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8The term "tagger" -- as with "writer" and "crew" -- is emic in that it exists within the lexicon of the social group under study. By contrast, the term "elite" is etic, a part of the vocabulary of the analysts.
greater than the elite writers, taggers in Seattle recognize their lower status in
the HHG subculture, a view that contrasts with that of taggers in New York
City (Lachmann, 1988). In our study, for instance, numerous taggers
claimed to have painted pieces, but checks of the specified locations revealed
no such graffiti. Yet, as in New York City, most taggers have limited access
to the elite writers from whom they could learn the techniques necessary to
further develop their writing, illustrating a type of differential opportunity to
skills in the HHG subculture (cf., Cloward and Ohlin, 1960).

2. Crews

The most basic social group of all writers is the “crew.” Crews are informally
organized groups of writers (usually friends). Crews range in size from a few
to a couple dozen writers. Stash Five further explained the meaning of a
crew:

Crews go out and paint together for themselves, for competition, and for fame. These
crews are little armies of artists armed with a marker or a aerosol can, ready for battle.

The creation of and recruitment of members to crews assume a variety of
patterns. Crews may be the result of writers who live in the same neigh-
borhood or attend the same school joining forces for companionship and co-
operation in writing ventures. Similarly, writers of equivalent status within
the HHG subculture who get to know each other through random contacts
or various writer networks may also band together for the same reasons.
Finally, crews may form as one or two experienced and charismatic writers
generate a following of proteges.

Once a crew is formed, admission into it (for non-founding members) can
depend on specific criteria. Novice writers seeking acceptance by a particular
crew may have to steal paint and prove their ability at managing themselves
in dangerous, stressful situations (such as avoidance of, and confrontation
with, police). Other crews may require potential members to already be
prolific or stylistically accomplished, as Stash Five related:

Me and my boy, Trem 73, have been trying to earn our way into T.M.F. So we have
planned this friendly battle [contest to paint the artistically best piece]. We just are
battling so they know we ain't no joke and to see how fresh [good, beautiful] we can bust
out [create].

Crews sometimes enlarge their membership to accept equal status writers
who are not from the same city. Keep One, a Seattle writer on a trip to New
York City, recounted that he met:

9Crews vary widely in structure and size over time. For a discussion of crews and their
composition, see Castleman (1982), Williams and Komblum (1985) and Lachmann (1988)

10For a discussion on HHG’s role as a rite of passage among urban youth, see Feiner and
...these dudes from Brooklyn and they took me to the [MTA train] yards one night. I did a piece on this old rusty train. After that, he [a member of the crew] said that there was this guy in California that was down [a member of the crew] with them and that they should have someone up in Seattle. So he put me in [the crew].

As might be expected, proteges of crew members often are admitted into the crew if the mentor has high standing within the group.

Membership in a crew has numerous benefits, rights and responsibilities. If a writer joins a prestigious crew, some of that crew's status is conferred to the new member, elevating him within the HHG community. Stash Five elaborated this point in a letter to the lead author:

T.M.F. wants to rule the [San Francisco] Bay Area and then go to Southern California and start battling, then they will have taken care of the West Coast....I will be down with T.M.F. because they will help me become better and I'll get much fame at the same time and I will get to express myself everywhere I go! Anyway, I hope someday to get in T.M.F.-- it will prove to myself that I have worked hard and that I have style.

Members of a crew are expected to be loyal to each other, to support the crew. Transgressions committed against a fellow member by a non-crew member (such as in a “cross-out war,” when rival crews deface the writing of the other) become matters concerning the entire crew. Stash Five demonstrated this idea of crew honor:

They [another crew] crossed out my buddy [in his crew], so I wrote some shit about them [on a wall]. Then we crossed them [the other crew's HHG] out and now everything is touchy.

Being a member of one crew, however, does not exclude belonging to other crews, and some writers belong to several crews, writing clusters of crew abbreviations near their tags. Although crews play an important role in the HHG subculture, they are dynamic and usually short-lived, with groups forming and breaking up regularly.

Since taggers and elite writers have somewhat different goals and methods of writing, crews tend to be largely composed of writers of one class or another. Moreover, cities, like individual writers and crews, are also ranked in status. New York City is considered by Seattle writers to be the hub of the HHG world, whereas Seattle exists at the periphery.

3. Networks

Writers also associate with other writers outside of their crews, building networks among themselves. Because writing HHG is ultimately a competition between individuals, writers are keenly aware and interested in new graffiti and those who produce it. Writers often introduce themselves if they suspect that they are in the company (for example, on a bus) of another writer. Typically such contacts lead to the exchange of piecebooks which contain signature tags, practice tags, and piece sketches of colleagues. Piecebooks serve an important function by allowing those who read them to quickly iso-
late the position of a writer in commonly intertwined writer networks, and thereby make a status assessment.

Writer networks facilitate communication about recent writing, police action against writers, joint writing expeditions, inter-crew conflicts, and other topics. A few, primarily elite, writers construct or tap into larger inter-city and international networks of writers maintained through written correspondence, telephone communication, and travel. Stash Five underlined this sense of community:

*Almost any graffiti artist in the world can go to any country where [HHG] graffiti is being done and will be welcomed by many other artists. Unity is what keeps this culture going.*

The proliferation of HHG newsletters and magazines has further fostered the development of broad networks of writers. There are presently eight HHG publications in the U.S., two in England, and two in Holland, in addition to a videotape magazine -- *Video Graf* -- in New York City.

### 4. Mentor-Protege Relationships

Often, when a more experienced writer and a less experienced writer become close friends, a mentor-protege relationship is established. If the less experienced is a “toy” (novice) then the more experienced writer may educate the recruit in the rules and practices of the subculture. If neither writer is a toy, but one writer has mastered HHG more than the other, the more experienced may teach the less experienced special styles and techniques of writing. The relationship benefits the mentor with the feeling of having done something powerful and positive by sharing knowledge. Stash Five, actively involved in inter-city and international networks and mentoring, announced that:

*Someone could be from Africa and I'll send them outlines [of pieces for practice].*

The mentor further gains by propagating his individual trademark style, at least temporarily, until the protege has matured enough artistically to innovate a personal style. Then too, the protege may also help the mentor in obtaining paint and in writing activities requiring only intermediate levels of skill (e.g., painting “fill-ins” [interiors] of outlines). Such tangible exchanges are generally required for the initiation of a mentor-protege relationship, as Seattle writer Nemo stipulated:

*I don't teach nobody for free....If I'm gonna show him [a potential protege] styles, he's gonna have to get me paint and give it to the master.*

The protege, of course, benefits from the relationship by acquiring new skills and by knowledge and being associated with a higher status writer, all of which raise the protege's status in the HHG community.
Values

“Getting up” is the process of writing graffiti in which writers compete against each other for status. This competition illustrates four fundamental values of HHG subculture: fame, artistic expression, power, and rebellion.

1. Fame

Fame -- taken here to encompass the affiliated concepts of recognition, respect, and acclaim -- is the most important goal and value in the Hip Hop graffiti subculture. Stash Five (formerly Stash One) glamorized this primary motivation for writers in a message on one of his pieces:

Aerosol King Stash 1's my title. What I want is for me to become your idol. I don't want to sound conceited, but please understand it's just an honorary feeling knowing I have fans!!

There are three basic dimensions of fame: quantity, exposure and style. Stash Five captured the importance of sheer quantity in HHG production succinctly:

To be all-city [to have one's name appearing in many different places and areas] is what every writer is out to do, whether it be tagging or pieces.

A writer must be quite active to create the impression that one “gets up a lot” or “bombs.” Becoming “all-city” (or “getting up a lot”) requires dedication, discipline, and hard work. Strategies such as embarking on long tagging walks and nighttime writing ventures are necessary for any writer with ambition. Seattle writer Rubik conveyed this reality when talking about Spaide, a high production writer:

Wherever I go in the city, I see that boy up. He's definitely the king of tags and you know no one else is puttin' in the time he is.

Achieving fame with a strategy based on quantity is made even more difficult by the “buffing,” or painting over and erasure of HHG by authorities and property owners. Seattle writers accept the short lifetimes of their work while disputing the asserted effectiveness of buffing programs in deterring their writing. In fact, writers’ drives to “get up” generally have out-paced even the most vigilant paint-out campaigns.

Related to the principle of quantity is the idea of exposure. Writers carefully choose where they will write based on whether other writers (and to a lesser degree, the general public) will see their writing. Thus, HHG appears on such targets as public transit systems, semi trucks, and trains because these have the most convenient, widely circulating surfaces on which to write. Again, to guarantee exposure, writers often write at places routinely fre-

11Competition also plays a prominent role in rap music and break dancing. See DeMott (1988), Deyhle (1986), George et al. (1985) and Slovenz (1988).
quented by other writers: schools, neighborhoods, convenience stores, parks, and so on. When Black Seattle writer, Gene was asked if he tagged at the high school to which he was bussed, he responded:

> Now, I don't write out there. Out there, there's just white people. If I write out there, ain't no niggers [the intended audience for his writing] gonna see it.

This strategy of getting exposure to increase fame is the first mechanism underlying the observation of policymakers that "HHG- attracts-HHG." Additional ways of achieving fame by way of exposure are to have one's writings pictured in photographs, newspapers, magazines, books, movies, or on television.

Style is the third key variable in attaining fame. Cooper and Chalfant (1984:66) define style as "...the form, the shapes of the letters, and how they connect." Ever since the convention emerged early in HHG history of making the writer's name particularly noticeable (Castleman, 1982), style has been an essential criterion for earning fame and raising one's status in the subculture. This is true especially for elite writers, since it is much more difficult to produce vast quantities of time-consuming pieces than nearly instant tags. Thus, elite writers tend to seek distinction in the excellence of their style (although quantity of pieces still remains a determinant of status). Stash Five explained how style (and correspondingly, status) is graded:

> The more disciplined and complex your individual style is, the more you have beat your competition. When your piece is up, another writer is going to try to do better than you. So your letters are the weapons to kill your competitors' letters.

In addition to the form, shapes, and connections of letters, writers' choices of colors and color schemes are also important. Stash Five explained:

> Some colors don't go with other colors. Crayone [sic] sat me down one night and taught me colors. But you also gotta have a feel for it [colors] to know what's right and what's wrong.

Writers frequently strive to paint "burners" or pieces that prove their superior artistic imagination, technical skill, and originality, hence the general term "burning" for the artistic aspect of HHG. A specific manifestation of this goal is the contest of "battling." In battling, one writer faces off against another writer, in response to a challenge, trying to paint a stylistically better piece (as judged by the battling and nonbattling writers). In a message to a rival battling crew on his "battle piece," Stash Five compared his battling victory to dumping a girlfriend:

> L.A.S. [a crew] you lost!! Like a bitch you've been tossed! Hip Hop Art is about letter formation. What you got is a demo [demonstration]. Step off [the stage]!!

To remain a "king" (a writer who excels in quantity, exposure or style), a writer must continually get up, since, as Rubik reflected, "When you're on top, you got a lot of people tryin' to knock you down." If a writer fails to sustain high levels of quantity, exposure, or style, one's status as an active writer falls. However, fame once achieved does not evaporate, but rather be-
comes a fact of history to be remembered and retold. Reviewing his four year career of writing HHG (both legally and illegally), which he has now largely abandoned, Seattle writer Tazeke remarked that he "got fame from family, friends, and thugs," by writing HHG. This, he believes, promoted his personal and social development during adolescence.12

2. Artistic Expression

Artistic expression is another primary concern of writers; style and aesthetics are not only means to fame, but also ends in themselves. Both writers' self-perceptions and significant non-writers' evaluations of their work exhibit this value. In telling others why they write HHG, writers speak in positive affective terms. Crooz elaborated on his commitment in this way:

It's beautiful, you release all your energy...it's like it makes you feel so good, man, after you piece [paint a piece] you go, "Man, that is fresh [sharp, beautiful]."

For Stash Five, writing HHG is a "big high" and a "beautiful disease." Moreover, many writers believe that it is the feeling generated by the art, and not the form of it (generally letters), that makes their painting art. Stash Five described one of his pieces in this way:

It's kind of an emotional thing-- it's not just a bunch of words or something.

Writers can closely identify with their painting, viewing their work as an extension of themselves. Every time one of his pieces is buffed, Stash Five contends that "part of me is washed away." Even the names some writers give their crews, such as State of Da Art (S.O.D.A.), The Unusual Artists (T.U.A.), Demons Of Art (D.O.A.), and Born To Create (B.2.C.), attest to the idea that some writers consider themselves artists. Elite writers often think of themselves as public artists with their work having a positive impact on the urban environment, as Tazeke defended:

What I do is good for the community, plus it's good for my art; I am an artist, a graffiti artist.

Writers, then, regard their writing as art. All writers try to develop style. These include taggers who, when not writing Hip Hop graffiti illegally, may spend hours at a time practicing and perfecting their tags on paper. Just as elite writers see themselves first and foremost as artists, the majority of taggers view their own writing as having some sort of aesthetic appeal. Writers of all classes show an appreciation of art in general and sometimes actively participate (for example, in school) in other kinds of painting, drawing, and design activities. In recent years, a growing number of elite writers have refused to call their painting "graffiti," a word they feel is tainted with negative connotations. Phase Two, a world-famous veteran writer from New York City, emphasized in an unpublished personal letter to Ghetto Art that:

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12 For a discussion on how writers gain acceptance from other deviant groups, see Lachmann (1988).
...this word "graffiti" needs to go....It means "scribble-scrabble" and does not enhance the value of this cultural art....It was made up by the media and accepted by lack of knowledge of [how] complicated, cultural, technical, spiritual, and on and on this art is.

Supplementing, if not entirely displacing, the word graffiti, terms like "Hip Hop Art," "Newave Art," "Aerosol Art," and "Spraycan Art" are part of the subcultural lexicon.

HHG has gained acceptance and even acclaim as a valid art form in certain parts of mainstream society and a small number of writers have assumed the role of "legitimate" artists. Elite writers paint canvases, walls, and cars (in HHG lettering or abstract spray-can style) for themselves and their families and friends. Storeowners, business firms, nightclubs, community arts projects, private citizens, fashion advertisers, and other patrons have commissioned writers to paint signs and walls in the style of HHG. Writers have also been hired to design and paint logos, posters, record covers, clothing, and television studio sets, among many other items. The HHG subculture has made considerable inroads into the international art world (Castleman, 1982; Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987; Lachmann, 1988). Despite the relative obscurity of the Pacific Northwest in both the conventional art and HHG worlds and the fluctuating market for HHG, there have been several gallery exhibitions of HHG in the 1980s in Seattle.

3. Power

HHG is an expression of power for individual writers and crews, as well as for the subculture as a whole. In the case of individual writers and crews, HHG lays a personal claim to the surfaces written upon, typically those either seemingly controlled by no one (e.g., abandoned buildings, cement walls, neglected property) or apparently never to be controlled by the writers (e.g., schools, public transportation, businesses, municipal properties). In this sense, writing is, in part, a territorial phenomenon. The more a writer writes, the more the writer comes to dominate and symbolically "own" an area of a city. This symbolic ownership manifests itself in several cities with writers and crews competing to dominate particular transit lines (Castleman, 1982; Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987). In Seattle, however, turf control is mostly limited to specific places and neighborhoods, as Keep One highlighted:

The Beach [Rainier Beach High School] and Odessa Brown [a park] are ours...only me and Shame been piecing there for the past three years...nobody touches these walls 'cause they're ours.

Crew names, such as Out To Crush (O.T.C.) and Controlling The Bay (C.T.B.), also help to make explicit the salience of power in writers' world view. "Going over" -- the act of "tagging," "piecing," or otherwise defacing another writer's (or crew's) writing -- is a routine tactic used by writers to secure and maintain control of a surface. This can provoke a cross-out war between individual writers or crews. "Going over" also functions as a means to repudiate another writer's fame, or to provide art criticism.
At a collective level, HHG reinforces a shared notion of writers that the subculture as a whole is powerful. This is illustrated by the reaction of a number of writers standing on a street corner to a nearby bus heavily marked with tags. Upon seeing the bus, one writer exclaimed "This bus is totally destroyed!" The other writers laughed with delight, even though none of the tags was of their doing. They then ran out to the bus when it stopped momentarily and "tagged" on the outside of it before it pulled away. Rubik echoed this value of subcultural power: "When I go by a place that's been bombed, it makes me feel good." Crooz generalized the concept when he described the early stages of HHG in Vancouver:

"It was great, but everybody was wack [inexperienced and unskilled]. But it was sort of neat, it was a good feeling 'cause everybody was writing."

These examples illustrate that writers resonate with other writers' expressions of power and celebrate the subculture's strength and presence. This aspect of identifying with subcultural power is the second mechanism driving policymakers' explanation that "HHG attracts HHG." Writers write near others' graffiti to participate in a simultaneous expression of personal and subcultural power.

4. Rebellion

More than a display of power, HHG is also a demonstration of rebellion and protest against conventional norms. The general public and municipal authorities condemn writers and negatively label them as "delinquents," "criminals," and "vandals." Within this context, writers acknowledge their sociological deviance. Yet, they do not believe HHG warrants police attention, as Nemo dismayed:

"There's over 300 rock [crack cocaine] houses in this city and people are starving in Africa, and they [law enforcement and city government] are worrying about a few marks on the walls.

Writers perceive themselves as modern outlaws and behave -- sometimes perhaps dramatically -- accordingly. In their writings and activities, writers convey a tough street image to their peers and to the public. Tazeke illustrated the rebellious mystique of the writer identity:

"I come along and do a piece at night and the next day everybody is saying "Who did this? When did he do this?" I'm like a Zorro dude-- surprise! And people still be saying "Who the hell is this?"

The names of crews reveal the writers have appropriated deviant labels which are consistent with the outlaw self-image: Menace to Society (sic) (M.2.S.), Crime Over Night (C.O.N.), Leaders of Rebellious Destruction (L.O.R.D.), West Side Threat (W.S.T.), and Instant Destruction (I.D.). Supporting evidence that writers value protest and rebellion is found in the militaristic terms that permeate writers' jargon--"bomb," "hit," "destroy," "kill," "tag" (from dog tag), and "style wars" (cf., Beere and Schoon 1983).
The HHG outlaw ethos involves some criminal behaviors. Writers are usually expected to “rack” (shoplift) their materials, and they occasionally must trespass to do their writing. Although some writers may enjoy breaking the law, they do not wish to be arrested, and it is a matter of pride to have never been caught for writing. In the “cops and robbers” game that develops between police and writers, writers remain committed to their craft as evidenced in Seattle writer Nemo’s response to a local official who said that writers had no right to write illegally:

I have the right to go and go and go [on writing graffiti] until I get caught.

Similarly, Keep One refused to give up illegal writing, even after he had begun to accept a few legal writing opportunities.:

This don’t change nothing. Even with cash gigs, I’m still going to vandalize [paint illegally] They [patrons, municipal authorities, and police] can’t stop me.

However, after those initial painting jobs, he turned his emphasis to legal work, only occasionally writing illegally.

Illegal HHG is more highly esteemed than work done legally for a few key reasons. First, legal work cannot satisfy writers’ value of rebellion and protest. Second, the chances to gain fame from peers are reduced, depending on the location, exposure, and quantity of the legal writing. Finally, legal work -- especially if it involves a patron and payment, or an element of government bureaucracy -- may place constraints on a writer’s artistic expression.

Discussion

In the sections above, we introduced the types of Hip Hop graffiti, outlined the social characteristics of writers, and presented frameworks for the social organization and major values of the HHG subculture. Here we remark briefly on the failure of current methods to curb the illegal production of HHG and the promise of alternative approaches.

There are two basic kinds of strategies presently in use to reduce HHG activity. The first kind of strategy indirectly prevents or discourages writers from writing. “Hardening the target” of graffiti entails reconfiguration of the physical environment. This may be accomplished through the positioning of decorative plants, or the installation of a fence or some other obstacle. This strategy has proved to be impractical and costly in most applications, but there are exceptions. New York City, for example, recently succeeded in discouraging HHG on its MTA subway system by purchasing an expensive “graffiti-proof” stainless steel trains. Nonetheless, the rest of the city’s most popular walls remain as covered with graffiti as they have for years, and garbage trucks have replaced trains as moving targets (Butterfield, 1988; International Get Hip Times, 1988).

“Paint-out” campaigns also indirectly discourage HHG writers from applying their craft (Bell, Bell, and Godefroy, [in press]). These, too, are generally in-
effective. One reason is that painted over ("buffed") surfaces (as well as those which have been covered with special coatings allowing for the easy removal of graffiti) still provide a blank slate for future writing. We have seen that writers often intensify their efforts in the face of paint-out campaigns (see, Scigliano, 1987). Only the most responsive campaigns, designed to attend to graffiti soon after identification, and encompassing the full graffiti region could begin to significantly decrease the output of illegal graffiti. Such programs would also have to be sustained until most writers ceased to be active.

Finally, policies banning the sale of spray paint to minors also indirectly address the graffiti problem (Haberstroh, 1989). The effect of such measures would seem to be slight. It is commonplace for writers to steal their paint (some writers have reported taking paint from behind-the-counter cabinets); then, too, writers have little trouble obtaining spray paint from sympathetic others over the age of eighteen. At best, policies of this type simply lead writers to substitute ink markers, grease pencils, shoe polish, and sticker tags, among other tools for spray paint.

The second basic kind of strategy to combat illegal graffiti focuses directly on the writers, rather than on the setting or paint. With such a strategy, writers encounter policies of deterrence, re-education, and diversion.

Frustration with the results of indirect strategies, a number of communities and cities have turned to punitive measures. Thus, intensified law enforcement activities directed at writers and stricter sentencing for graffiti-related offenses have been implemented (Martinez, 1989). The effectiveness of these programs is difficult to ascertain. Despite occasional crackdowns on writers by police in Seattle, for example, we have yet to encounter a writer who has been arrested for writing HHG. Part of the problem is that it is difficult to catch writers in the act of writing HHG, given the quick methods of tagging and the secrecy and tactics of piecing.

It is possible that by emphasizing the criminal aspects of HHG, and by the stereotypic labeling writers as "vandals" and "delinquents," policy makers cause the HHG subculture to be even more deviantly polarized from society at large. The value of rebellion, which we found to be the least important of the major HHG values, takes on greater significance when communities vilify writers and intensify law enforcement measures. Castleman (1982) showed that during New York City's augmentation of anti-graffiti efforts, writers not only resisted, but enjoyed the drama linking writers and police. Publicized wars on graffiti can also backfire in feeding the writers' sense of group power, as, for example, when writers take heart from programs which are going poorly.

Anti-graffiti education and media programs are direct strategies which, to date, ignore the cultural values of HHG. Such programs (see, for example, Seattle Engineering Department, 1986; Korzybsky, in press) --which stress the criminality, cost of property owners, and negative aesthetics of HHG--clash with (hence, reinforce) writers' commitment to rebellion, power, and artistic expression. The practice of recruiting city officials and police
officers as key participants in education and media programs also contributes to writer attachment to power and rebellion.

Another direct strategy is to divert writers from generating patently illegal graffiti. Philadelphia, for example, has instituted a non-HHG mural program. Despite claims of some success, the city has been unable to significantly squelch illegal HHG (Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network, 1987; Chalfant, personal communication, 1988). The mural program fails to sufficiently capture the interest of writers because it neglects the writers' sense of artistic identity; aerosol spray paint and traditional HHG themes (e.g., letters, cartoon characters, city life) are prohibited by the program.

What, then, are the alternatives to these strategies? In our view, the marginal deviance of illegal HHG provides a chance for the subculture to be rechanneled along more conventional lines. Giving writers greater access to legal arenas for their writing is the key to reducing illegal HHG. Their outlaw self-image notwithstanding, most writers straddle deviant and conventional worlds (Lachmann, 1988). Our field experiences suggest that writers can become successfully involved in legal HHG enterprises and projects. The least expensive strategy is to set aside walls for HHG which are managed by writers. To be effective, writers should be involved in finding suitable wall locations and the legal wall plan should be somewhat extensive, including more than several token walls. These legal walls should be showcases for current HHG. Therefore, the paintings should continually change. This is quite different from the situation of commissioned walls where a single mural is painted and then left intact. Informants report that where legal walls exist, they do get used. Sadly, our negotiations with municipal authorities -- as well as writers' contacts with city officials elsewhere regarding legal walls -- have nearly always been broken off by city authorities, perhaps because setting aside legal walls has the potential to be viewed by local constituencies as a surrender in the war on graffiti (Brewer, 1989; San Francisco Chronicle, 1987).

Another promising strategy to control illegal HHG is to create places (e.g., community centers, schools, warehouses, art studios) where writers can learn, practice, and get exposure and recognition for their painting (Castleman, 1982; Brewer, 1989; Heim, 1990; New York Times, 1987; Murphy, 1990). Legal HHG programs such as these become effective in reducing illegal HHG when they break down the differential opportunity within the HHG subculture to privileged skills (e.g., how to paint pieces). Our observations concur with those of Murphy (1990) that pieces, legal or illegal, tend to discourage tagging on walls. Communities might also expand in this direction by sponsoring HHG exhibits (for example, the HHG art expositions in Los Angeles from 1988-90, see Murphy, 1990) and promoting HHG art showings on public transit (cf. "The Bus Show" in Becker, 1982: 138-144). Additional strategies include supporting local HHG contests (International Get Hip Times, 1989; Martinez, 1989) that complement the element of competition in the HHG subculture and promoting private HHG enterprises that range from gallery shows and HHG sign/mural painting businesses to HHG t-shirt and clothing designers (Castleman, 1982; Gablik, 1982; Chalfant and Prigoff, 1987; Ghetto Art, 1988; Lachmann, 1988; Troutt, 1988; United Press Inter-
national, 1988; *Western Report*, 1988; Brewer, 1989; Merina, 1989). As with legal walls, all of these additional alternative strategies must be implemented comprehensively to control illegal HHG.

In conclusion, all strategies that foster legal HHG should be culturally tailored to writers' social organization and two most primary values, fame and artistic expression. Legal HHG programs not only provide youth new opportunities, but also have the potential to be cost-effective alternatives to traditional anti-graffiti programs.

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