Perceptions of Graffiti in Ottawa: An Ethnographic Study of an Urban Landscape

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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An Ethnographic Study of an Urban Landscape”**

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis investigates and interrogates the different discourses that are constructed around “graffiti.” Based on fieldwork located in the capital region of Ottawa, it identifies two communities that are responsible for separate discourses surrounding the subject. These communities are described as the *community of creators* consisting of graffiti writers; and the *community of control* made up of participants in the graffiti debate who wish to eradicate graffiti from the city. This ethnographic study seeks to uncover how different communities conceptualise the presence of graffiti in the space of the urban landscape. Concerned with the power relations involved in the political and ideological struggle of graffiti, it will discuss the emergence and enactment of a dominant discourse of graffiti as deviant and dirty and suggest the existence of a subculture of graffiti writers that contests the exclusionary aesthetic of the municipal/national image.

This thesis is dedicated to Natalie Luckyj (1945-2002) and Georgian Parkes:

Two women who have greatly affected my life.

You are both an endless source of inspiration.

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Introduction

Over the course of the last twenty years, the subject of graffiti has raised some very complex and contrasting issues in cities across the world. Graffiti's presence has made its way from the inner city subway of New York City to the divisive structure of the Berlin Wall. It has become a phenomenon of urban culture whose production is an outlet for political dissent, social commentary, romantic sentiment and decorative art. The creators of graffiti are just as varied as the messages they wish to communicate. Their audience is a diverse cross-section of society who have become accustomed to travelling in cities with coloured walls.

From New York to Amsterdam, to Paris and Japan, graffiti has been treated by many as a symptom of urban existence and, as a result, has been transformed from the street into a variety of institutional frameworks. As a result of its examination within different disciplines, in conjunction with its widespread presence around the world, graffiti has become a vernacular term in western contemporary culture. As sociologist Jane Gadsby explains in The Taxonomy of Graffiti Texts (1995), the terminology utilised to study graffiti is "imprecise" and the term graffiti has come to mean "all wall writings, pictures, markings on any kind of surface for whatever reasons"(2).

For the purpose of this thesis, graffiti is understood as the drawings and markings created in the style associated with spray-can images, which evolved from the New York style of graffiti of the 1970s. This graffiti takes place in the public space of the city street and is generally created by young people who identify themselves as 'writers.' My thesis does not focus on other forms of graffiti often referred to as Latrinalia: bathroom graffiti; freight art: freight train graffiti; or political or hate graffiti. In excluding these forms I am

not dismissing their suitability for academic study. Rather, it is their immense potential for study that has forced me to limit my thesis to the style mentioned above.

Through its physical location, graffiti has the capacity to enter into the shared spaces of the city street. As a result, graffiti of the city street has the ability to instigate an unsolicited, personal response from the viewer. Historically, variations of this response have become the basis through which graffiti has been interpolated into varying academic discourses. As a result, graffiti has typically become the assumed enemy of the state or the friend of the art critic. Graffiti is interpreted as either a positive or negative indicator of urban culture. However, very little consideration has been given to examining the variety of perceptions that graffiti elicits from individuals involved in its production and management.

The goal of this thesis is not to add to the existing body of literature and knowledge that compartmentalises graffiti one way or the other as art or crime (see Castellon: 1978; Cooper and Chalfant: 1984; Ferrell: 1993). This thesis does not address the issue of whether graffiti is morally or ethically justifiable. I do not seek to label graffiti. Instead, I have investigated examples of social behaviour and organisation based on varying perceptions and ideals while at the same time considering their existence as diverse structures and qualities of the urban landscape.

In their study of graffiti entitled The Handwriting on the Wall: Toward a Sociology and Psychology of Graffiti (1977), social psychologists Able and Buckley have noted the arbitrary nature of conclusions drawn from previous studies of graffiti. For example, they cite J. Lindsay's study The Writing on the Wall: An Account of Pompeii in its Last Days (1960). Lindsay claims that his "genuine record" of the "characters and

private lives, everyday concerns of the people who inhabited the streets” of Pompeii was made available through his study of graffiti from that region. Able and Buckley suggest that in the same way that artefacts are studied by archaeologists, the graffiti scholar should relate his or her artefacts to other contemporary evidence thereby placing his or her “fragmented objects into a meaningful context with respect to the society and the events he or she is studying” (1977: 4). Although I will not analyse the text or message of the written word of graffiti as artefact in this thesis, I agree with Able and Buckley regarding the potential usefulness of graffiti in providing insights into the workings of contemporary society. This thesis will investigate the existence of graffiti in the urban space not only as the expression of a marginal group but in a more comprehensive manner, suggesting that perceptions of graffiti can provide insights into the preoccupations of the dominant society.

The goal of this thesis is to investigate graffiti in one particular Canadian location. The location I have selected is Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. I have selected Ottawa for a number of reasons. Firstly, Ottawa has been my home for the last six years, during which time I have noted an increased presence of graffiti in the downtown core. Secondly, Ottawa is the capital of Canada, and I will argue that, as a result, a considerable emphasis is placed on the maintenance of a particular image for the city. Thirdly, and most importantly to Canadian Studies, the study of graffiti has traditionally been undertaken in the United States with very little attention directed at Canadian graffiti. That said, my thesis should not be applied to other urban centres in Canada. Rather, this thesis will act to encourage further investigation of different types of graffiti in Ottawa, as well as the study of graffiti throughout Canada.

Through ethnographic study in the Ottawa region, my aim is to identify particular perceptions of graffiti that are expressed in contrasting discourses surrounding the subject. In order to identify these perceptions and their associated discourses, I have conducted interviews with members of two distinct groups of people who are participants in a growing public debate about graffiti in the capital region of Ottawa. From August to December 2001 informal interviews were conducted in various locations across the city. These interviews were governed by the standards approved by the Ethics Committee of Carleton University in July 2001.¹ The first of these groups interviewed includes city employees, councilmen as well as concerned citizens who form the basis of what I am calling the 'community of control.'² I identified members of this group through their active participation in the public debate on graffiti. The interview process began with telephone communication, which was followed by meetings to discuss and record their positions and perspectives of graffiti in Ottawa. As we shall see, the members of this group share a conceptualisation of graffiti that is expressed through what I am calling the 'official discourse' on graffiti.

In contrast to this discourse is the perspective on graffiti expressed by graffiti writers in the region. I made contact with the graffiti writers by way of word of mouth and arranged informal interviews to take place in a variety of public places. These informal interviews were conducted within three to four hours with follow up conversations taking place over the telephone or again in person. I have termed their conceptualisation the 'graffiti discourse,' and I call this group the 'community of

¹ Please see Appendix I for example of the consent forms that were signed by each informant.

creators.’ Fieldwork has revealed evidence of the polarities of perception that exist regarding the cultural production of graffiti in Ottawa. This thesis will present and analyse the findings that emerged through the identification and analysis of these discourses as they are deployed with regard to the urban landscape of Ottawa.

While ethnography is the method adopted for presenting or re-presenting graffiti in Ottawa, I have not selected this method without consideration of its limitations. One may only write ethnography with a certain element of authority which acts to legitimise the author’s or ethnographers ability and/or informed position. However, it is in the process of writing in conjunction with this ascribed authority that the limitations of ethnography become known.

While discussing the process of writing that enmeshes an ethnography, James Clifford explains that “this writing includes, minimally, a transition of experience into textual form” (Clifford, 1988: 25). He claims that this transition or “textualisation” results in some fictional relocation of events, rituals and actors (Clifford, 1988: 39). While recording and presenting the events, rituals and actors of this study on graffiti in Ottawa, I am aware that interpretation is taking place. As Clifford states: “no sovereign scientific method or ethical stance can guarantee” the truthful presentation of “different peoples concrete images of one another” (Clifford, 1988: 23). However, this constituted textualisation of interpretation is not based on the traditional exclusion of dialogue. Rather I have attempted to mesh my interpretative authority with that of the dialogue of both the community of control and creators, thereby retaining to the largest extent

² In regard to the community of control, I am making reference to the authority or the potential ability to exert authority that is characteristic of their positions in the city.

possible the discursive occasions from which it emerges. If ethnography is the interpretative representation of cultures, I have undertaken this study aware of the limitations of this “unruly textual process” (Clifford, 1988: 54).

Having uncovered the two contrasting discourses, my thesis illustrates the variation that appears in the perceptions of one group versus the other regarding graffiti in the urban environment of Ottawa. In this way, the substantial differences and contradictions that exist between the official discourse and the graffiti discourse become evident. This thesis will illustrate that within the official discourse, graffiti is perceived as a negative and problematic element of the city. I believe that issues particular to the City of Ottawa compound this perception of graffiti.

The long-standing image of the City of Ottawa has been aligned with a bureaucratic view of the capital of Canada. Clean, orderly, and safe, the capital is a favourite destination of business travellers and tourists alike and is often seen by the rest of Canada as a orderly, pretty, government town guided by the patriarchal tradition of the federal government. This widespread image of the City of Ottawa is one that therefore parallels its image as the nation’s capital. For example, we can see this in the case of the capital region’s municipal logo of “Clean and Green and Proud,” whereby fundamental elements of the national image are embraced as the defining elements of the city’s municipal image. The City of Ottawa has clearly appropriated what I call ‘a privileged urban aesthetic.’

But while the City of Ottawa identifies with this privileged urban aesthetic of the clean and safe capital of Canada, its visual manifestations of graffiti are clearly not consistent with this aesthetic. Rather, the presence of graffiti is seen as unnatural and

threatening to the community of control. The resulting power struggle over what is legitimate for Ottawa's urban landscape fundamentally revolves around what urban anthropologist John Rennie Short refers to as "the meaning of the city: what it represents, what it could represent and what it should represent" (Short, 1996: 390). I am arguing here that graffiti and its associated discourses are sites of political and ideological struggle. I would now like to clarify the use and meaning of the terms "discourse" and "ideology" as I use them in this thesis.

An often over-used and misunderstood term, discourse will be understood for the purpose of this thesis as a way of representing particular knowledge in a specific historical period of time. Discourse acts to define reality in a particular way for particular groups of people. As Stuart Hall states in Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, "discourse defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others" (Hall et al., 2000: 44). Discourse then includes and excludes particular ways of constructing knowledge and therefore affects the way individuals conduct themselves in relation to a topic. Embedded in institutions and established social practices, discourses are thereby given power and legitimacy. Both the production of graffiti and its management and control are social practices manifested in institutions that act to legitimise the appropriate discourse. As Foucault argued, institutional apparatuses "consist in strategies of relations of force supporting and supported types of knowledge" (1980: 196). Discourse is therefore exercised power. The nature of the power that is associated with discourse lies in the relationship that it holds with knowledge. Power,

when linked with knowledge, has the ability of making itself seem true (Hall et al, 2000: 49). It would follow that the naturalisation of the knowledge made available through the institutional apparatuses further legitimates the discourse.

Graffiti as the site of political and ideological struggle suggests either the existence of two ideologies that are in conflict with each other or a single dominant ideology that is not supported by a particular group thereby making them subordinate to the dominant ideology. For the purpose of this thesis, the notion of ideology will be understood as a system of values and beliefs that is used by a particular group or class of people in order to make sense of the world. Through the process of naturalisation, the ideology of one group becomes understood as the lived reality, which like discourse, gains legitimacy in social and institutional apparatuses. Althusser argued that “ideology represents the imaginary relationships of individuals to their conditions of existence” (Althusser, 1971: 162). Ideology is therefore the “necessary representational means through which we come to experience and make sense of reality” (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001: 52). By establishing social norms and codes of behaviour as social apparatuses, both the community of creators and the community of control are able to achieve ideological ends, which in the case of Ottawa, leads either to the propagation of graffiti or its removal from the city street.

To contrast the value and perceived identity of graffiti within the official discourse, I will argue that the creators of graffiti in Ottawa are an organised community of cultural producers whose relationship/existence and cultural productions are governed by rules and etiquette that help to unite the writers and solidify particular values and beliefs. Through the use of language and understanding of their culture, the ‘graffiti

discourse' of the community of creators exists as an alternative perspective that challenges the 'fixed' or 'truthful' nature of graffiti as perceived by the official discourse. Graffiti in this case is understood as an inherent element of the urban landscape.

Following this introduction, a literature review will present an overview of the various approaches from a variety of disciplines discussing graffiti. Academically, graffiti has been discussed and analyzed by different disciplines including sociology, art history, geography and criminology. The number of disciplines that have demonstrated an interest in graffiti led sociologist Jane Gadsby to create a taxonomy of approaches designed to aid other researchers in uncovering relevant information. While writing her Master's thesis on Latrinalia at York University, Gadsby identified nine different methodological approaches to the study of graffiti. These approaches are the following: Cultural, Gendered, Linguistic, Folkloric, Quantitative, Aesthetic, Motivational, Preventative and Popularisation (1995). Gadsby explains that the majority of literature on graffiti makes arbitrary and subjective conclusions, and therefore should not be applied to situations beyond their limited field and purpose of examination (Gadsby, 1995). My approach varies from those reviewed in Chapter One in that my analysis is specific to the power relations in one Canadian city in a specific period of time and therefore sheds light on one experience of graffiti in Canada. It is through this ethnographic study of street graffiti in a particular Canadian city that I am able to engage with two separate communities party to the debate over graffiti, and move toward an analysis that will demonstrate that what is operating in both situations is a discourse on graffiti.

Unlike the majority of writings on the subject of graffiti, the point of my thesis is not to situate the cultural production of graffiti into a pre-existing, academic model in

order to better ‘explain,’ ‘deal with’ or ‘manage’ the phenomenon. Further, a number of writings on graffiti are designed to act as a model to be appropriated by various authority figures that seek to eradicate graffiti from their city (see Coffield: 1991, Ferrell: 1993 and Whitford: 1992). In essence, to approach the study of graffiti in this manner is to try to discover the motivation behind the cultural expression for the sole purpose of designing a more pertinent and successful plan of eradication. One may argue that this type of analysis only acts to naturalise the perception that graffiti is a societal problem that needs to be solved. By approaching the subject in this way, the authors of such analyses are accepting the inevitability or truthful nature of a particular discourse.

I am not concerned with ‘solving’ the ‘problem’ of graffiti, for I do not approach this subject of study with an acceptance of this ‘commonsense’ or popular view. The understanding of one writer or community of writers is not accepted as being applicable to all graffiti production. For this reason, I have not approached this subject from the also popular ‘motivational’ methodology which suggests that what motivates one graffiti writer to produce graffiti is the same for most or all graffiti writers (see Able and Buckley: 1977; Blume: 1985; Reisner: 1971).³ Instead, through ethnographic study, my aim has been to identify particular perceptions of graffiti that are expressed in contrasting discourses surrounding the subject for those within the debate. I will examine these naturalised discourses and explicate their positions within the capital of Canada. In doing so, I hope to illustrate that contradictions exist and that truth is in fact contingent. As Janet Wolff states: “to demonstrate the origins of a judgement is not to comment on its truth” (1993, 17). By uncovering what the people behind the spray-paint believe they are

doing, and the perspective of those in the city who claim to be its victims, I believe that the picture of graffiti will be more wholly presented than in most writings on the subject.

A short chapter will follow the literature review. The purpose of this chapter is to ensure clarity of terms and expressions that are used throughout this thesis. This chapter of terms is derived from fieldwork and identifies and defines the language of the restrictive discourse of graffiti writers.

Chapter Three introduces the community of creators and their ‘graffiti discourse.’ This chapter presents the discourse on graffiti through the words of the graffiti writers themselves. Informed by the language and knowledge of graffiti writers, this chapter offers insights into graffiti from within the often secretive and anonymous community of writers. This perspective of graffiti exposes the writers’ understanding of the culture. This chapter presents the graffiti writers’ perception of graffiti, a discussion of their values and norms, their categorisation of style, and the organisation of their community. This chapter illustrates what graffiti writers believe to be true of graffiti and the city in which they create it. The insights that are offered through this perspective are imperative to the analysis of both perceptions that follow.

In Chapter Four I present the official perception of graffiti as it is held by the community of control. Informed by the perspectives of the police, the mainstream media, individuals of municipal authority and concerned citizens, this community of like-minded individuals fosters parallel understandings of the motivations that drive the graffiti writers, a conception of the categories of graffiti, as well as a strategy for solving the ‘problem of graffiti’ and opinions on its removal. Collectively, this community is able to

³ Motivational is one of Jane Gadsby’s nine methodological approaches used in the study of graffiti.

transform their perception of graffiti into an informed ideology. Informed by the official view of the community of control this ideology may be put forward as the dominant ideology.

Having identified the communities, their perceptions and the resulting discourses surrounding graffiti, the last two chapters are dedicated to the analysis of both communities, their perceptions and the associated discourses that exist in the social space of the city. In Chapter Five, I will argue that graffiti writers in Ottawa recognise themselves as a culture or society with rules and boundaries that govern their community. I have examined the identity of the community of creators as well as their aesthetic and behavioural rules and this examination suggests that they possess values and understandings that are not widely shared by individuals or groups outside their community. I will argue that graffiti writers in Ottawa are a youth subculture, as the concept of subculture has been conceptualised in cultural studies (see Hebdige: 1979; Hall and Jefferson: 1976; Thornton: 1997). The resistance of the subculture of graffiti writers in Ottawa lies in their ritual production of graffiti, as it has become associated with freedom of persons within the community. The subculture of graffiti is an example of contemporary youth subculture. As a result, I have extended the limitations of traditional subcultural theory in order to better understand graffiti in this light.

To contrast the organised structure of the graffiti subculture of Chapter Five, Chapter Six is dedicated to an analysis of the official discourse of graffiti. Drawing on theories of hegemony, Howard Becker's work on deviance and Mary Douglas' analysis of pollution, I will argue that the community of control believes that graffiti threatens their ideal of the privileged urban aesthetic that has become fundamental to their relation

to and identification of place. In an effort to combat the production and tolerance of graffiti in Ottawa, members of this group have responded by promoting an official discourse that perceives graffiti as an indication of danger and a form of pollution. The notion of graffiti as a negative element in the city of Ottawa is furthered by the naturalisation and normalisation of the ideology. This naturalisation is entrenched by some of the strategies and solutions proposed through the official discourse that are clear examples of the exercise of hegemony.

The concept of hegemony is only able to operate when “a fundamental class is able to establish its leadership as distinct from the more coercive forms of domination” (Bennett et al., 1981: 87). The idea of cultural domination or cultural leadership can only be achieved through the consent of the individuals that will ultimately be subordinated (Bennett et al., 1981: 187). That is to say, hegemonic ideology must be adopted by the public at large. They are convinced that their interests will in fact be served through the acceptance of the popular or commonsense beliefs offered up or suggested by the hegemonic ideology of the dominant group. Integral to Gramsci’s theory of the concept of hegemony is the idea of negotiation with opposing groups that result in some form of genuine accommodation. Using the theory of hegemony, I am able to consider the nature of the image of the City of Ottawa as it is understood by the community of control. This theory also provides the means to analyse the method or process through which the community of control is able to convince others to share this image, and how the dominant group accommodates graffiti writers within this ideology.

By applying these theories to different views of graffiti, I am not attempting to identify a ‘real’ or ‘true’ view of graffiti in Ottawa. Instead, I present an informed

discussion of the production and management of graffiti as it exists and is understood by those individuals and communities involved. My framework takes into account the individual quality of perception and is based upon a persistent belief in the contingent character of truth. A final chapter will conclude the thesis by offering a brief summary of my conclusions and point toward directions for future research.

Chapter One: The History of Graffiti and its Study

The form of graffiti addressed in this thesis emerged from the ‘writings’ of inner city youth from New York City in the late 1970s. However, graffiti, in its literal sense, has a much longer history than the American cultural productions of the Cold War era. The Oxford English Dictionary defines graffiti, the plural for graffito, as “the drawings or writing scratched on a wall or surface”(1989: 732). In this definition, many scholars have attributed the origins of graffiti to the Greek and Roman empires whose widespread educated majority possessed the ability to write and the desire to leave their mark on society. Obscene and political comments line the ruins of Egyptian monuments, while across the sea, phrases found in the Tower of London preserve the last words and thoughts of kings, queens, scholars and criminals while they awaited their death (Abel and Buckley, 1977: 5). Regardless of the variations of age and place, the origins of graffiti date far back into past civilisations. As long as humankind has been able to express itself, it has chosen to do so on the doors, floors and walls of our surroundings.

In 1731, Hurlo Thrunbo of London published the first book devoted to the study of graffiti (Columbo, 1983: 6). However, it is generally held that the study of twentieth century graffiti can be traced back to Lexical Evidence from Folk Epigraph in Western North America: A Glossarial Study of the Low Element in the English Vocabulary published in 1935 by Allen Walker Read (Columbo, 1983: 6).¹ Motivated by observations made on a holiday through the western United States and Canada, Read, a professor of English at Columbia University, believed the examples of bathroom graffiti

¹ An epigraph is an inscription found on a building or statue. Epigraphy is the study or science of inscriptions. In this case, Read’s folk epigraphy was the study of markings created by people in general.

that he noted “were a form of folklore that should be made subject of scholarly study” (Abel and Buckley, 1977: 8).

Read’s interest in the American use of the English language led him to copy the words and sayings he found in bathrooms throughout his journey. He created a glossary of terms in the hope that “the inscriptions [would] be found serviceable to folk-lorists, psychologist and sociologists” (Able and Buckley, 1977: 8). Read treated the often sexual and crude messages as data for a linguistic study comparing the literal meaning of the words and terms used in the graffiti, for instance, “son of a bitch,” to the their use and intended meaning in the toilets. Read’s gathering of messages left inside the stalls of bathrooms has led to numerous studies of gendered graffiti in this context.²

As graffiti began to spread and change location, individuals from numerous disciplines found particular types of graffiti the worthy subject of scholarly examination. Graffiti, as it is understood in this thesis, can be treated as a global phenomenon; however, its origins can be traced back to the isolated emergence of street graffiti in New York City in the early 1970s. A large body of scholarly study has focused solely on the examination of this particular type of graffiti which varies greatly from latrinalia, hate or political graffiti. I will now discuss the history of the study of *street graffiti*.³

The Emergence of Graffiti:

² See Gadsby, Jane. 1996. “To my Fellow Sisters: Discourses on the Washroom Walls” Canadian Folklore 18 (1): 27-48.

New York graffiti production is said to begin with a Washington Heights resident named Demetrius who wrote his nickname Taki followed by his street number, 183, on the surface of buildings throughout his neighbourhood (Castleman, 1992: 55). Early works on the study of this type of graffiti implied that for Taki 183, the initial name writings were motivated by the need to identify himself within the often-anonymous city. Sociologists Herbert Kohl and James Hilton claim that Taki was able to do this by creating boundaries of his own existence within and around his neighbourhood. These boundaries were marked by his name plastered on shops, public monuments and gathering stoops (Kohl and Hilton, 1973: 55). Although his identity remained largely unknown, Taki 183 soon became a household name and the inspiration for thousands of youth across the city.

As a result of the investigative work of a New York Times reporter, the identity of the mysterious Taki 183 was revealed in 1971. In the article, Taki was represented as an “engaging character with a unique and fascinating hobby” (Castleman, 1982: 135). Once the young people of New York realised that Taki 183 was the name of a local boy, they were impressed by the potential notoriety that each of their names possessed. As photographers Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant argue in their photographic essay Subway Art (1984), this awareness in conjunction with the simultaneous introduction of permanent markers and aerosol paint gave birth to contemporary graffiti (Cooper and Chalfant, 1984:14).

³ Please refer to the chronology table of Appendix II.

During the development of graffiti in New York, media of all types were drawn to the subject. In the 1970s, newspapers treated graffiti as a new trend in urban culture, which some scholars claim played a significant role in the copycat effect of graffiti production that spread through the city. City University professor George Jochnowitz held the New York Times partly responsible for the proliferation of graffiti. He stated that “on July 21, 1971 an interview with Taki 183, a previously unknown graffiti dauber, appeared...the glorification of this vandal by the nation’s most prestigious newspaper was not without effect. Within months a minor problem was a major one” (Jochnowitz in Castleman, 1982: 146). As a result of similar accusations, the media dropped the subject of graffiti despite the continued increase of graffiti on the walls and subways of the city. After a turbulent year had passed, the media picked up the graffiti story again, but this time favouring harsh measures of eradication thereby influencing the anti-graffiti policy adopted by the city.

At the same time that graffiti writers were becoming familiar with the anti-graffiti measures of city officials, scholars were becoming knowledgeable about the creators of graffiti as well as the motivations for its production. In 1973, Herbert Kohl and James Hilton published Golden Boy as Anthony Cool, in which they shared their first-hand experiences with creators of graffiti. With their writing intermingled with photographic essays, Kohl and Hilton argued that New York graffiti was evidence of a “vibrant youth culture”(1973: 17) that shed light on the way in which young people “come to terms with the anonymous cities they are forced to inhabit” (1973: 55).

Surprisingly, Kohl and Hilton made reference to the variety of different economic backgrounds of the graffiti writers at a time when it was generally believed that graffiti

was practised only by inner-city or 'ghetto kids.' For example, Able and Buckley, in their book The Handwriting on the Wall (1977), speculated that the motivation for leaving one's mark via graffiti "[was] primarily the pre-occupation of adolescents belonging to the lower socio-economic classes" (1977: 16). They concluded by stating that public graffiti was rarely found in middle to upper-class neighbourhoods (1977:16). I would argue that Able and Buckley mistakenly concluded that because graffiti was not prevalent in middle-class neighbourhoods at that time, middle-class kids were not creating it.

Kohl and Hilton, on the other hand, argued that middle-class kids, as well as kids from impoverished families, created graffiti because they felt similarly isolated in their surroundings (1977: 20). To explain the absence of graffiti in middle-class neighbourhoods they argued that in areas of affluence, personal possessions replaced the walls of the ghetto as centres for identification (1977: 41). Middle-class kids would travel outside their affluent world in search of a meaningful identity, while 'ghetto kids' conducted the same search only within the boundaries of their own neighbourhood. By marking out the street, both classes of youth were staking claim to an identity within the boundaries of the city: one group created graffiti to compensate for a lack of identifying possessions, the other to compensate for an abundance of them.

Both of these early writings (Golden Boy as Anthony Cool (1973) and The Handwriting on the Wall (1977)) challenged the rising condemnation of graffiti. They expressed concern that society was unaware of the potential of graffiti in unveiling the truth about contemporary society. Kohl and Hilton explained that graffiti illustrates that "our society is in despair and people living within it, divided" (1973: 46). Furthermore,

in justification of the study of graffiti, The Handwriting on the Wall (1977) commented on the contradiction that surrounded New York's treatment of graffiti:

If art and literature of a particular culture are often examined for insights into the pre-occupations of the best minds of that society, should not graffiti be given the same consideration? . . . Does a drawing have to be plastered on canvas or a statement printed on a page to qualify for such analysis? . . . Do we stop trying to figure out what motivated the artist or the writer merely because he chose to express his thoughts through some unconventional medium? (1977:14)

Although directed by very different approaches, it is most important to note that in the case of both early works, especially Golden Boy as Anthony Cool (1973), graffiti was taken seriously as a form of expression rather than dismissed as reckless vandalism. Both books treat the subject of graffiti as an example of social expression rather than the by-product of a "miserable subculture."⁴

The Evolution of Style

As more and more youth in and around Manhattan began to replicate Taki 183's method of expression, the distinguishing characteristic of the typically printed name was no longer enough to differentiate one writer from another. Therefore, the importance of style soon became the primary concern of New York graffiti writers. By illustrating a "good sense of design and a facility with the use of spray paint, a writer [could] win the esteem of other writers and even that of some members of the public" (Castleman, 1982: 20). Competition for recognition from the developing community of writers resulted in the swift expansion of graffiti style.

⁴ New York City officials commonly thought of graffiti in these terms. Style Wars, 1982.

In 1982 former New York graffiti writer Craig Castleman wrote a definitive text on graffiti. Through the words of participants, Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York (1982) took on the task of explaining the graffiti movement. The author obtained the majority of his information from tape-recorded interviews with those individuals involved in the creation of graffiti in New York. While also providing a historical overview of the response by city council and the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), the end result is a text that is extremely informative although relatively descriptive.⁵

Craig Castleman placed a large emphasis on style in his book Getting Up (1982), explaining that graffiti production by the early 1980s was no longer only a spontaneous act. Rather, the importance placed on style, form and execution forced writers to practice their designs in sketchbooks and note pads before they turned to the subway. The author explained the “seven basic forms of graffiti” in ascending order of complexity. In doing so, Castleman documented for the first time the evolution and skill that is required in the production of graffiti (1982: 26). Castleman lists Tags, Throw ups, Pieces, Top to Bottoms, Ends to Ends, Whole Cars and Whole Trains. Most of these forms of graffiti are specific to New York subway graffiti, although I will make reference to some of these forms in my examination of graffiti in Ottawa and will define them in the following chapter.

Getting Up (1982) also made clear that the desired audience of the graffiti produced on the subway train was the general public; however, assessment and meaningful judgement of the work could only be made by other graffiti writers: they were the critics of each other’s work. Castleman explained, “they look[ed] for originality

of design, smooth integration or ‘flow’, brightness of color, smoothness of paint, sharpness, effective use of color” (1982: 25). Graffiti writers were an organized group of dedicated youth that took pride in ‘getting up’ and seeking the fame that came with positive peer-assessment of their work.

The Importance of the Name

As style increased the competition between writers, the name chosen and reproduced by the graffiti writer increased in importance as well. Most often, the name chosen was a nickname or street name that the writer was given by his or her peers. Due to time limitation, which is inherent to the production of street or subway graffiti, the majority of names selected by New York writers were limited to five letters or less (Castleman, 1982: 75).

For graffiti writers, the selection of a name was based on the aesthetic potential of the letters when on display. Craig Castleman explained that “when a graffiti writer chooses a name, a great deal of emphasis [was] placed on picking a name that ‘pieced good’” (1982: 75). Aesthetically pleasing letter formation and patterns partnered with the masterful execution of style could result in the notoriety and fame each writer worked hard for. Their name was the medium through which ‘style wars’ could be waged.

Scholars have treated the selection and use of a name as essential in the quest for identity that they claim surrounds the production of graffiti. For example, the early work of Herbert Kohl and James Hilton suggested that the absence of the family name from the graffiti movement was an indication of the “breakdown of the family loyalties many

⁵ The MTA is a state agency that manages New York City’s public transportation system.

youth within urban ghettos may experience on the streets” (1973: 124). In Golden Boy as Anthony Cool (1973), the authors believed that in a society where one’s social existence begins only when named, “to be re-named is to be re-born into the larger social context” (1973: 56). In this sense, the street name became an extension of the teenager’s identity.

Writers themselves were also aware of the importance of their name to their identity. As New York graffiti writer Wicked Gary explained to his interviewer:

A lot of people found . . . security and comfort when dealing with their name. It was strengthening who they were to themselves . . . Writing your name identifies who you are. The more you write your name, the more you begin to think about and the more you begin to be about who you are. Once you start doing that, you start to assert your individuality, and when you start doing that, you have an identity. (Castleman, 1982:76)

I would argue that the identity that resides in a graffiti name is twofold: one aspect of this identity is the writer’s perception that by producing a graffiti name, he or she became a member of the graffiti community. The other element of identity created by the production of the graffiti name is the general association of a particular person with a corresponding level of skill in design, as illustrated through their work. Through the use of his or her graffiti name, the writer is known by the community; his or her critics who will “sit in ultimate judgement of his accomplishments” (Abel and Buckley, 1977: 140).

Getting Up (1982) presents graffiti writers as an organized network of individuals. Castleman was able to argue this position by presenting the writer’s own perception of himself or herself. Prior to this book, graffiti was generally treated by academics as a form of expression limited to youth that randomly participated in the act of making

graffiti.⁶ However, informed by the perspective of the writers themselves, Castleman shows that graffiti writers were a united, organized group of producers who shared more in common with each other than anyone else. He explained that all writers shared an interest in the lore, language and techniques of graffiti and were distinct from other teenagers in the city:

Although they have much in common with other city kids, graffiti writers as a community are more remarkable for their differences. In a much fragmented city, writers are among the few young people to reach beyond the boundary of their own neighborhoods and travel throughout the city, meeting and getting to know young people from other boroughs and a variety of ethnic and economic groups. (Castleman, 1982: 71)

The writers were considered a community whose social organisation was finally noted as an important factor in the evolution of graffiti.

The Subway

Just as the increased number of writers forced the aesthetic importance of graffiti style to the fore, increased competition within communities of writers led to the expansion of size and colour used when ‘getting up.’ Writers began experimenting with the size of the graffiti, which resulted in a desire for new and creative settings that would provide the perfect backdrop for their work. The moving canvas of the subway soon became the location of choice for many writers.

Not only did the writers use the New York subway as a method of transportation which by default made it a likely ‘target.’ The potential for exposure attracted the growing ‘graffiti competition’ to the underground. The subway served “as a type of

⁶ The random act of graffiti was treated either as vandalism or as the expression of urban street kids.

communication network, allowing them to expand their audience, broaden fame and solicit competition from outside the neighbourhood” (Powers, 1996: 4). The New York subway facilitated the expansion of graffiti thereby increasing the rate of creative competition and production.

Through the format of a name, on and in the subway, the competition of style and form was again greatly affected by technology. Just as tagging styles changed with the introduction of aerosol spray paint, the invention of the ‘fat cap’ had a tremendous effect on the evolution of the style and form of graffiti writing. Emerging in 1972 through a writer named Super Kool, ‘fat cap’ was born by the replacement of the narrow-dispersion cap of a spray paint can with “the wide spraying top of a spray foam or spray starch can” (Castleman, 1982: 55). The broad and sweeping style of the graffiti produced using the fat cap, which covered larger surface areas, bore the first ‘masterpiece’ of graffiti in the 221st street train yard and with it a corresponding rise in the status of capable graffiti masters (Castleman, 1982: 56).

The Competition

‘Bubble letters’, ‘wild-style’ and ‘computer text,’ examples of styles of graffiti, became so widely practised that fame was a condition known only to those writers willing to challenge their safety and skill by ‘getting up’ in the most visible or dangerous places. Visibility often meant increasing the size of the design, which in conjunction with the limitations some writers felt with writing only below the windows of the subway cars, led to the expansion of their writing upwards to Top-to-Bottom: writing their name from the very top of the train all the way to the bottom; and length-wise: End-to-Ends

(Castleman, 1982:57). On the night of July 4th, 1976, Caine, Mad 103, and Flame One painted the first whole car in the number seven train yard (Castleman, 1982: 36). Risking walking into walls, falling into pits, getting shocked by the third rail, or being hit by a train, writers pushed the size, skill and design of graffiti for the sole purpose of becoming king or queen of the line or even the city.⁷ Graffiti was becoming a highly stylised, identifiable form of expression that was spreading throughout New York.

By the mid 1980s, as masters of the trade competed with each other in the creative replication of style, they also began to assist those writers who were just beginning their graffiti careers. The apprentice/mentor relationship that developed within the New York graffiti scene was a mutually beneficial one: the mentor would feel validated by the position of authority that he or she possessed over the apprentice, while the student gained insight into graffiti skill and design from the knowledge shared by the experienced master. This socialisation of graffiti solidified the production of graffiti by a group of writers. Although travelling in groups, writers generally wrote individually, constantly striving to 'get up' for each other.

The book Subway Art (1984), currently viewed by writers around the world as the 'bible' of graffiti books, criticized the official dismissal of graffiti as vandalism. Photographers and authors Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant approached the production of 'tags,' 'throw ups' and 'pieces' as the cultural production of artistic expression. Unlike Castleman, Cooper and Chalfant made specific reference to the images produced, discussing the aesthetics of subway/street graffiti.

⁷ The third rail is the exposed train track through which high voltages of electricity are constantly running.

The authors claim that by 1984, graffiti “ha[d] already acquired a tradition,” one that limited the up-and-coming graffiti artist to the established forms and conventions of the trade (Cooper and Chalfant, 1984: 17). They claimed that the “aesthetic parameters within which he would work for the next few years as a practicing graffiti artist were fairly narrow” (Cooper and Chalfant, 1984: 18). Due to the competitiveness of the community, other writers quickly adopted any new styles or innovations of design. Therefore, Subway Art (1984) made note of the shared aesthetic of graffiti and argued that it may in fact limit the creativity of the form that was previously thought of as infinite in its potential. Through its glossy photographs, Subway Art (1984) categorized the stylistically limited aesthetic of subway art. In doing so, the book has become a “manual of style for aspiring writers outside of New York” (Ferrell, 1993:10).

The New York Response

The response to graffiti in New York was varied; however, for the purpose of review, I will discuss three different although equally dominant reactions that emerged from three separate communities in the city: the hip hop response; the official response of the city and the MTA; and the cultural response of the New York City art market.

First, an emerging urban subculture of music makers and dancers adapted the visual form of graffiti. The subculture of hip-hop began with the musical production of DJs like Grandmaster Flash, the Grand Wizzard and Kool Herc, who produced a new form of music by “reworking old sounds on their portable turntables . . . and manipulating the record back and forth” which created a sort of “scratching” effect that “accentuated the mixed beat of the music” (Ferrell, 1993: 6). The “front man” to the

breaks of the DJ is the MC (or emcee) who entertains the crowd with a style of verbal expression called rap (Ferrell, 1993: 6). The musical composition of the DJ, along with the MC's spouting of urban poetry, is complemented by the choreographed dance of the "break dancers" who, like the graffiti writers, would organise themselves into 'crews' to facilitate group competition (Ferrell, 1993:6). Along with DJing, MCing and break dancing, graffiti has become the fourth and final element of the hip-hop subculture.

Many aspects of hip-hop music are based on the borrowing or 'sampling' of lyrics, sounds and style from other creative expressions. Since, as we have seen, the aesthetic of graffiti is based primarily on the replication of a particular graffiti style, the sampling aspect of hip-hop culture easily transferred onto the visual expression of graffiti. By the mid 1970s, graffiti had become the "written word of rap" (Style Wars, 1982). The development of hip-hop culture in New York City helped to amplify the importance of urban style thereby directly contributing to the popularity of graffiti.

To contrast the coalescence that graffiti was experiencing with other complementary forms of urban expression, I would now like to discuss the second reaction or response that graffiti evoked within the city of New York. Graffiti was perceived by city officials and the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) as a "quality of life offence" similar to that of purse grabbing or pick pocketing (Style Wars, 1982). The rapid increase in the production of graffiti fuelled by the competition for fame was equated by some as a loss of police authority and control. The result was a portion of the public who felt that graffiti represented a threat to their security and a majority of city officials who were willing to implement new policies to cope with the 'graffiti problem.'

In the spring of 1972, newly elected Mayor of New York John V. Lindsay confirmed the rumours that the city had declared a war on graffiti. Later that year, he announced the creation of the Graffiti Task Force that would be responsible for the enforcement of the new graffiti bill, which was passed unanimously by city council on October 11, 1972 (Castleman, 1982:138). The bill introduced harsh controls on the sale and personal possession of spray paint and recommended that judges sentence writers “to remove graffiti under the supervision of an employee at the public works office” (Castleman, 1982: 138). The punishment was designed to embarrass the graffiti writers in front of their peers therefore creating tension within the different communities of writers throughout the city.

The City of New York was remarkable in its resolve to win the graffiti war regardless of the possibility of its defeat. By the end of 1972, the anti-graffiti effort had cost the city \$10 million, yet the visibility of graffiti had not been reduced by even 30 or 40 percent (Castleman 1982: 140). With the election of Mayor Koch in 1981, the anti-graffiti measures in New York increased to address the declining levels of subway riders and a stagnant tourist industry. As a result, graffiti no longer simply threatened the security of other New Yorkers. It was now perceived primarily as a violation of property rights that projected a “terrible impression of the city” abroad (*Style Wars*, 1982). To address the rising concern, Mayor Koch installed barbed wire fences “between which six dogs patrolled the perimeter of the yard” (Castleman 1982: 146). Although this was a trial effort, limited to one subway yard, the MTA and other city officials believed it was successful in decreasing the presence of graffiti writers from the subway. I would argue

that the subway had become a battleground of war between the writers and city officials of New York.

The decrease of graffiti on the trains parked in the trial yard justified a \$22.4 million plan to install similar fences in a majority of the MTA's subway yards (Castleman, 1982: 140). It was believed that in conjunction with the 'Buff,' a new harsh cleaning product designed to remove graffiti from the exterior of the trains, the new policy of protection would ensure that no train left the station vandalised by graffiti. "Leave your mark in society, not on society" became the new slogan of the anti-graffitists who would, over the course of 15 years, become marginally successful in curtailing the vandalism and re-instituting a perception of security previously threatened by the production of graffiti.

New York civilians, police and the Transit Authority largely perceived graffiti to be a crime, while the subculture of hip-hop embraced it as a visual form of expression. I would now like to discuss the third public reaction that was evoked in the 1970s in response to the graffiti 'problem' in New York. Unlike the MTA's perception of graffiti as an indication of urban decay, a segment of the hungry art market of New York City simultaneously saw the onslaught of graffiti as an expression of the "radical chic" (Abel and Buckley, 1977: 140). Soon graffiti writers were pulled off the subway, and their work was relocated into galleries in order to satisfy the need of the New York art market.

With the motive to re-direct graffiti writers to what was considered a legitimate form of expression, sociology student Hugo Martinez persuaded a small number of writers to create their work on canvas and organised them into a registered corporation, the United Graffiti Artists (UGA) (Abel and Buckley, 1977: 141). This organisation of

graffiti writers sought to illustrate to art collectors and the general public that they were serious artists and not members of street gangs looking to threaten the public's security (Castleman, 1982: 118). The art market's immediate interest in graffiti has been described as phenomenal and for a short period of time through the production and sale of graffiti on canvas, graffiti was considered as 'cutting edge' contemporary art (Powers, 1996: 4).

The International Response

Into the late 1980s, graffiti retained its position in the art world. With increased media attention and the popularisation of hip-hop culture, graffiti became one of the hottest cultural products of Cold War America. By the early 1990s, many tags and pieces could be found in cities throughout Europe. While many of these markings reflected the individual character of the writer or the "shared aesthetic of the local subculture, they also reproduced with remarkable precision the stylistic conventions of hip-hop graffiti" (Ferrell, 1993: 11). The style of graffiti has played a significant role in what I call the 'copy-cat effect' that characterises the relocation of graffiti world-wide.

I argue that the outbreak of street graffiti throughout the world supports the 'aesthetic parameter' argument held by Cooper and Chalfant in Subway Art (1984). By the early 1990s, nearly two decades after its inception, graffiti found in international cities mimicked the style originally found in the New York subway: the aesthetic model had relocated itself in other city centres. In The Berlin Wall Book (1990), photographer and professor of design Hermann Waldenburg conceptualized graffiti of the Berlin Wall as the transferred stylistic expression of American graffiti into a European context. For

him graffiti on the Wall was the “apt translation of public opinions into a color and sign language” (1990: 13). However, over the course of his “picture hunt,” Waldenburg explains how the once articulate European expression turned in on itself to reflect American graffiti (1990: 13). In the beginning, he makes note of paintings, collages, wall-paperings, posters, mosaics and object installations and describes the Berlin Wall as a “temporary museum” (1990: 24). But as time passed and the Cold War endured, a transformation in graffiti occurred:

The innovative power and artistic potential were soon exhausted . . . at first there were pictures without signatures, now there were signatures without pictures . . . Rudimentary self expression became an over-inflated end in itself: tags, and pieces along American lines and third hand copies occasionally executed with European finesse. (Waldenburg, 1990: 14)

With the international circulation of the book Subway Art (1984), American graffiti had extended the style of street graffiti and the subculture of graffiti writers to the corners of the globe.

Similarly, as the publication of this book on American graffiti encouraged the spread of American graffiti to other urban centres throughout the world, the response evoked by the MTA and New York City council was also adopted by authorities in countries outside the United States. The American eradication measures are the standard by which other cities battling the ‘war’ against graffiti have judged the success of their efforts. For example, the London Underground’s Getting Rid of Graffiti: A Practical Guide to Graffiti Removal and Anti-Graffiti Protection (1992) begins its informative guide by introducing the reader to the history of graffiti and New York anti-graffiti policies. Justifying the strategies for removal that follow, the guide argues that graffiti is endured rather than accepted by city centres around the world.

While the authors of Getting Rid of Graffiti (1992) admit that the existence of graffiti does indicate a human presence in a sometimes isolated urban environment, they argue that graffiti creates an “atmosphere of neglect and unease rather than life . . . where it can be threatening” and an indication “of worse things to come” (1992: xii). Clearly, the criminalization of graffiti characteristic of the American perception underlies the British Underground Authority’s (BUA) method and procedures of graffiti removal outlined in this book.

As a result of the occurrence of graffiti on subways around the world, its increased presence on international city streets, as well as its disputed position in contemporary art (legitimated by the support of Andy Warhol), graffiti and those responsible for its cultural production have become the focus of a large body of literature adopting a variety of theoretical approaches. With a world wide increase of graffiti, the majority of literature from the 1990s discusses graffiti that is produced outside New York (see Bushnell, 1990, Ferrell, 1993, Nwoye 1993). The books either justify the creative expression of street vandals, debate the rightful presence of graffiti in the art world, or dismantle the conceptions of power that fuel the thirty-year ‘war’ that continues to be played out between graffiti writers and public authorities around the world.

An example of such literature, Crimes of Style (1993) is a study of the Denver graffiti scene. Focusing on ‘hip-hop’ or street graffiti, the purpose of this study is to “investigate the interplay of cultural innovation and institutionalized tolerance, and the politics of culture and crime” (1993: 5). Extending Castleman’s (1982) suggestion that the producers of graffiti are an organized community, Ferrell further argues that a

subculture has emerged. He argues that as the Denver graffiti scene grew into a full-blown graffiti subculture. He states:

It not only created a collective context in which young writers could develop, but redevelop . . . Drawing on the shared aesthetic resources taken from the worlds of art, media and hip hop culture, writers within the scene began to collaborate on designs, pieces and identities . . . Graffiti writing began to take on the many dimensions of a collective activity. (Ferrell, 1993:49)

Ferrell describes the Denver graffiti subculture to be defined by the particular felt-tip markers, paints, brands of sketchbooks and bags which are used by all members of the subculture (Ferrell, 1993). I will argue that graffiti in Ottawa likewise constitutes a subculture.

While informing the reader of the social organization of graffiti subculture in Denver, Ferrell also claims that the national and international clamp-down on graffiti has “altered the urban ecology and social dynamic of the scene and has helped shape the subculture’s evolution in the late 1980s and 90s”(1993: 104). His study then illustrates the larger social context of both national and international graffiti as well as the “co-ordinated development of campaigns designed to criminalize and suppress it”⁸ (Ferrell, 1993: 15). Ferrell’s study, although located in an American context and applying theories of what he calls ‘anarchist criminology,’ is an example of the way in which graffiti has been analyzed in one of many academic disciplines.

Graffiti in Ottawa

The Ottawa situation that will be examined in the following chapters is quite different than the situations covered by the studies mentioned in this chapter. Living in the North American market and therefore subject to the trends of the United States, young people from the City of Ottawa are aware of the increased popularity of hip-hop culture in music and in the urban experience. Similarly, the conservative Canadian art market limits interest in and therefore the adoption of “other art,” making graffiti less than attractive in the contemporary art scene. Based on my investigation, the art market in Ottawa is not concerned with the highly stylised production of street graffiti. These differences play a significant role in the way in which graffiti exists and is conceptualised in this Canadian city.

However, graffiti is still apparent along the streets and alleyways of the City of Ottawa. City officials, like the officials of other international cities, struggle to suppress it. The municipal government fights to ensure that the urban landscape reflects the city’s motto of “Clean and Green and Proud,” while the graffiti writers struggle to ensure that individual expression challenges this control of space. The following chapter will briefly define the terms and expressions that are used throughout the thesis by both the community of creators and the community of control. It is necessary that these terms are outlined and understood in order to fully comprehend the remaining chapters and analysis.

⁸ Ferrell illustrates the widespread co-ordination of the anti-graffiti movement through a number of national associations and organizations. The most prominent however is the National Graffiti Information Network.

Chapter Two: Terms and Definitions

In order to understand the research and analysis of graffiti that follows, it is important to have a clear and concise understanding of the different types of graffiti that exist and the terms that are used in their discussion. This chapter identifies relevant terms and provides concise definitions that, with the aid of visual examples, will ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

A person who participates in the act of creating graffiti is called a 'writer.' Graffiti writers produce a variety of types of graffiti that range in size, colour, style and dimension. To begin, I would like to identify and define graffiti in the form of a 'tag' (see Figures 1 and 2). A tag is a writer's signature. It is previously designed, sketched and practised in a sketchbook and then replicated on the wall. By practising the execution of the tag, its reproduction on the street is easy for the writer to complete quickly, thus helping to reduce his chance of being seen by a passer-by or police. A tag is often one colour and one dimension and is produced repeatedly throughout the city for the purpose of promulgating the writer's name.

By 'bombing' the city with a tag or 'throw up,' writers participate in a graffiti writing rampage which results in the prolific painting or marking of a writer's signature. A 'throw up' is similar to a tag in its purpose. However, graffiti in the form of a throw up is usually larger than a tag and is typically written using one colour and is outlined for effect (see Figure 3). However, the largest, most complex form of graffiti discussed in this thesis is called a 'piece.' Short for 'masterpiece,' graffiti pieces can be understood as murals using more than one colour and dimension in design (see Figures 4 and 5). Pieces

may be created free hand, without a prior sketch, using a process called ‘free styling’; or they may be drawn first in a writer’s sketchbook and then painted on a wall. Pieces may take days to create, thereby increasing the writer’s chance of being apprehended by the police.

Pieces are produced by single writers, or in many cases, by groups of writers called ‘crews.’ Crews are organised groups of writers that produce and judge graffiti together. Each member writes the crew’s name in the form of a tag and/or a throw. When a piece is produced by a crew, the crew tag as well as the individual writer’s tag are often placed as signatures indicating the authorship of the piece. Crews try to out-write other crews in the city either by bombing the city with tags or through creating masterful pieces that are deserving of recognition and fame. The desire of most writers and crews lies in ‘getting up,’ which entails the vast exhibition of their tag, throw or piece throughout the city. A writer’s or crew’s success in getting up is judged by other graffiti writers and the title ‘king of the city’ is given to the crew or individual writer that is ‘up’ the most throughout the city or is responsible for the production of numerous ‘quality’ pieces. Graffiti is in many ways a form of competition.

In the following chapter, I will discuss how graffiti is conceptualised by the individuals that produce it. The definitions of terms provided will help in comprehending their perspective and may be expanded upon in Chapter Three. Chapter Three will illustrate the shared perceptions of the community of creators and identify the particulars of graffiti production in the capital city. Furthermore, it will illustrate that the nature of the city greatly affects the cultural products that emerge. The following chapter will also

reveal the secretive and often anonymous community of graffiti writers and the discourse on graffiti as it is constructed by those that create it.

Illustrations

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Chapter Three: The Producers of Graffiti and their Discourse

“Graffiti is my life. Really if it came down to it, if no one . . . If I was the only one here in the city I’d still do it. I’d be the one walking down the street and that picks me up. I can’t say a lot of people have that. I feel fortunate enough to be a graffiti writer in a way. Cause I can walk down the street and be totally . . . I couldn’t imagine not witnessing this stuff. Cause it moves me. It makes me move my feet everyday. If I’m walking somewhere, I see everything. If I see a rooftop we did or I’ll see this or that and I’m just like . . . The biggest smile walking to work. Nothing but positive things”. (Dave, 27)

Members of the public are constantly interacting in an urban space that is full of signs and images. A majority of these signs are positioned throughout the city in highly visible locations in an effort to gain the attention of city residents as they walk or drive to work. Commercial advertisements have taken a common position on the street and exist there without the consent of the public that is subjected to them day after day. Graffiti is also present along the sidewalks and walls of the city street. The signs and images of graffiti are also positioned throughout the city in highly visible locations in an effort to gain the attention of the public and other graffiti writers. Graffiti, like billboard advertising, is also produced without the consent of its viewer. However, unlike commercial ads, graffiti is produced without the approval of city officials.

Graffiti is a mystery in both its purpose and function to a large majority of the public. Graffiti writers and their crews are not accessible members of the community. They are anonymous, mysterious individuals that work in the shadows of the day and darkness of night. The productions they create are temporary in that they are physically present one day and gone the next. This chapter considers the anonymous production of

graffiti. My intention of uncovering the varying perceptions surrounding the visual forms of graffiti required me to locate the mysterious individuals responsible for its creation. As I will argue in Chapter Five, these individuals are part of an organised subculture that I have gained access to through ethnographic study. As Graeme Turner states in his book Introduction to British Cultural Studies (1990), “ethnographic studies of subcultures within contemporary urban societies are attempting to analyse the subculture’s interpretation of their own cultural experience” (Turner, 1990: 30). The ‘insider’s perspective presented in this chapter, in conjunction with the similar perspective of the city officials presented in the following chapter, will facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the production and management of graffiti in Ottawa. However, before such an analysis can be undertaken, I will present the views held by various members of these two communities. This chapter is dedicated to the presentation of the way in which graffiti is viewed from within: the way the community of creators in Ottawa perceives itself.

The information presented in this chapter is based upon information gathered through interviews with graffiti writers in Ottawa. Over the course of a four-month period, interviews were conducted with seven graffiti writers in Ottawa. In order to protect the identity of the writers, each interviewed member of the community of creators was given a pseudonym. It is their pseudonym that will be referred to when identifying them by name in this thesis.

In order to present a comprehensive image of the graffiti writers that I spoke with, it is important to discuss their socio-economic status.¹ All seven of the informants are white males, ranging from 16 to 27 years old. All informants were employed at the time of the interview. Many of them managed more than one job at that time. Five of the seven graffiti writers were in some form of educational program at the time of the interview. Only one of the informants attended high-school while four of the graffiti writers were attending post-secondary education in the city. All of those graffiti writers were studying in a field either directly or indirectly related to fine art. Only three of the writers had been apprehended by the police and only one of those writers arrested had ever been charged and convicted of a crime.

Through the interviews conducted with members of the community of creators, I have sought to identify their perceptions and their associated discourse. As we shall see, this is a complex discourse with a diversity of meanings. In this chapter I will also discuss the style and aesthetic of Ottawa graffiti in relation to graffiti in other urban centres across Canada, illustrating in a number of ways the unique character of both the City of Ottawa and the graffiti that is created in this challenging context. My purpose is not to judge the moral merit of graffiti, but to try to understand the perceptions of graffiti within the city space of Ottawa.

In the introduction to this thesis I defined graffiti as the drawings and markings created in the style associated with spray-can images which evolved from the New York style of graffiti of the 1970s. This definition is meant to demarcate the boundaries of this

¹ Their socio-economic status must be discussed, however, without compromising the anonymity required by the Ethics Committee of Carleton University.

study. As a subject of academic study, graffiti is conceptualized in a variety of ways. However, after discussions with graffiti writers from Ottawa, I am now aware that they too use the term graffiti as imprecisely as those who make use of this term in academic study. Graffiti is a complex visual form with a multitude of components that convey a variety of meanings. The term graffiti may be complicated; however it is clear that for graffiti writers, it does not include the writings of political or hate messages. These types of writings are not considered graffiti.

Graffiti: Expression, Lifestyle and Self-Accomplishment

Graffiti is conceptualized by those who create it as personal artistic expression. Stemming largely from a personal interest in fine art, young men transform a private wall into a canvas and direct their undeveloped interests in fine art into more concrete expressions in public space. At the beginning of their graffiti careers, none of the informants were participating exclusively in formal 'fine art' training, although all of the writers were very interested and active in creative expression in the form of drawing or painting. I argue that both the style associated with graffiti, and its physical presence in the public space of the city, attract young writers to this genre of creative expression. Underlying their conception of graffiti as an illegal act is the recurring understanding of their production as artistic expression. This partnership of deviance and creative expression can be illustrated through Fred's explanation of graffiti. He states:

Graffiti as a whole is for people who are anti-authoritarian to channel their feelings in a relatively non-destructive way. It's beyond logic. It's like art. You create it and then say 'I must be crazy to have done this.'

Although graffiti is a form of expression that may have emerged from an interest in art, committed writers simultaneously perceive graffiti as a lifestyle that thereby effects every aspect of their existence. As Fred, a university student, explains, “graffiti is your escape and reason for living all at once.” Similarly, experienced writer Dave states that graffiti is his “life.” Once graffiti becomes the adopted method of artistic and personal expression, the world occupied by the writer is transformed into the subject and object of this form of expression. The highly stylized nature of graffiti, as Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant describe it in Subway Art (1984), enables the producers of graffiti to transform everyday life and objects into possible outlets for graffiti expression. For example, many writers explain that the physical environment of the city entices their creative expression of graffiti. Later in this chapter I will discuss the role location plays in the physical production of graffiti. However, it is worth noting the way in which, once internalized by the writer as a lifestyle, graffiti is no longer simply a hobby or mild interest. This lifestyle effect can be illustrated by Fred’s description of graffiti as “overwhelming.” He explains:

It becomes a spiritual activity. You need to create. You’re captured by the energy and aesthetic of the movement. You feel it within you. It becomes your life. You stop looking at other graffiti and become inspired by your environment. You get inspired by say a leaf attached to a tree and say ‘bing I have an idea.’

Graffiti enables the writer to transform the urban space of Ottawa into a powerful medium: the simultaneous medium of inspiration and expression.

For those who create it, graffiti is not simply paint on a wall. Rather, it becomes a way of thinking about and occupying a comfortable space within the dominant culture. I would argue, therefore, that the ability of graffiti to be internalized by the writers to such

a degree is directly related to the effect that graffiti has on the writer himself. Graffiti creates a sense of purpose and inspiration for writers who might otherwise question their place in the dominant group. Tagging, as well as larger, more complicated pieces of graffiti embody the emotion of the creator as he expresses it through this form of visual expression. When producing graffiti, writers are able to gain a sense of self-accomplishment and pride from the emotion that drives the production as well as the end result or the physical embodiment of that emotion. Many of the writers believe that, unlike many aspects of their life that offer no sense of personal reward, graffiti is a personally gratifying experience. This sense of personal fulfillment is apparent when Dave states that “putting your mind to something is really a good feeling. You feel like you’re accomplishing something. Like the final product.” With the production of tags, throw ups, and pieces writers are aware of the time and skill involved in the making of graffiti. By putting up a ‘wicked tag,’ its wickedness determined by location, style and skill, the writer is able to gain a sense of accomplishment and expertise as a result of his creative production.²

The reward of producing graffiti is not limited to a sense of accomplishment that comes from completing/creating something stylistically coherent. Rather, the personal reward that is derived from the production of graffiti is based largely in the writers’ perception that they have altered the local urban environment through their production of graffiti. In one sense, the sense of accomplishment that comes from altering the city street is rooted in deviant motives. For these graffiti writers, it is the sense of adventure

and risk that provides them with this sense of fulfillment. By breaking the law through altering the visual image of a private wall in public space, the graffiti writer feels confident in his skill and proud of his efforts. Dave explains this sense of achievement:

It's something you did and you sit there, looking at it and you know this is gonna be huge. You know that when everyone wakes up in the morning they're gonna see that and like 'what are these kids thinking? How did they do that? Why didn't they get arrested for that? Who are these people?'

By forcing the public to notice the altered state of their environment, graffiti writers appreciate graffiti for making possible this sense of personal gain.

The sense of personal gain that writers enjoy from the adventure and satisfaction of altering the urban space of the city street is compounded by a belief that they have improved the physical environment. For them, graffiti is the positive addition of personal expression to an otherwise emotionally negative or negated space. By creating graffiti, they are able to affect the environment of their urban center in a positive way, adding something that is either intentionally excluded or nonexistent in the context of the city street. This perceived positive effect of graffiti on the urban landscape is expressed by a majority of the writers and can be illustrated through Gary's frustration with the city's stance against graffiti. He points out:

See that big white wall there? That just pisses me off. Rather than that big white wall you try to do a throw up on it and they buff it. If they ever let us do crazy pieces over the whole thing, that wall would be beautiful. People would walk past that wall and think it was beautiful. Now you walk by and see nothing.

² The merit of a tag or any other piece of graffiti is determined by a number of rules of engagement and aesthetic. These rules consider location, style and skill of the graffiti. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the rules that govern the assessment of graffiti as well as rules of engagement.

Clearly, Gary believes, as do other graffiti writers, in the utility of graffiti, a utility that is overlooked by the dominant culture. Writers believe that graffiti can improve the image of the city street and, by being responsible for this improvement, the writers are able to feel good about themselves. As Fred suggests, graffiti as “evidence of creation, is beautiful. And I created it.”

Graffiti provides the writers in Ottawa with a sense of self-accomplishment that is rooted in their belief that graffiti alters the urban environment in a positive way. Graffiti has come to be understood by these writers as a lifestyle that is fundamental to their existence, although it may have begun simply as an ambiguous interest in fine art. The transformation of graffiti from merely an interest in art into a lifestyle articulated on private walls in the downtown core is an example of the developmental aspect that is inherent to graffiti. I am suggesting that notions of process, development and evolution underlie the culture of graffiti, as the community of creators understands it. In this chapter I will make reference to a number of examples where the development and the process of evolution play an essential role in graffiti, and for the writers that produce it. These examples will explain how the production of graffiti has continued to exist as a method of personal expression for young people for over thirty years.

Graffiti Types: Tags and Pieces

Like the majority of writers before them from countries around the world, graffiti writers in Ottawa distinguish between two main types of graffiti. The distinction between tagging and piecing is made in categorical terms suggesting that together, these forms of expression are conceptualized simply as separate parts of the larger whole. In regard to

its cultural significance, one type of graffiti is not necessarily more important than the other. This point can be illustrated through Fred's discussion of the two types. He explains that "to graffiti artists, they are just as great. To see a wicked tag gets you just as stoked as a wicked burner." The criteria by which graffiti is judged will be discussed later in this chapter. However, it is worth noting here the equal appreciation that graffiti writers hold for all forms of graffiti.

Equal appreciation for all forms of graffiti likely contrasts with the general public's view of graffiti. Graffiti writers are aware that the public dislikes the majority of graffiti, but they believe that generally speaking, the public aversion toward graffiti is directed more specifically at graffiti in the form of tags and throw ups as opposed to large pieces like those located at the Tech Wall downtown.³ The graffiti writers in Ottawa are aware of the difference between their perception and the perception of the general public and city officials. Long time friends and graffiti writers Richo and Rowley express their concern over the inability of the dominant culture to understand that the same person is creating both a tag and a piece in the city. Richo states:

Wherever you go, you are going to get both. Writers who do bubble letters, then go and do a mural with characters and backgrounds and then right after that they'll walk down the street and they'll tag a mail box.

By dismissing the production of tags as the senseless expression of youth gangs, graffiti writers believe the creativity that underlies both types of graffiti is overlooked and the importance of the forms is either not understood or ignored by the city's authorities.

³ Tech wall is a "gray" space where writers have been permitted by police to piece. The result is an abundance of large graffiti pieces isolated to a relatively small surface area.

Although most graffiti writers produce and equally admire all types of graffiti, most often categorized by writers as tags/throws and pieces, tags and pieces do not originate simultaneously as the first form of graffiti that is produced. Although the same graffiti writers practice tags and pieces, the ability to produce both pieces and tags is evidence of refined skill and expertise. The significant difference between the two forms of graffiti is directly related to the experience and commitment of the writer. The production of stylistically sound pieces requires a high level of artistic ability and skill. As a result, this form of graffiti tends to be practiced by writers only after sometime of graffiti practice and gained experience. The production of both types of graffiti reaps different rewards for the producers. The rewards associated with each type of graffiti are determined by different rules of engagement and aesthetics that will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Tags and Throws

Graffiti in the form of tags and throw ups are the forms first produced by what some might call the 'toys' or novices of graffiti. Experienced graffiti writer Fred explains that "it is a natural progression: you start tagging then move on to more complex things." By looking to other writer's tags and throw ups for inspiration of design, this earlier phase of graffiti writing is arguably defined by 'biting.' Biting refers to the borrowing or 'ripping off' of style or characters from other writers or from popular culture. Biting is often a symptom of being a toy or novice writer and is generally looked down upon by the community of creators. Some experienced writers admit they still bite from pop culture.

Beginning with the invention of a tag practiced repeatedly in a sketchbook, an emerging graffiti writer will move to a wall and produce his rehearsed tag for the first time in a space that allows him considerable time with limited exposure to public visibility. The location selected for toy production must allow the time required for first-time spray painting and the relative isolation of the tag from public view in an attempt to avoid ridicule from other writers. To illustrate the difficulty of even the simplest graffiti, many of the graffiti writers challenged me to give it a try. Self-appointed graffiti-head Gary asks whether or not I have ever tried to paint a straight line on a brick wall before? "We make it look easy," he said. As a result of the difficulty experienced by most beginner writers, they are often apprehensive about what the community of creators will think of their first graffiti attempt. As a result, more secluded locations are often selected for the production of such early work, possibly away from the downtown core. The selection of distant and remote locations by insecure, novice writers may explain the increase in 'toy' tags throughout the suburbs of Ottawa. Novice writers are experimenting with new styles away from the traditional graffiti locale of the highly visible downtown core.

With extensive practice of this throw up and perhaps other variations of the same tag, the evolution of both graffiti and writer begin. Firstly, the writer develops the ability to bomb a wall with speed and grace. The efficiency of bombing is an important element in escaping capture from the police. As Alex, the youngest and most inexperienced writer I spoke with boasts, "I always do it so fast. It takes me three seconds to do any of my throw ups. It's sick." As a result of the development of speed, taggers become more confident in their abilities as a graffiti writer.

This heightened level of confidence can only develop as a result of an increase in the quantity of tags produced and the successive improvement in their production time. Following in this process, extensive bombing starts in more and more visible areas, ensuring that both the community of creators and the community of control begin to take notice of the tag or throw throughout the city. This is the second stage in the development of a graffiti writer. The writer will soon become synonymous with his tag and eventually, a third stage in the evolutionary process of tagging will follow. Based on the originality of work and the development of the style, the graffiti writer's status as a toy will be removed and he may possibly gain a reputation within the community of creators as a prolific tagger or bomber.

Tags and throw ups are the first type of graffiti created by many writers and the resulting fame acts to attract and integrate the new writers into the already existing community of creators. Recognition and fame are largely the greatest intended purposes of creating graffiti in this form. The association of fame and this type of graffiti can be illustrated through Dave's discussion of tags and bombs. For him this aspect of graffiti is "all for fame." He states:

You walk around town or you see or hear of people saying 'you hit that spot, I see you everywhere. I woke up this morning and it was in my face and it was big and beautiful and huge'.

It is the notoriety from within the community of graffiti writers as well as general citizens that motivates the increasing quantity of tags and throw ups in the city.

Although tags are the first element of production followed closely by bombing the city with throw ups, they can nonetheless provide a committed tagger with high status in the community of creators. Through continued production of graffiti in this form, a

writer can become famous amongst other writers and the general public as well. The status of 'king of the city' is the utmost desire of many or most taggers in Ottawa. The determining factor of this title lies in the *quantity* of tags produced by a writer. American graffiti writer Craig Castleman discussed a similar status in his book Getting Up: Subway Graffiti In New York (1982). Referred to in this context as 'king of the line,' this title is granted to the writer "who gets his name up the most on the outside of a particular subway line" (Castleman, 1982: 31). In Ottawa, the title of 'king of the city' will reward the writer whose name is up most frequently throughout the city.

The competition for the title of 'king of the city' has led graffiti writers to associate the production of tags and throw ups with the intended purpose of generating fame. Therefore it is the notoriety derived from fame that drives graffiti writers to compete with each other. As a result of this competitive drive, the boundaries of sanity and safety in the production of tags and throw ups are pushed to excessive levels. This is most evident through the following situation described by Alex. In an attempt to be recognized as kings of the city, he and a friend placed their throw ups in the highly visible location on the highway signs of the Ottawa Queensway:

The hi-way signs, the overpass, the exit signs that go up over the Queensway. We hit like five of them this summer. The poles on the side of the highway. We just climbed up the poles. It's like a little ladder. Then you climb inside the top thing and swing around. There's a little ledge in front of the sign. It's crazy though. It shakes when the big semis go under it. You have to lie down flat when you see them coming in the distance. It's mental.

This experience illustrates the temporal and local conditions specific to tagging. In being limited in time due to the highly visible nature of their location, the writers were able only to produce graffiti in the form of tags and throw ups. The personal satisfaction that

Alex feels from having successfully completed such a stunt without being apprehended by the police is an example of the sense of self-fulfillment that I spoke of earlier in the chapter. Rooted in altering the environment in the shadows of the night, Alex and his friend gained a sense of pride that would be rewarded through fame. Identified by their tags, Alex and his friend would be credited with fame for the mission of that night as well as the abundant quantity of graffiti they are also responsible for throughout the city.

Rules of Engagement

The fame and notoriety sought by graffiti writers in the production of tags and throws are determined by the judgement of their peers. Unlike the fundamentally important element in the production and assessment of pieces, which I will discuss later, the *quality* of tags and throws is not a required element for judgement in peer assessment. The reward of fame for the production of tags and throw ups is determined by what I have identified as the first set of rules of engagement that manage the evaluation of graffiti. Specifically, these rules are responsible for managing the way in which graffiti is judged by the community of creators. Graffiti writers from Ottawa understand that fame generated from tagging/bombing is determined by the quantity, location and, to a lesser extent, size of the throw up. Peer assessment of tags and throw ups are based on the visibility of the tag, taking into account the difficulty and risk associated with the location of the graffiti.

Although quantity, size and location are the qualifications for the basis of judgement for tags and throw ups, the third element of location is not an independent

variable affected only by the decision of the writer. Unlike the components of size and quantity, the location of the graffiti is affected by the rules of engagement that manage the production of graffiti in the city. These rules of engagement regarding location govern the production of all types and forms of graffiti including pieces and murals.

Location is limited by a code of conduct that sets 'off limits' certain areas or buildings in the city. Fred explains that all writers, independent of their experience or age, understand this code of ethics. He states:

We abided by a code of ethics. You never hit a church, or a school, embassy or monument. These were rules that evolved from bigger cities and we just learned about them.⁴

The status of a particular writer can be tarnished by the inappropriate positioning of graffiti within the urban environment. Although visibility of graffiti is of fundamental importance in the status of the writer, a graffiti writer that values the visibility of his tags, throws or pieces over these rules of engagement is not looked upon highly by his peers.

These guiding principles or rules of engagement are generally held by all members of the community of creators and help to illustrate the system of beliefs that is shared by the community of creators. These beliefs act as the principles upon which order within the community of creators is maintained. As evidence of this alternative system of beliefs held by members of the community of creators, I will discuss Dave and Fred's conception of graffiti and vandalism demonstrating that it is fundamentally different from the definitions held by the dominant culture. Fred believes that graffiti is

⁴ These rules of engagement are passed on through the socialization that takes place in crews. I will discuss this in greater detail later in the thesis.

“evidence of creation.” Similarly, individuals outside the community of creators do not generally hold Dave’s conceptualization of vandalism.

He understands that society has deemed him a criminal and he is aware that what he does is illegal. However, he refuses to describe graffiti as vandalism. For him, vandalism is based on the *inappropriate* positioning of graffiti within the city. In this context vandalism occurs when graffiti writers produce graffiti in places that show no respect for the nature of the location. A synagogue or hospital may be an example of such a location where the placement of graffiti would constitute vandalism. A writer producing graffiti in this type of space has paid little attention to the rules of engagement I discussed above, as they pertain to location. Graffiti writers are also guilty of vandalism when they create graffiti that does not coincide with the environment of the location. Dave explains “I don’t want people to look at it, its surroundings and say ‘it’s awful because of its positioning.’ That’s when I feel like a vandal.” This conception of vandalism is not about disrespecting notions of property and ownership; rather it is about disrespecting the sacredness of space and the beauty between the relations of city space and the culture of graffiti. This alternative construction of meaning illustrates the pervasive effect that the lifestyle of graffiti has on the ideologies of those that participate in its production.

Locations that are determined to be fair game for graffiti writers are therefore the buildings and surfaces of the city that offer them exposure, flexibility of production and inspiration. However, in addition to the perceived utility of the building’s location for the production of graffiti, graffiti writers express a united disdain for private companies and corporations. This negative association leads to a lack of concern that acts to fuel the

production of graffiti in general on the walls of large corporations in Ottawa like McDonald's, Staples, or financially stable outlets like the LCBO or the Rideau Shopping Centre. Experienced writer Fred explains this position:

Large businesses have less private personality. It's not like you're pissing in someone's bathtub. As a youth you have less respect for commercial things in the urban environment. Your environment is so saturated that you begin not to care. It's like 'oh it's you again.'

Alex, one of the city's most infamous taggers, agrees that middle-to-large-scale businesses should expect to get hit. He even states that "they can't get angry about it" suggesting that their success as large businesses with advertising and marketing warrants the graffiti attack.

Pieces

Aside from the code of ethics that governs the selection of location, rules of engagement particular to tagging and throw ups are not necessarily applicable to the production of pieces or murals. Although this category of graffiti is conceptualized as the second component that constitutes the activity of graffiti for this group, piecing is governed and judged by different rules of engagement than its counterpart (tagging). These rules address more accurately the desired outcome or purpose of graffiti production in this form. As I illustrated earlier, 'king of the city' and the fame associated with this title are the desired outcome or repercussions of tagging and producing throws. However, they are not the sole desired result or outcome in the production of a piece. For that reason, quantity, size and location play alternative roles in the production of pieces than tags. This is not to suggest that the legitimacy of a piece and the graffiti writer(s)

that produced it are not subject to evaluation based on certain rules and criteria. On the contrary, I submit that the rules of engagement that determine the merit of pieces are more complex than those used to judge tags and throw ups in the city. The rules of engagement that guide the production and peer evaluation of pieces are based on the artistic skill of the writer and the *quality* of the graffiti he creates. Clearly the subjectivity of the above mentioned criteria for judging a piece makes it a more complex and less cohesive determination than judgement of graffiti in the form of a tag or throw up. Later, I will suggest that aesthetic evaluation of pieces causes disagreements within the community of creators.

Like tags and throw ups, pieces and murals are often practiced first in the sketchbooks of graffiti writers. They are often planned out in numerous renditions with colour sketches illustrating for the writer what the finished product might look like. Many writers also create complex pieces that have not yet been conceived of prior to their production on the wall.⁵ However, due to the complexity of both style and size of most murals, an inexperienced writer is not likely to attempt this type of production. It is the more experienced writers with greater knowledge of wall surfaces, paint types and techniques that produce pieces or murals in the city. The lengthy process of painting a relatively basic piece is explained by Alex. He explains:

First you prime the wall and let it dry. Then you do an outline and then a fill in. Do my 3D, then do my other outline, then do either an inline or a 'force field' and then I'm done.

As a result of the time required to produce a piece, the criterion for production is inherently different than for that of tags and throw ups.

If quality is the most important element of consideration when piecing, due to the amount of time that is required, less visible locations are selected more often. These allow the graffiti writer the time necessary to masterfully replicate their sketchbook design onto the wall, or freestyle a skillful piece without being apprehended. The majority of the older experienced writers suggest that the development or progression of graffiti production from tag to piece is manifested specifically in the process of piecing. Unlike tags and throws that are limited, as a result of time, in their aesthetic and style, the nature of the graffiti piece or mural facilitates the creative expansion of the aesthetic away from traditional graffiti style. It is this evolution that makes graffiti mature from the letterform characteristic of its origins in New York, to more modern, less highly stylized forms of expression. Fred, an elder and graffiti master of the Ottawa scene, discusses this evolution of style:

Eventually the letters become abstracted forms of letters. It transcends the letter. Most graffiti remains defined by letterform . . . purists of the tradition would argue that it is about the name, the letters. We've evolved from that, evolved to characters, they are extra. Some people make them the staple of their graffiti diet. At some point the messy stuff, the drips become part of it, putting that stuff on the wall. You are denying its existence with straight up styles in letterform. Those are the ones that are the most beautiful. Playing with decay, it has to evolve.

Clearly, Fred believes that such development in style is a natural and positive progression in the creative production of graffiti. However, many of the older writers in the area agree that Ottawa is one of only a few cities where this stylistic evolution is occurring.

Many older writers from the region judged the creative developments emerging in Ottawa as some of the best in Canada. Unlike Toronto, where the status quo of graffiti

⁵ This process is known as freestyling.

has become the trend in production, Ottawa, like Halifax, is sheltered from many of the urban pressures to maintain these trends and is therefore able to support cutting edge graffiti. The impression many of the graffiti writers in Ottawa have of the Toronto scene suggests that although Toronto is home to a enormous number of graffiti writers, Toronto graffiti is highly stylized and has not evolved over the course of time. As one of the graffiti informants Rowley explains, “in Toronto, graffiti is this and if you don’t fit the mold than you’re not graffiti.” To contrast this notion of stylistically stagnant production, Halifax is described as the polar opposite to Toronto. There, the young artistic community influences and affects the style of graffiti. Rowley states that “the students get formal art training and then turn to graffiti. It’s different. It’s a different flavor there than in Toronto or even here.” However, the ‘flavour’ of the Ottawa graffiti scene is aligned with artistic rather than trendy producers.

In a comparison of the Ottawa and Toronto graffiti scenes, Fred goes further to suggest that unless writers continue to challenge aesthetic boundaries in their pieces, the whole culture will “start crawling up its own ass.” He believes:

Crews like Quota in Toronto did to graffiti what Puff Daddy did to hip-hop. They do what’s trendy. They do what’s trendy as opposed to getting dirty with it, trying new stuff. Ottawa is sheltered from this big city mentality. Ottawa has more fine arts roots, other cities have lost those roots. The culture here is relatively young. Some come from fine arts backgrounds. The shelter kept it healthy, writers were more likely to develop their own style. Some of the best graffiti artists started in Ottawa.

By remaining confined to the traditional aesthetic of letterform pieces, writers in large city centres like Toronto are artificially preventing the growth of graffiti.

However, not all graffiti writers in Ottawa interpret the stylistic abstraction of pieces as a positive evolution in the culture. The sense of evolution of style in regard to

piecing has caused disagreement among members of the community of creators. For some of the writers, the abstract creations of some of the better known and experienced writers in the city push the aesthetic boundaries of piecing too far. They believe that the end result can no longer be considered graffiti. Alex is one such writer who does not believe in challenging the style of graffiti. He states "It's stupid. It's not graffiti. I don't think that graffiti should be art." His opinion is one of a novice graffiti writer, which may suggest that his apprehension about such stylistic advancement is related to his position in the hierarchy of writers. Perhaps, the reaction of taggers with similar sentiments against 'creative' graffiti may suggest that the desire to create new styles of graffiti is a mature desire; one typically held by writers with the artistic capabilities necessary to challenge the previous traditions of graffiti style.

If this is the case, I would argue that challenging the aesthetic of graffiti may be part of the process of 'growing up' in the culture. Alex suggests that, to his dismay, the development in the desire to push the boundaries of graffiti style may be inevitable. He states:

I hope I'm not like that but it will probably start happening. I've already started to paint a lot of canvases this year but they are still in letterform graffiti. Last year I said 'screw canvases, I'm not an artist, I'm a graffiti head. I want to go and be a punk.'

This sense of inevitability is shared by most young writers in the region who criticize the existing community of experienced writers who create stylistically alternative graffiti pieces. I therefore have concluded that graffiti is initially conceptualized as a production limited to the highly stylized letterform. Any desire to challenge this tradition appears to evolve out of years of experience in the sheltered environment of the city of Ottawa.

Crews

Some of the largest, most complex pieces in the Ottawa region have taken over three days to produce. As a result of the time and effort required to produce full murals, graffiti writers band together in crews. Pieces completed by a crew or group of writers are often called ‘productions,’ suggesting that various elements of expertise and talent have come together to create this large form of graffiti. This sense of the consolidated production of a crew is formed in the early stages of designing a piece. As Gary explains “we’ve all sat at home for like weekends on weekends and thought about this brilliant scheme and like popped bottles of champagne over ideas that we all had.” After the idea is formed and the sketches are made, the co-operation of production continues until the piece is painted in the public space of the city street by members of the crew.

The organization of such a crew will result in the production of skillfully complex and stylistically advanced pieces ensuring that the standard of *quality*, the most important component of a piece, is constantly being raised. Furthermore, membership of crews can be held by prolific taggers as well, whose unified efforts result in the full-scale assault of the crew’s tag by its members on the city or beyond. Tagging crews, in this sense, strive to increase the *quantity* of graffiti produced by its members. Therefore, both forms of graffiti (tags and pieces) are advanced through the group production facilitated by crew organization.

By reducing the time and effort that is required to produce graffiti generally, crews aid graffiti writers in the widespread dissemination of graffiti in a particular form throughout the city. Membership in crews can be organized around the style and skill of

the writers, uniting similarly inclined writers. Gary suggests that membership in a crew is based firstly on style and talent. Only after aesthetic alliances are formed are friendships able to grow. He explains:

Becoming part of the group, it came together amongst people that like to go out and just wreck the city. People that are feeling the same shit we are . . . it's turned us into good friends.

Similar style, dedication, and intent drive the formation of the group. Based on the information provided by my informants, the act of joining a crew can happen in many different situations. However, the restricted or secretive aspect of the community perpetuates the attraction of a graffiti writer to other writers. For example, in a large bar in the city, two graffiti writers met over a conversation whereby the language used by one individual indicated to the other that he was also a graffiti writer. In other circumstances, a lonely graffiti writer bombing in the night may be approached by other graffiti writers on the street or at Tech wall. Based on style, skill and personality, strangers are invited into crews and become entrenched in the community of creators.

A sense of belonging develops over time between the writer and his fellow crew-mates. This sense of community or family is expressed as one "part of the mystique, part of the appeal" of graffiti. Dave explains:

For me, it's more of a family thing. It makes me feel really good. Just being able to get together with a whole bunch of people and all putting your mind to something is a really good feeling.

He continues that the idea of "getting together with people and doing something that's productive" was intriguing to him. Piecing or tagging with the company of other writers is a fundamental element to the community of creators and is part of the attraction that graffiti holds for many.

The productivity of graffiti that is facilitated by the group participation of the crew is seen by many writers as a positive distraction from the other negative pastimes enjoyed by many teenagers. Many graffiti writers understand the artistic production of graffiti combined with the camaraderie of membership to be a very positive element in their lives. Most writers believe that by creating amongst friends, the culture of graffiti has changed their lives. Some even believe the sense of brotherhood felt between members of crews in conjunction with the time and level of commitment required for graffiti has 'saved their lives.' Describing his crew members as Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, Gary states that:

without graffiti I'd be on a much worse track right now. Before I hung with this crew . . . my *friends* that I hung out with before graffiti are in and out of jail, they fucking steal, they do everything. That's the truth. When I got into graff, they got into drugs. It takes up my time. It keeps me out of trouble.

Referring to his crew, "we do straight missions and we're brothers because of it."

Crews help to illustrate the social importance of graffiti for their members. Crews become secret societies for their members and membership in such crews provides a number of the boys/men with a sense of camaraderie and acceptance that they have otherwise been unable to find (to such a degree) outside the graffiti community. Camaraderie is amplified by a shared sense of pride experienced by the members of a crew. The sense of pride that is related to membership can be explained by the generally inaccessible nature of most existing crews to new and fresh 'toy' writers. The limited nature of the membership thereby heightens the perceived status of member writers.

However rewarding the association of crew to its members may be, the crew's existence is dependent on the commitment of the members to represent the crew

frequently and skilfully when they are bombing, tagging, or piecing. Discussing one of his crew's many productions, Fred explains the ingenuity and creativity that emerged out of the collaborative talent of his fellow members. "To break out of the routine, we picked out a monochromatic colour scheme and we each had to paint four pieces in the city in that colour by a final deadline." The competition of time with the complexity of the idea challenged the writers. While each writer gave credit or "props" to the crew within the pieces, they heightened the crew's exposure and fame. Fred says it best: "Everybody fuels the crew, individually, but it is the crew who gets the props in the end." Therefore, although each writer received an increased amount of admiration and respect for their work with the crew, the magnificent pieces that they created could only be realised through their organised production. The crew became famous and the individual members almost mythic, but the fame of both relied on the perceived skill and talent of the other.

The fame that is assigned or awarded to the individuals of the crew and the crew itself is maintained and passed on through generations of graffiti writers. The almost mythic standing that individual members of particular crews attained through the unprecedented production of masterpieces is passed on to new and upcoming writers. Such young writers are made aware of those writers that came before them who are responsible for affecting the local history of production. For example, while Alex is criticising a particular piece created by a long-standing crew from Ottawa, he qualifies his statement by stating that "I give these guys respect, like unbelievable respect. I respect my elders but" Some of the older participants from the community of creators speak highly of their "elders" as well, and imply that the reputations generated

through the fame of the organised productions of crews is carried on in new generations. Through the admittance of new writers into existing crews, legendary elders or master writers with years of experience continue to have control over the organisation of the crew and the direction of the graffiti they produce. The same hierarchy of talent, age and experience that organises each crew is found to govern the respect held toward its elders by each generation of the graffiti scene long after their physical, visual presence has disappeared.

Crews are an agency of learning that are responsible for teaching the history of the graffiti scene that includes the legends and myths. I would argue that through the exposure to other more experienced writers, beginning writers learn the etiquette and ethics without which they would not survive as a member of a crew or be perceived by the community as a whole as a respectable graffiti writer. Crews play fundamentally important roles in the socialization of graffiti writers. Their effect on the quality and proliferation of work, and their role in satisfying the social and emotional needs of their members ensures that the social formation of graffiti will continue to rest on the graffiti crew. The continued existence of crews guarantees the continued production of graffiti.

Graffiti writers in Ottawa, whether they produce tags or pieces individually or in crews, believe that graffiti as a culture and as a lifestyle has positively affected their lives and acts to improve the urban space of the capital region. Appreciation for the positive utility of graffiti is clear in discussions with graffiti writers. This understanding of graffiti is in direct conflict with a number of challenges that face graffiti writers in Ottawa. I would now like to discuss some of these challenges as they are illustrative of the particular situation of graffiti as it pertains to those that produce it in Ottawa.

Challenges in Ottawa

The notion that graffiti belongs on the walls of large corporations and companies is confirmed by the fact that graffiti writers believe that there are no alternative locations for the production of graffiti. Large corporations have a tendency to have large open wall surfaces that provide the perfect canvas for both tagging and piecing graffiti. The frustration that is felt toward the limited amount of wall space is shared by all of the writers in Ottawa. Many suggest that the ramifications of such limited space affects the order of production within the community which thereby affects the type of graffiti that is produced.

Graffiti writers understand the order of production that guides the culture of graffiti. Like the rules of engagement that manage graffiti evaluation, there exists a hierarchy of work that acts as a rule of engagement that in turn creates order within the community. This hierarchy is as follows: “throws go over tags, pieces go over throws and nothing goes over a piece.” When operating in any other city in the country, the duration of the graffiti produced therein competes only against the city removal committee. In Ottawa, writers feel that the limited number of walls in the city forces many writers to disobey the rules of engagement. Tags and throw ups are painted over pieces in the struggle of a growing community of creators to produce on a limited number of walls.

Writers believe this problem is inherent to the City of Ottawa. There is a low proportion of large corporations with large wall space in Ottawa. As the town of the federal government, the City of Ottawa has an abundance of government buildings,

granite and marble monuments and embassies. These building types and surfaces limit the production of graffiti. Any writer that would produce graffiti on these buildings would be, in Dave's terms, a vandal. Experienced writers express a sense of malevolence about their skillful and beautiful creations that are most often forced into the back alleyways of the capital region making them invisible to the general public. The result of this limitation is a high level of competition over a limited amount of suitable wall space. Many writers believe that this competition over space results in the sloppy production of throws or the incomplete images of pieces that have been painted over before they are finished.

Many graffiti writers believe that the quality of graffiti that is produced as a result of the competition for space has a negative effect on public opinion of graffiti. They believe public resistance toward graffiti is directly related to the lack of suitable walls.

Alex passionately explains this sentiment:

Nothing lasts. Pieces in this city. No one has any respect. And there's not enough walls especially with the O Train rolling through. There's nowhere to go in the day except for Tech and that place is played out, I don't even paint there. I hate it. It's so popular and such a trend. I don't know. Everything's gone like a day after you paint it cause it's so competitive here cause there's no walls. Tech is the only place where everyone is accepted . . . it'd be sweet to have some legal walls. There needs to be more walls. Everyone in this city hates graffiti so much just cause all they see is bombing. There's no legal walls in the city for anyone to paint on so everyone is always in a rush not to get caught. Like we can't go downtown on the side of a wall and just paint but there are so many walls that have throw ups on them anyway. I don't understand why owners wouldn't say 'please do a mural here.' It wouldn't get painted over.

For Alex, the solution for space and approval is through co-operation with small business owners and the City of Ottawa to designate some legal walls in the city that would permit

the creation and production of graffiti of any kind, free from arrest. Through this type of co-operative agreement, the spaces that are currently being bombed with tags and throw ups could be transformed into spaces for more aesthetically pleasing murals and pieces.

The idea of co-operation of small business owners in Ottawa comes from the writers' perception of the creative freedom of graffiti writers in Montreal. By comparison, graffiti writers from Ottawa understand Montreal as a liberal city with progressive attitudes toward graffiti. In Montreal, small business owners, large corporations and the city alike offer up wall space for graffiti writers to produce graffiti free of any limitations on creativity. The result is the production of stylistically advanced and aesthetically pleasing graffiti throughout the city. Dave and Gary agree that the freedom to produce graffiti in this setting is beneficial to all parties involved:

Montreal is the graffiti capital of Canada for sure. They respect it there because they are seeing the product of genius . . . compare this city with Montreal where they have big graffiti comps, graffiti jams. You see crazy murals everywhere. I guarantee no one has ever come back from Montreal and not come back and said 'wow. The graffiti was amazing'. That's never gonna happen here. Here they just won't have it anywhere.

It is clear that the level of co-operation as seen in Montreal by Ottawa writers is not something that they believe could ever happen in the capital city. For they understand that the City of Ottawa has waged a war on graffiti.

As a result of this war, waged publicly on television and in the local newspapers, writers understand that compromise on the part of the city and small business owners is highly unlikely. The inevitable continuation of this situation in Ottawa is disheartening to many of the writers who believe that they are being misinterpreted and misjudged by

members of the general public. From this perspective, the writers from Ottawa feel their committed efforts and passion for graffiti and the creative developments originating in this city are belittled by repeated attacks on the part of city officials and the police. Having recently been arrested in the latest sweep to 'clean up' the street, Dave's sentiments clearly express the concern of the community of creators:

I don't want to do time for something that I love. When I got arrested at Tech I said to the officer 'I've been painting here for 13 years. Under these walls are memories.' Honestly, if you peel back the layers you would see just incredible art. We don't get paid to do this. We're doing this cause we want to be here. We'd rather be here than any place else. We'd rather be doing this than anything else. I'm here because I want to be here. Not because I'm laughing at all the police, laughing at the city cause I'm getting away with something illegal. We do this to do something more positive. You know?

The dichotomy of the situation is disheartening to many graffiti writers. A solution that would appease both parties in the graffiti debate is unlikely when knowledge of the culture of graffiti as it is reported in this chapter remains restricted to the community of creators.

Graffiti writers' proposed solution to the graffiti debate in Ottawa entails allocated walls and creative freedom, but this 'solution' can only occur if the opinions regarding graffiti change. The community of creators cannot understand the dislike and anger that is felt by some (although relatively few) members of the public. The graffiti writers hope that their cultural expression in the form of graffiti no longer be misunderstood and mistreated by the general public. Gary asks why the city doesn't show them the limited amount of respect that the writers themselves are asked to show the city:

Why won't the city put garbage cans at Tech wall? They should so that we can throw our trash in the garbage can. Our buddy usually goes there with a shovel and cleans up the garbage. Kids that paint at tech wall pick up garbage. Seriously, no one cleans that place, like whenever you see it clean, it's from somebody who paints there. It's a park but their not gonna clean it cause they want it to look bad. Think about other parks around the city. They've got pollution there too and every morning people from the city go in there and clean it up. I'm just saying that they're trying to make it look bad by leaving all the garbage out. There was a picnic table there destroyed. I guarantee it wasn't anyone who writes graffiti that destroyed that picnic table. Cause you see our destruction. We tagged it, we pieced it. That is our destruction. Anyway they just left it there, left it for months. There's still pieces sitting there. This is our place and that's why they leave it like that. It makes me so angry.

Writers do not create graffiti to negatively affect their environment. On the contrary, they believe that the environment is positively affected through their expression, regardless of the form the graffiti takes. They believe that to be treated in this fashion disrespects the lifestyle and culture of graffiti.

The lifestyle of graffiti is facilitated through widespread comprehension of the social organisation of crews, rules of engagement regarding the order of forms and those that govern the production and evaluation of graffiti. For many writers in Ottawa, the culture of graffiti is simply communicated and maintained through these elements. The discourse on graffiti as it was discussed in this chapter illustrates the particular nature of graffiti in Ottawa as it is conceived and produced by graffiti writers and limited by the city that inspires its creation. This chapter was dedicated to presenting the discourse on graffiti in Ottawa. This discourse is clearly embedded in the established social practice of producing graffiti. If, as I stated in the introduction, discourse is exercised power, the mechanism of power associated with this graffiti discourse can be found in the many rules of engagement determined and adhered to by the writers in Ottawa, through the

institution of the graffiti crew and in the respect that is held by the 'toy' writers for the power and skill associated with their elders: the masters of the trade.

In the following chapter, I will present the alternative discourse on graffiti in Ottawa. Chapter Four will illustrate how the community of control perceives graffiti. It will illustrate the shared perceptions of the community of control and identify their opinions on removal and strategies for solutions to the 'graffiti problem' in the capital of Canada. Furthermore, the 'official discourse' on graffiti will bring to light the city's role in the so-called 'war' that is being waged on graffiti in 2002.

Chapter Four: The Official Discourse and its Promoters

The increase in graffiti in the city over the last five years has led me to question how city officials and concerned citizens of the capital conceive of and respond to it. This chapter contains an account of the perceptions of some officials of the City of Ottawa as well as some other members of the community. I conducted interviews with seven individuals from the community of control, five men and two women. All informants from the community of control were white and middle class. All had been long-time residents of the City of Ottawa.

In this chapter I will discuss their conceptions of Ottawa graffiti, including their attitudes toward graffiti in Ottawa, their perception of the issues raised by graffiti, and their response to the presence of graffiti in the capital. This chapter will also examine the types of graffiti in the city; those who are thought to produce it, their believed motivation for production, as well as some possible strategies toward a solution to the graffiti problem that is said to continue to tarnish the urban landscape of Ottawa. Communicated through common language and shared beliefs, their perceptions constitute what I have identified as the official discourse on graffiti.

The City of Ottawa

From its beginnings as a settlement built on revenues from natural resources, Ottawa has expanded into a metropolis with a population of over one million residents (Ottawa Kiosk, 2002: 1). As the fourth largest city in Canada with wonderful green spaces and the expansive Rideau Canal, maintaining the aesthetic aspect of this capital city is an important priority for the city government.

However, the city does not simply project a 'green' image alone. Rather, the current image of Ottawa contains many elements of an urban landscape. Urban anthropologist John Rennie Short explains that "the urban image is of particular importance in an era of intense competition between cities for business, investment, tourism and industry" (1996: 421). As a result, and being in competition with cities like Montreal and Toronto, the Ottawa identity is not rooted solely in culture or trade but in both. Ottawa is associated with culture and urban life-style in addition to the obviously "safely controlled and manicured nature" of a green city (Short, 1996: 421). As a result, the capital of Canada is developing into a city where government mingles with high-tech and art and culture along the banks of the Ottawa River. However, the diverse quality of the Ottawa identity continues to be enveloped in the bureaucratic traditions of government, thereby perpetuating the city's reputation of extreme cleanliness and order.

Constituted by a number of individuals, institutions and perspectives, a diverse group of people are united in agreement around one fundamental belief: graffiti is a problem in Ottawa. This shared understanding of graffiti is held by those in positions of influence and power. They can therefore spread and enforce their view through family, community and other institutions. It is for this reason that they are named the 'community of control' and that their view of graffiti is called the official discourse.

Attitudes Expressed by Members of the 'Community of Control'

Although the subject of graffiti and the solution to graffiti are understood by the community of control in many different ways, the underlying belief that unites this group

is the negative connotation that they have attached to the growing production and existence of graffiti in Ottawa. As city councillor of Capital Ward 17, Clive Doucet explains graffiti is an element of urban culture that the residents of the city “suffer from.” It is not understood as part of the growing urban identity of the city.

It is generally held that up until a short while ago, the problem of graffiti was location specific. Isolated in the downtown core, graffiti was relatively limited in its scope and intensity. As a result of the isolated instances of graffiti, Councillor Doucet’s secretary Donna Silver believes that the priority of graffiti elimination will only be understood by city councillors who are directly affected by it in their ward, implying that downtown councillors have been more involved in the fight against the ‘urban nuisance’ than other more rural councillors:

Most of these issues are downtown issues so there would be more concern for it downtown, that isn’t to say that there isn’t a problem with it elsewhere . . . some rural councillors are beginning to say that there is a problem out there too but not to the same extent.

However, the growing concern of rural councillors indicates that graffiti in Ottawa is spreading out from the downtown core into suburban areas and is doing so with increased intensity.

As councillor to Bay Ward 7, a ward outside the downtown core, Councillor Cullen discusses the new presence of graffiti outside the city centre. “No matter where I went I was finding it everywhere.” The previous downtown problem is becoming the problem of many residential areas of the city. Furthermore, once graffiti is identified in both the new and old locations, its presence becomes more difficult to ignore. In regard to a rural landscape that has not typically been the chosen location of graffiti writers in

the past, Councillor Cullen describes a notion of a graffiti epidemic: “When it covers nearly every hydro box, bell box, mail box and traffic signal box in my residential area. I think, hey this doesn’t belong here.” Clearly, for the community of control, its presence is out of place and therefore understood as an unsettling element in the rural landscape. Suggesting that graffiti is out of place in rural settings, the community of control interprets graffiti as a largely urban problem that has somehow infiltrated their sheltered suburban environment. Furthermore, I would argue that in thus expanding, graffiti in both location and volume is perceived as problematic and unnatural.

The following statements illustrate that the community of control shares an understanding of the growth of graffiti in Ottawa. With twenty-seven years of service to the city as superintendent of Parks and Trees, Tom Carling clarifies this point. Discussing the presence of graffiti in parks and green spaces throughout the city, he states, “I have seen it go from no graffiti to where we are today which is very disturbing.” As Co-ordinator of the Community Pride Program for the City of Ottawa, Paul McCan agrees. “I’ve seen it in places I’ve never seen it in before, four years ago. It seems to be spreading to places you never saw before.” He shared with me an incident that heightened his concern regarding the city’s graffiti:

What got my attention was as a parent when I was at my local park that had never had a problem with it before, and I just happen to follow the kids into the smallest nook and cranny for small kids, and it was plastered on the inside with stuff that kids shouldn’t have seen . . . It wasn’t directed at the kids but it was still unsuitable for the user. The only way I would have seen that was to go in there. I don’t know how long it was there. People are going in there and writing stuff that just doesn’t belong.

The graffiti in this case was not racial slurs or hate graffiti. However, its presence alone

was understood by Paul McCann as unsuitable for children. The spread of the once isolated, downtown graffiti heightens its negative reputation and implies that infectious graffiti is spreading uncontrollably into the otherwise untarnished rural regions.

The concern that arises from graffiti in any location in the City of Ottawa is rooted in a general understanding of the inherent qualities of graffiti. First the community of control believes that graffiti is visually offensive. Secondly, they perceive graffiti to be a disruption to the established order of things. I will now discuss these key elements in the official discourse of graffiti.

An Offence to the Senses

The distaste toward graffiti that is shared by the community of control is one that is expressed through the use of terms evoked to describe those things aesthetically unattractive. This use of language is clearly rooted in the perception of graffiti as an eyesore. Here, I submit, notions of order are synonymous with notions of cleanliness. If the community of control views the City of Ottawa as a generally clean and orderly city, then graffiti in Ottawa is conceived as a superficial scar or decay on the clean surface of the ordered community. For example, when discussing the various ways people are affected by graffiti, Councillor Doucet speaks of graffiti as “ugly and offensive.” Tom Carling adds that graffiti is “unsightly,” while Councillor Cullen claims that graffiti “defaces a beautiful town.” With a great deal of importance placed on the appearance of the city, graffiti is understood as a threat to the visual order and cleanliness of the city.

The Community Pride Program established by the city in 1994 is designed to

“address the issue of litter and beautification in the City of Ottawa” and illustrates that the cleanliness of the city is of utmost importance. When asked if something particular was effecting the cleanliness of Ottawa at that time, co-ordinator of the Program Paul McCann replies:

It was more complaints coming in. The visibility of things were looking shabby. Ottawa's got a reputation to be clean and green and that's because it's maintained clean and green but it stops at a certain level. It was spilling off, blowing in. It's always there but it was showing. People were voicing their concern and volunteers have always been there. We just supported and formalised.

Stemming out of the annual program ‘Spring-Cleaning the Capital,’ the ‘Graffiti Paint Over Project’ is associated with the effort of community volunteers to clean up their neighbourhoods. The Spring Cleaning the Capital and the Graffiti Paint Over Project are both initiatives that have developed in an effort to meet the goals of the Community Pride Program. Spring Cleaning the Capital is in its ninth year of successful month-long community-driven clean ups during which time the city supplies participants cleaning materials and advice. The newer Graffiti Paint Over Project is also facilitated by the supplies and support of the City of Ottawa which provides volunteers with the opportunity to paint over graffiti on city property (McCann, Spring 2001).

Individuals that partake in the ‘Graffiti Paint Over’ are attempting “to keep this city beautiful” by removing unattractive and offensive graffiti from the city. Described by fellow Bank Street shop owners as a victim of graffiti, Jim Morphy is a local storeowner in the downtown core who also comments on the associations that people continue to make between graffiti and dirt and decay. If graffiti is perceived of as an eyesore, it harbours the ability to alter the appearance and identity of the environment it

contaminates. He explains:

We have to look professional, clean. When people come into a photo lab they like it to look like a hospital operating room or something . . . some people may perceive graffiti to be seedy or associated with a seediness and an unkempt business or a poorly run business, although it is totally out of my control, perception may be that. And so they say, I don't like the *look* of that place so I'm not going to go in.

The emphasis of Jim's concern lies in the way in which graffiti alters the aesthetic image, the visual presentation of his storefront. The 'mess' that graffiti makes solidifies its impression as a visually offensive element of the urban landscape and contributes to the perception of graffiti as a negative phenomenon that is drastically out of place.

Graffiti as a Misleading, Destructive Threat to Society

In addition to seeing graffiti as an eyesore, the community of control believes that graffiti signifies and results in many things that are undesirable. For them, graffiti acts as an indicator of various untruths regarding the occupied or 'victimized' community and its citizens. Among them, graffiti presents a misleading perception regarding the interest of the community; it destroys the sense of self-fulfillment many associate with property ownership and it acts to attract more vandalism. Underlying the aforementioned potential of graffiti to disrupt the order of the community, the official discourse frames the cultural production of graffiti as a threat to the security of the person.

The community of control believes that the presence of graffiti in the local communities of Ottawa projects the impression that the citizens are uninterested in the appearance of their community. Councillor Doucet eloquently explains this characteristic of graffiti:

You don't want all that horrible stuff on your urban environment because it gives you an idea that people don't care about their community. Ultimately, your community is like your house. Your house doesn't have to be a million-dollar place but it should be maintained to show that people care about it and a ward is the same way, you want people to care about it. So I take it quite seriously.

One can deduce that like a mismanaged home, graffiti in Ottawa suggests that the environment is of little importance and that the community is irresponsible and without high moral standards. If the community did possess such traits, graffiti would not be tolerated, even as a symptom of urban growth.

Implicit in Doucet's statement is the notion of the perceived importance of ownership and property. The ownership of either private or public space has become an indicator of success. It would seem that even the ownership of public spaces has become a tangible reality in the new City of Ottawa. Facilitated through the Adopt a Park Program public space has become the quasi-property of corporations and individuals. Adopt a Park Program of the City of Ottawa "allows volunteers to contribute to the maintenance and care of community parks and be recognized for their efforts" (McCann, Spring 2001: 4). This Program permits individuals to announce their pseudo-ownership of public green space. It is based on the city's assumption that by giving the right of ownership and the ensuing responsibility of maintaining the grounds to private individuals or corporations, the adopted spaces will be well managed and clean. The city maintains that as the 'owners' of the park, corporations and individuals will have an increased desire to ensure the cleanliness of *their* public space.

This Program is extremely successful in the Ottawa region, suggesting that the citizens of Ottawa are protective of the parks they manage. Community members are

possessive of their neighbourhoods and take great pride in caring for them. In this context, graffiti is interpreted as an “offence to the general public.” Graffiti is interpreted as an intentional insult to their investment and efforts. Paul McCann describes the cycle that exists between those who maintain the parks and those who destroy them. He shared with me a story about one of the volunteers that takes care of a park in a downtown subdivision:

She’d been working on this park before, and she got them (graffiti) covered up and she was doing her part to keep *her* park pretty and doing all sorts of projects, and they came and made a mess of what she had removed so she tried a project with children. So they painted flowers on the surface etc. The next day it was written over.

In this case, graffiti is the nuisance that disrespects the efforts of those that claim ownership of the park and maintain its cleanliness.

Expressing similar frustration, Councillor Doucet discusses the effect that graffiti has on the small business owner, emphasising the abrasive nature of graffiti in robbing the owner of the rewards of pride. He explains:

A businessman is proud of his business. He’s happy with it, he cares about it and then to have it defaced like that is a pretty emotional thing. We get some pretty upset people calling here.

Graffiti is therefore capable of diminishing the sense of accomplishment that individuals are said to experience through their ownership. Graffiti is described as an insult, “disheartening” “humiliating” and “hurtful,” thereby suggesting that graffiti creates victims of those people affected by its disturbing presence. By painting graffiti on the wall, graffiti writers are believed to be mocking and negatively affecting the pride experienced in the ownership of both private and public property.

The Contagious Effect of Graffiti

The community of control perceives that graffiti has the ability to debase the moral standards of the neighbourhood, thereby affecting the mood of the community. However, of greater concern for the community of control is the potential of graffiti to act as a catalyst inviting illicit and illegal behaviour in the graffiti-riddled area. Graffiti that is not removed by the city or private business owners not only communicates false impressions of the community but it can also communicate to other graffiti writers and attract more graffiti to the area. This sentiment can be illustrated through Councillor Cullen's belief that the record increase of graffiti in Ottawa is the result of lagging diligence in its removal, thereby suggesting that the tolerance of graffiti (real or perceived) leads to its contagious reproduction. He states:

It has been allowed to get out of control, possibly because of the amalgamation there was less attention paid to it . . . I think this thing has bloomed because of the change over and I think because there was a period where it wasn't being dealt with it just accumulated, grew and became more visible.¹

The presence of graffiti throughout the city becomes an invitation to other writers to leave their mark and to do so without fear of apprehension by police or concerned citizens.

Furthermore, the idea of contagious vandalism is compounded by the continued adoption of what the community of control calls the "Broken Window Theory."

Developed in the late 1960s, the Broken Window Theory hinges on the belief that

¹ On January 1 2001, the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton and eleven local municipalities amalgamated to create the new City of Ottawa.

disorder and crime are inextricably linked in a “developmental sequence” so that if one broken window is left un-repaired “the rest of the windows will soon be broken” (Wilson and Kelling, 1982: 31). In 1979, sociologist Nathan Glazer suggested that the proliferation of graffiti is directly linked to the presence of existing graffiti (Wilson and Kelling, 1982: 33). Visible graffiti suggests that the community does not care about the neighbourhood and that vandalism is tolerated. As a result, it is thought that additional criminal activity will ensue. The criminalization of graffiti will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Councillor Cullen echoes these views by Glazer. He states that “if graffiti is tolerated as an anti-social act then it opens the door for other anti-social acts.” The community of control perceives graffiti as a sign “that the community is falling apart,” which in turn encourages others to break the law in a similar manner. Graffiti incidents are reported in conjunction with a number of other non-violent crimes committed in the same location. The shared location of various crimes is interpreted by the community of control as evidence or proof of the Broken Window Theory. Paul McCann clearly associates graffiti vandalism with other anti-social acts. He states:

The people removing the graffiti are the same people that are replacing the broken benches and all that. Because there is also vandalism to the furniture, the wood, the garbage cans. They're pulling out big spikes. People are just . . . It's insane what happens in parks. Setting fires . . . there's more than just graffiti, that's the problem . . . The same parks that are filled with graffiti are getting the bleachers ripped down, the benches flipped. People are pulling out spikes of the chained tables and putting them in the pools and using it for skateboarding. They are going out of their way to destroy. In some places they have to take the table out it's been damaged, burnt repeatedly: no more table. So who was using it? Them. Well they have no more tables to sit on now. They're torching garbage cans, they're torching everything, it's just, they get away with one little thing and it builds up.

McCann's evidence may support the Broken Window argument or it may go further to suggest that the community of control believes that graffiti vandals do not limit themselves strictly to the production of graffiti alone. It may suggest that graffiti writers are also responsible for other non-violent crimes committed throughout the city.

The Broken Window Theory begins with the premise that anxiety in many big cities is caused not only by fear of 'real' crimes, but from a sense that the street is disorderly and that this disorder is a "source for worrisome encounters" (Wilson and Kelling 1982: 31). The community of control is in agreement that the presence of graffiti threatens the public's previously held notion of security in their community. In his article "On Subway Graffiti in New York," Glazer wrote that graffiti "even when not obscene, confronts the subway rider with the inescapable knowledge that the environment he must endure for an hour or more a day is uncontrolled and uncontrollable, and that anyone can invade it to do whatever damage and mischief the mind suggests" (Wilson and Kelling, 1989: 33). The proliferation of graffiti throughout the streets and residential neighbourhoods of Ottawa is perceived to affect the security of the person and the community in a profound way. If one's safety is based on one's sense of security, and if graffiti is disorder which perpetuates crime, then the presence of graffiti will affect one's sense of security and safety.

The community of control conceptualises graffiti in this light, suggesting that graffiti is interpreted by many as an attack or threat to personal security. Councillor Cullen reports that "from the community's perspective" graffiti is responsible for "a loss of . . . a sense of loss of security." As an example of this, Paul McCann suggests that the

threat of graffiti is so great that it forces members of the community to be apprehensive about reporting graffiti to the police:

I know a lot of people who take care of their parks who live across the street who have a fear that if they call the police that somehow that gang will find out and retaliate. Somehow they think that they'll find out which is not necessarily true, not until you get into court maybe but they've feel, even though there are six houses across the road from the park that they'll zero in on their house. That retaliation has happened. I've heard stories of that too.²

Projecting the image of the victimised residential home-owner, graffiti in local parks challenges the “night watch or block parent” mentality. The community of control has assigned to graffiti the associated capability of threatening the security of the citizens of Ottawa.

The Facts as they are Understood by Members of the Community of Control

Although the City of Ottawa differentiates types of graffiti for the purpose of determining its priority for removal, a more critical categorization of the types of graffiti is present in the official discourse. Tom Carling explains that the City of Ottawa formally differentiates graffiti based on “how quickly they react to it,” noting that “if it’s offensive, the reaction time is much faster and will be addressed usually within 24 hours.” Offensive graffiti of this nature is hate, sexual or racial graffiti. The National Capital Commission, which is responsible for the removal of graffiti from any of their buildings, furniture or property, also maintains a 24-hour reaction policy.³

² I was unable to locate any information that supported or dismissed this claim.

³ It is important to note that the City of Ottawa places such racial and hate sentiments into the category of graffiti. This contrasts with the clear distinction that is made between graffiti and hate crimes by the graffiti writers themselves. For them, sexist political or racial slurs painted on a wall are not graffiti.

Having established that the community of control perceives graffiti to be a type of disorder that therefore threatens individual and community security, the official discourse distinguishes between different types of graffiti and categorizes these types as two separate forms of graffiti. The community of control has distinguished between tagging and piecing. I will now discuss the community of control's conception of street graffiti with regard to their categorization of the types and affiliated forms of graffiti that they identify within the urban landscape.

Tags

The community of control identifies a type of graffiti that is seen to be most visually offensive and one that causes the most damaging effects on the community within which it exists. The negative categorization of this graffiti is not based on a judgement of its aesthetic qualities. Rather, this type of graffiti is identified based solely on its capacity to visually offend, threaten and mock the community. I believe that the official discourse of graffiti is formed largely in response to this specific type of graffiti. In the official discourse of the community of control, this type of graffiti is most often associated with graffiti in the form of tags or throw ups.

The City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Police identify the following types of graffiti: tags, creative or artistic, racial, sexual, political, love, anti-establishment, and vulgar or explicit. They claim that tagging is the most common type of graffiti in Ottawa (Ottawa Police, 2001: 1). They define tagging as "the painting or 'bombing' of an identifiable symbolic character or 'tag' that may or may not contain letters"(Ottawa Police, 2001: 1). Explaining that the city formally recognizes many different types of graffiti, Paul

McCann highlights the prominence of tagging. “There are several kinds: you’ve always had the love stuff, you’ve always had the “was here” stuff but now the tagging, and that is like 80 percent of the problem and that is the unsightly scribbled stuff.” Tags and throws are understood as the worst form of visually offensive street graffiti based on the quantity of its presence in the city street. Political, racial or sexist graffiti is more offensive to the majority of the public. It is removed within 24 hours. Tagging, however, is not, and therefore the longevity of its existence in conjunction with its quantity makes it the most offensive of the two forms of street graffiti discussed in this thesis.

Many informants from the community of control explained that not only do they find tags and throws visually disturbing; they are unable to read this form of graffiti. For example, Councillor Doucet explains, “the tagging business, I must admit I don’t understand this tagging stuff. This desire of young people to put these little tags everywhere which are really quite offensive . . . we get really upset people calling here.” The tagging “stuff,” as Councillor Doucet calls it, is without interpretable content. Because of its illegibility, I believe it is more easily perceived as a threat than other legible or aesthetically pleasing forms of graffiti. While commenting on the increase of graffiti in parks throughout Ottawa, Tom Carling agrees, stating that “it is a lot of no message graffiti, just vandalism with paint stuff.” The community of control is able to identify tagging from other types and forms of graffiti; however, graffiti in the form of tagging is interpreted as lacking any message which heightens their dislike of it. Their perception of this form of graffiti is further compounded when the community of control considers the notion of an intended audience that is able to decipher and comprehend it.

Recognition of this distinct and anonymous group of graffiti writers able to read the scribbles left for each other around town heightens the perceived threat by suggesting the existence of a separate community of deviants whose private discussions take place in the public space of the city street.

Although the content of the message of tagging is unknown, the community of control believes that they understand the purpose of tagging. Heightened by the illegible style of the form, the official discourse frames tagging as the worst form of street graffiti because of its authors and its intended purpose. The participants believe that tagging is gang related.⁴ Found throughout the downtown core and residential suburbs in ever increasing frequency, tagging as the communication between gangs is viewed as a serious problem by the city and its officials. For example, as Councillor Cullen states, “on the mail boxes, hydro boxes, bell boxes and traffic signal boxes you would basically find scrawls of a script that was later identified to me as tagging by gangs.” Although many individuals within the community of control admit that they have little or no first-hand experience in dealing with the city’s youth, they continue to perceive the production of tags and throws to be the work of inner-city gangs. Paul McCann explains that he himself has “not been out there long enough or at the right times to see the gang stuff.” However, when discussing tags in Mitchell Park, he mentioned that members of that particular community have informed him that the graffiti on the trees are the colour signs of three prominent gangs in the city. It was reported in the Westboro community paper The News that a member of that local community came to a public meeting on the subject

of graffiti to “find out if there was any truth to rumors he had heard about Mafia gang activity being behind the spray paint” (Oct.7 1999: 17). It is clear that tagging in Ottawa is perceived largely to be the work of gangs. Through the association of the perceived authors of this kind of graffiti with other more serious criminal offences, this type of graffiti is seen to heighten its ability to threaten the safety and sense of security of the public throughout the city. Through this association, the production of graffiti becomes ever more frightening and undesirable.

Whether created by gangs or other “disenfranchised youth,” the community of controls determines the purpose of tagging to be a mechanism of staking claim to territory. Many informants compare the illegible markings of tagging to similar territorial markings left by animals in the wild. Concerned citizen and former mayoral candidate Diane McIntyre explains that “in order to claim space, they tag it out like a wolf would by lifting his leg by a tree but they use a spray can.” Councillor Cullen agrees that “tagging is like marking territory, their territory. Much like what a dog does but in a different way.” In an effort by individuals to claim territory, members of the community of control directly interpret tagging to be the most destructive and dangerous form of street graffiti currently visible in Ottawa.

Pieces

Although the official discourse firmly holds that all graffiti is inherently destructive, it can at certain times and in certain places recognize some types of graffiti as

⁴ Although each person I spoke to admitted to having never been presented with evidence to support the connotation of tags in Ottawa to be the production of youth gangs, they continued to use the “gang”

less offensive and less mindless than other types. My research indicates that the community of control associates pieces as the form of graffiti that is the most decorative. Its members perceive that graffiti in this form is influenced or affected by the creative and artistic capabilities of its creator. The creative expression of a graffiti “artist” contrasts with that of the “malicious” tagger. Pieces are therefore understood to be influenced by a creative expression, and as a result, are decorative and more aesthetically pleasing than tags or other forms of street graffiti. The police describe this type of graffiti as “pictures or symbols painted in a highly skilled manner to display creative or artistic talent” (Ottawa Police, 2000: 1). This type of graffiti is not as common in Ottawa as tagging.

The community of control realizes that this type of graffiti is located in the downtown core as a result of the number of large surface areas characteristic of urban centres. Councillor Cullen describes the location of this type of graffiti:

This type of graffiti is found where there are larger expanses of concrete. There you would see, I guess you would call it larger works that I guess you can interpret as art and that’s fine.

Pieces are distinguishable to the community of control not only on account of their decorative or creative merit, but also on account of the scale or size of the piece.

When speaking about the larger, less offensive graffiti, the community of control refers to the colorful and talented work that they believe can be found therein. Members of the community of control are very specific in locating this second type of graffiti on the retaining wall in the old soccer field at the Ottawa Technical High School on Slater Street at Bronson Avenue. Councillor Cullen explains his understanding of the situation.

affiliation as a way of justifying programs for graffiti removal.

“I think there is a difference between tagging and what you see at Tech.” He goes on to say:

You can look at the wall on Albert as it rises out to Bronson out at Lebreton Flats and see lots of art there. It is very different from the scrawls that you see, the tagging. That is another type entirely.

For the community of control, the graffiti that is found at Tech wall is representative of piecing. Graffiti in this form is creative and expressive. As a result, it is viewed by many of the informants in the community as street art. Many members of the community of control “actually like graffiti when it is done that way.” I argue that this appreciation of pieces is seen as a contradiction within the official discourse.

The nature of the problem surrounding this form of graffiti is not its destructive capacities or its ability to threaten the public. Rather, graffiti in this form is problematic as it gives rise to a dichotomy in the official discourse of the community of control: it is a beautiful example of the illegal act of graffiti. Members of the community of control recognize that piecing and murals are less visually offensive than other forms of street graffiti and in most cases are visually pleasing. However, these visually pleasing images are expressed through blatant disregard of ownership rights: graffiti in this form remains an unlawful creation and practice. Isolated within the territorial equivalent of no man’s land, Tech Wall has become the favored location of many graffiti writers. The community of control refrains from arresting them and removing the graffiti.⁵

As a result of the limited presence of this expressive type of graffiti in Ottawa, piecing is understood by many as positive. In this context, Tech Wall and the graffiti

⁵ The Ontario Board of Education does not ask the police to put a stop to the graffiti production at Tech Wall. However, the decision to arrest a graffiti writer there remains the discretion of the arresting officer.

found there is utilized by the community of control to further illustrate their concern and dislike for tags and throw ups. By using the pieces at Tech as visual aids, the public can more easily identify and discriminate between the different types of street graffiti. Councillor Cullen illustrates this idea by clearly stating that the graffiti found at Tech “gives you a chance to distinguish between the sort of genuine artists and the violence.”⁶ Councillor Doucet’s secretary Donna Silver agrees that the creative process that occurs at the Tech Wall is great for two reasons:

One because it gives people who have nothing to do something to do and this is always a productive thing for the community at large, civilization as a whole. But it also makes something ugly look nice. It was just an ugly retaining wall with ivy or whatever growing all up and down it.

The more positive graffiti that can be found at Tech is therefore perceived as being more than simply a contrast to negative tagging. It is seen as a utility to the city.

Writers: Artists vs. Gang Members

I have discussed the differentiation that is made between the types of graffiti that exist in the City of Ottawa. A similar differentiation is made between the writers responsible for their production. The community of control believes that the artistic graffiti that is found at the Tech Wall is the creative expression of individuals they call “artists,” unlike the mindless writers or the threatening gangs believed to produce the tags around the city. The artists of such pieces are those individuals whose interesting work is

⁶ I would argue that violence in this sense is meant to imply tagging and hate graffiti.

executed typically in more than one color and dimension, creating a pseudo-fresco in the city.

Although a distinction is made between the writers of both types of graffiti, a more specific understanding of their identity remains an area of confusion and mystery for the community of control. Paul McCann believes that the young people creating graffiti are not members of the Ottawa community. He believes that many of the graffiti writers are travelers or visitors that are “just passing through,” He explains:

There is a triangle of people that are looking for a new life between Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal, maybe it's acceptable over there and they bring it here, and now we are seeing more of it. They move on from here to Toronto, move on from Toronto to Montreal and come back. I know that sometimes we remove it and it doesn't come back, sometimes we remove it and it does come back.

Although no other members of the community of control share McCann's theory of the transient graffiti writer infecting an otherwise healthy community, the majority of the informants agree that graffiti vandals producing both tags and “art” are generally individuals of high-school age up to their mid twenties. Donna Silver suggests that the creators of graffiti eventually grow out of its production, suggesting that “somebody doing graffiti say ten years ago is no longer doing it now.” The official discourse does not consider in great detail the economic background or ethnicity of the graffiti writers. The identities of the writers of graffiti are secondary in importance to the assumed motivations that are thought to drive the production of graffiti in Ottawa.

The community of control distinguishes between two types of graffiti and the writers that are responsible for their production. I have suggested that the official discourse tends to hold that pieces are created by ‘artists’ while tags are the destructive

work of gangs. Although the purpose of each type of graffiti may be distinguishable from the other -simply that tags are territorial markings and pieces are not- the underlying motivations for both types of graffiti are the same. The official discourse generally holds that the production of any or all street graffiti is rooted in some general contempt of society by its young people.⁷ It is the negative relationship that the writers have with society that motivates the production, regardless of the form of graffiti that it generates. Therefore the perceived “creative” production of Tech Wall graffiti art and the annoying production of the territorial markings of tagging are the result of the same instigator: young people who feel negatively affected by society.

This perception of motives can be clearly illustrated through the following excerpts. Donna Silver explains that young people face challenges that are difficult to overcome. She states:

A lot of people doing graffiti art are frustrated with society and how they feel it takes you far too long to get anywhere as an individual within the process of high school, university, grad school, apprenticing a job. You're thirty-five before you are actually starting your career and I want to do something now, today. It's the urgency of youth kicking in.

In her opinion, “anger is the motivating force that is causing them to seek attention through this method of expression.” Furthermore, Diane McIntyre feels that graffiti is the production of “disenfranchised youth.” She believes that graffiti in Ottawa is the result “of people wanting to claim space in a society that has excluded them from any meaningful participation.” By acting out in the form of graffiti vandalism, “some of the

⁷ The motivations for the production of graffiti were not of the concern of Councillor Clive Doucet. In the interview process he made no mention of the desire to investigate what drives someone to write on a wall or post box.

more primitive, of the more radical, of the more artistic” youth of society are simply trying to “claim space.”

However, this motive is seen to be compounded by the abuse of drugs and alcohol. Turning into a “childish, mindless prank,” Paul McCann suggests that graffiti is “obviously related to partying, not thinking correctly and bad judgement.” Members of the community of control perceive graffiti writers as troubled youth, drunk and stoned, that create graffiti as a way to claim space in a society from which they are otherwise excluded.

The Official Response

I argue that in as much as the community of control can be said to be united by the widespread agreement that graffiti is a fundamentally wrong and an unwanted element of the urban landscape, the official views on graffiti are also based on an agreement as to the likelihood of a solution to the problem. This solution will restore their environment to the safe, orderly and clean city that it once was. This sense of confidence is based on the relatively unprecedented success of New York City in fighting the worst ‘epidemic’ of graffiti in history. Using the American case as an example, the City of Ottawa believes that the war waged on graffiti in the capital will be won.

The “worst case scenario” of the New York situation is utilized as an example to illustrate the extreme measures that are required to effectively ward off the production of graffiti. Councillor Doucet explains:

I know in New York, for example they had a . . . I think starting to care about the Transit system was one of the things that turned New York around. Part of caring for it was just investing in a lot more trains and

getting a lot more efficient service. But also part of caring for it was having a rule that no train left the station in the morning dirty. If it had graffiti on it, it didn't leave. And what that did is, it sent a message to the graffiti folks that there was no point putting it on cause they weren't going to see it and in fact prior to the great clean up of the New York Subway system, the windows had been painted over, like you couldn't see the station. That's how difficult it was. I had one person say it felt like on a New York subway that you were being taken away to the concentration camps, like you were in a cattle car. They had to take very severe action because the problem had just gotten so bad. In New York, it got to the point that the city was crumbling, like the thing is with a big city like New York, it can't function without its public transit system working because the bulk of its people getting in and out of the city are on public transit, they don't use a car, so it literally started to suffocate. I mean, people weren't going to the city, they were not working in the city. Tourism was down, business was down, it was in decay.

By comparing the gravity of the situation in New York to the Ottawa situation, the magnitude of the problem of graffiti in Ottawa becomes comprehensible and the possibility of a solution more than feasible.

In the context of Ottawa, the recommendations for solution are varied in their strength and scope. However, the community of control appreciates that only a "custom" solution will be effective. For example, Donna Silver acknowledges that currently the graffiti situation in Ottawa allows the city "lots of options to get to some kind of resolution that would work for everybody." Furthermore, Paul McCann agrees that the solution adopted by the city must address the specific needs of the City of Ottawa. He states:

In the Ottawa area this is our own individual experience. I don't think we have . . . It's not the same problem at the same level as other areas. We should treat it . . . there's a solution and a custom solution to what is going on here.

It would seem that based on the success of the New York subway graffiti eradication

project, members of the community of control are able to distinguish the specific Ottawa experience and have confidence in the construction of a custom solution to the problem. Their solution is based on recommendations made by the Graffiti Removal Project of 1999, taking into consideration some “alternative” strategies that have proved beneficial in other American cities.

After identifying the increase in graffiti over the last few years, the Ottawa police with the co-operation of Ottawa Hydro, Canada Post, The National Capital Commission, OC Tanspo, the City of Ottawa, Bell Canada and the former Region of Ottawa-Carleton set out to “combat graffiti in Ottawa’s downtown core”(Ottawa Police, 2000: 1).⁸ The Graffiti Removal Project was designed to accomplish the following goals: to cover up/remove graffiti in Ottawa; to develop a graffiti database that would help in police investigations; to conduct research and planning into the long term prevention of graffiti and to increase public awareness (Ottawa Police, 2000: 1). Meeting their desired goals, the Graffiti Removal Project recommended that the new City of Ottawa design a long-term strategy managed by a full time Graffiti Task Force to combat the continued production of graffiti. This strategy would include some of the approaches adopted in the summer project, emphasising co-operation between sectors and the extensive use of the graffiti database.⁹ In addition, the report recommends that education play a significant role in deterring graffiti vandalism and encourages an ‘alternative’ approach to the

⁸ The “downtown core” in this project focused predominantly on areas of the Market, Centretown, Sandy Hill, The Glebe Somerset and Hintonburg. However, the project did include work on Rideau, Somerset, Gladstone, Wellington and Bank.

⁹ Electronic photographs were taken and used to create the Graffiti Database. Described as one of the accomplishments of the Graffiti Removal Project, Mr. Pepper, director of Community Development with the Ottawa Police, explained “that maintaining the visual database makes it easier to gather information on their activities and share it with other organizations” (Presentation on the 1999 Graffiti Removal Project).

strategies adopted by the city, emphasising that “partners pursue various avenues that include working with the affected communities directly, with youth, artists, business and community organisation”(Ottawa Police, 2000: 13). The desire is that the new City of Ottawa will design a holistic strategy to combat the vandalism of graffiti. The strategy of the official discourse combats graffiti writers and most importantly determines and enforces the ‘space’ that graffiti writers and their work are permitted to occupy in the City of Ottawa.

Using the recommendations of the report on the Graffiti Removal Project as “a lever,” graffiti removal in Ottawa is largely the responsibility of Councillor Alex Cullen. He has initiated a “war” against graffiti in Ottawa. Beginning with a motion presented to the Transportation and Transit Committee, Councillor Cullen directed city staff to devise a strategy based on the findings of the report. As media attention over the subject grew, small business owners shared with the city their costly encounters with graffiti. Cullen explains “we heard from other elements in our community. There was an overwhelming consensus that we had a problem.” The Transportation and Transit Committee endorsed the Councillor’s initiative on September 19th 2001 and it was unanimously adopted by city council. Although Councillor Cullen awaits the endorsement of funds from the newly amalgamated City of Ottawa, numerous components that would ensure the successful eradication of graffiti from the streets of Ottawa have already received a great deal of attention. I will now briefly discuss some of the components to the strategy. These elements, although not yet the formal policy of the City of Ottawa, have been determined as essential to the successful eradication of graffiti.

First, the new strategy will include a removal element. The community of control anticipates the introduction of a new by-law that would harmonise the twelve townships that now compose the newly amalgamated City of Ottawa. This by-law would act to force property owners to remove graffiti from their property or otherwise face the penalties of a fine. Clearly, a proposed by-law of this nature places a heavy burden on the business community. However, it is generally held that this community is in every case already feeling the financial burden of graffiti. Councillor Cullen explains that any way you approach the issue business owners “are out of pocket. If they don’t do something they’ll be fined and we’ll do it and pay for the effort or they can do it. Either way it’s a strategy.” With “private businesses” listed by police as the number one location “hit” by graffiti, the community of control is optimistic that this new strategy will force small business owners to respect and preserve a clean and orderly Ottawa (Ottawa police, 2001: 2).

As the second element in the strategy, education is extremely important to the community of control. Based on the recommendations of the Graffiti Removal Project, the graffiti pamphlet published by the police in 2001 is an example of the public outreach designed to instruct both the general public and graffiti writers on the social and economic costs of graffiti production. The community of control believes that the current tolerance of graffiti by many city officials and citizens alike suggests that education is drastically needed to “change some attitudes.” Cullen explains that the beauty of the City of Ottawa depends on the widespread “re-education” of citizens that have come to tolerate the presence of graffiti in their city.

Furthermore, Paul McCann explains that the educational component is essential to the success of the anti-graffiti strategy as a whole. He explains:

There is a strong educational component required to let writers realize that there is a cost to it. You can't paint a brick surface without shortening the life of the brick; it has to breathe. They have coatings, you can put up a solution of anti-graffiti coatings but at a cost in the long run. All these costs that people have to realize.

Still unsure of the level of cooperation and involvement of "services bureaus" and school boards, the community of control believes that by educating and consequently changing the perceptions of the public, graffiti will no longer be tolerated as an element of the urban landscape but understood as vandalism causing social and financial harm to the community.

The third and final element of the strategy for a solution to the graffiti problem in Ottawa is dependent on the effective implementation of both the education and removal components. Only after the city has removed the existing graffiti and convinced the citizens to understand the "harsh" realities of graffiti, may the third element be considered. Based on successful cases elsewhere, the community of control has suggested consideration of what I call the 'sanctioned wall solution.' This strategy is based on the principle of the allocation of space by the city for the sole purpose of graffiti production. Unsure of this component's successful implementation, it is the desire and belief of the community of control that by providing space for graffiti production, the city will be providing alternative locales for pieces. Therefore, the sanctioned wall solution would direct this type of graffiti away from the destruction of property, toward the beautification of allocated space.

The Tech Wall has become the example by which many local officials are able to conceptualize the notion of providing graffiti writers with a wall that they are encouraged to deface. The result is a colorful collage of ideas and paint that has been described as “beautiful” and “important.” Councillor Cullen stresses that based on the talent that he has seen exhibited at Tech Wall, the city “may want to find walls of community centres or something of the like and direct some of our graffiti artists there, giving room for murals and the like.”

Across the river in the province of Quebec, the City of Hull has identified and labeled particular spaces that are allocated to the production of graffiti. These spaces are limited to bridge abutments and underpasses that are not exposed to a high volume of traffic. The community of control agrees with the positioning of these locations. Paul McCann illustrates the significance of the location. He states “there is a bicycle underpass along a creek and it’s all a wall of neat stuff . . . it’s a great spot. It’s secluded so it’s not visible by the tour buses.” I would argue that the specific nature of this space is integral to its existence. The secluded nature of the graffiti walls in Hull shields the public from the condoned although uncontrolled production of graffiti. As a result, the similar adoption of this strategy by the City of Ottawa would ensure that the interest of all those involved would be met. Graffiti writers would no longer be arrested for the production of creative works. The secluded nature of the location would ensure the limited exposure of the graffiti. The public would never feel inundated by the officially sanctioned graffiti of the city.

Although the concept of a sanctioned wall is a fundamental aspect of the official

policy on graffiti, it has not met with unanimous approval by all members of the community of control. The concern lies in the inability of the city to control the type or form of graffiti that is produced on such an allocated space. Although the sanctioned wall solution is designed to attract the production of pieces, there is no method of limiting the production of graffiti to this particular form. The concern lies in the graffiti writer's freedom to tag or bomb the sanctioned space. Using the Tech Wall as an example, Paul McCann acknowledges the artistic creations that are characteristic of that location; however, he stresses that the legally neutral space continues to perpetuate the production of the more negative form of graffiti known as tagging:

I've heard good opinions about [providing space]. But that's the artists stuff, the writers are the ones who aren't looking for that. They want to hit, they want to bomb whatever else there is. The people in the field say that you can give them a wall but they'll just go around the corner. And you've seen the Tech wall and you see what's down the road that wasn't hit before. This is a high volume corridor.

For the members of the community of control that agree with this dilemma, the problem of graffiti can only be dealt with through its widespread removal, swift apprehension of the taggers and a "strong educational component" to teach young people that graffiti is costly and inherently wrong.

Attempts to re-direct graffiti production have occurred in Ottawa. For example, last year a number of local graffiti writers interested in decorating the urban environment were commandeered from the street onto the walls of the St. Laurent Bus Depot. Organized by the Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa, graffiti writers were asked to

produce posters that would be hung throughout the busy bus station.¹⁰ Councillor Doucet explains that the city “used graffiti artists to decorate our transit station.” The subjects of the posters were not free of restriction however. The writers were not permitted to make reference to any street name or crew in their design. The posters hung in the St. Laurent depot for over a year. However, the program has yet to be continued or extended to other major commuter hubs around the city.

Although there may be numerous approaches regarding a strategy for solution, the community of control recognizes the solution to the problem of graffiti in Ottawa is necessary and attainable. The motivation for a Graffiti Task Force is related to the city’s ability to serve the interests of their public. The concern of the public regarding the increased presence of graffiti in and around Ottawa informs the official discourse of the community of control. The official discourse therefore represents an attempt to meet the demands of the community of control that insists on an immediate response in the apprehension and punishment of graffiti writers. Councillor Cullen explains that the time to address these concerns has come. He states:

It is a war we may never win. But if you tolerate it, it’s not something that you can continue to tolerate. What the appropriate level of effort is required, that’s a political decision but clearly what we are hearing from our citizens is that we have to do better . . . This is an initiative and I intend to see it through to at least beat this problem back into something that is manageable. Is this a war where we take prisoners? Well, I hope so. We just can’t tolerate the status quo. We just can’t tolerate this stuff.

This chapter has revealed the perceptions on graffiti based on interviews with members of the community of control. Making reference to concepts and terms like

¹⁰ Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa is an organization that organizes volunteer work, leadership training, civic involvement and initiatives that promote partnership and strength in communities. They inspire

tagging and bombing, this overview illustrates that the community of control is informed but also misinformed on the subject of graffiti. Specifically, their official discourse on graffiti involves the shared ideal of a solution that would at one extreme remove graffiti from the shared spaces of the city and at the other possibly offer the compromise of the donation of wall space for the sanctioned production of graffiti art. The community of control conceptualizes the motivations of the writers guided by their categorization of street graffiti into two camps, tag and pieces or scribbles and art. This distinction between the types of graffiti is central to the official discourse, as it is through these categorizations that this discourse has developed.

However, the distinction between pieces and tags generally dissolves when there is general discussion of the potential of graffiti to threaten the security of the community, disrespect ownership, and create a misleading marker of the interests of the citizens. The official discourse quickly perceives both graffiti art and tagging as a phenomenon that has invaded the cleanliness of the city from some other place. The resulting appearance of disorder drives the community of control to approach graffiti as having an inherent quality of disorder. As a result, the official discourse on graffiti in Ottawa is based on the premise that unauthorized paint on a wall or post box in the city challenges the order and security of the community at the expense of limiting the true potential of the capital city. Power is given to the community of control through this discourse. Through the mechanism of media, police, community activism and municipal government, the official discourse on graffiti is legitimized and flourishes.

The following two chapters will present my analysis of the varying perceptions that have been presented in the previous two chapters on the official discourse of graffiti held by the community of control and the graffiti discourse as it is constructed by graffiti writers from the region. The next chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the motivations of graffiti writers based on my analysis of their discourse. I will argue that graffiti writers in Ottawa are attempting to address the exclusionary nature of the City of Ottawa and have formed a subculture as a result. Although the community of creators has the characteristics of a “subculture” as it is understood in subcultural theory, I will argue that this theory is in need of revision when applied to this subculture in Ottawa.

Chapter Six is dedicated to an analysis of the official discourse of graffiti. Drawing on theories of ideology and hegemony, I will argue that graffiti is a site of political and ideological struggle. I will then argue that the members of the community of control believe that graffiti threatens their ideal of the privileged urban aesthetic. Members of this group have responded by promoting an official discourse that perceives graffiti as a form of pollution and an indicator of danger. Chapter Six will be followed by the Conclusion of the thesis with a general summary of arguments made therein and suggestions for further research.

Chapter Five: The Understanding of Graffiti as a Subculture

There are a few things you must do before in order to make your presence a welcome one. First; know the history. Second; know the rules of the game. Third; work hard at being good, or at least competent. Fourth; snitches, and shit talkers get stitches and need walkers. Fifth; you're good, but you're not that good. Keep your fat head to a reasonable swell and get back to work. These are the five fingers of your left hand. Study them well. Soon, you'll be able to get a grip on your self-esteem and we'll all be better for it.
(The Bomb Magazine, 47 June/July 1996)

In the previous chapter I presented the way in which graffiti is perceived by members of the community of control, including councillors and city workers as well as other citizens from the region. To contrast this perspective, Chapter Three was dedicated to the presentation of the perception of graffiti in Ottawa from the creators of graffiti themselves. Although there may be some contradictions within each of the discourses, it is apparent that the two communities of study in this thesis are directly at odds with one another.

I believe that it is important to interrogate the manner in which different individuals or communities come to conceptualise the visual production of graffiti in such different ways. However, it is not my desire to judge or declare which perspective is true or even morally correct. Rather, I am attempting to understand the phenomenon of graffiti which, through the passing of time, has become a problem for the dominant culture.

My argument here is that graffiti is a site of struggle. As an element emerging from the metropolis of New York City, graffiti has found its way across borders and oceans and has found a place in the capital city of Canada. The urban landscape of

Ottawa is both the physical and ideological context in which this struggle takes place.

In this chapter I will discuss the process of association that occurs between space, image and behaviour. In the context of the City of Ottawa, the result is an urban aesthetic that reflects both the municipality and the image of the capital of Canada. Graffiti is not included in this aesthetic. I will argue that graffiti writers have a separate conceptualisation of the urban aesthetic that addresses their exclusion from the privileged urban aesthetic of the community of control. Finally, in this chapter, I will present evidence to suggest that graffiti writers in Ottawa are a subculture, exhibiting new characteristics of style and expression that challenge traditional subcultural theory.

The long-standing image of the City of Ottawa has been aligned with the bureaucratic model of the capital of Canada. Communities have formed throughout the city based on the citizens' shared myth and assumptions about the world. Like-minded individuals have migrated to specific settings in the city including the high-tech suburb of Kanata, the New-Yuppie, green friendly area of the Glebe and the diverse hub of Centre Town. On a local level, the dominant culture is aware of the important image of the capital of Canada that is contained within the municipal framework of the City of Ottawa. Unlike most municipalities, the image of the City of Ottawa is conceptually dictated by its second image as the capital region.

What does this mean in the construction of an image for the City of Ottawa? I believe that the widespread image of the City of Ottawa is one that parallels its image as the nation's capital. With the municipal logo of "Clean and Green and Proud" I argue that fundamental elements of the national image have been conceived and embraced as the defining elements of the municipal image. As a result, the defining traits of the

community that are socially acceptable and therefore encouraged or rewarded are not necessarily traits inherent to the local community. Rather, the defining traits of the image of Ottawa as a city are those traits that also support a preferred image of Ottawa as the nation's capital. Similarly, the negative elements that are perceived to challenge the capital image are understood by the community of control to be negative elements to the image of the municipality.

The image of the city is understood to reflect its inhabitants. The "community pride," echoing patriotism of the municipality, signifies that the city and its citizens celebrate the "clean and green" image and are committed to maintaining and supporting it. Strategically, this conceptual imposition is effective in ensuring that the citizens of Ottawa make it their responsibility to support and defend the desired image of the capital. This conceptualisation of the City of Ottawa by the dominant culture results in the adoption of particular values and beliefs that result in suitable social interactions that further the desired image. These interactions are then governed by the rules of behaviour that are specific to the space of interaction.

The social interactions of the city are understood to be regulated by what urban anthropologists Dansei and Perron have called "spatial codes"(1999:194).¹ Although limited to only three spatial locations, these codes distinguish the social behaviours assigned to spatial elements of the urban landscape. These codes relate to public, private and sacred places and the types of behaviour that are appropriate for each spatial location. The public spatial codes relate to the spaces where various communal interactions take place, while private spatial codes are "those that relate to places that individuals have

appropriated or designed as their own” (Dansei and Perron, 1999:194).² It is my belief that any behaviour that takes place within a private space reflects not the community in this instance. Rather, it reflects the image of the individual to whom the appropriated space belongs. What emerges in both circumstances is a two-pronged association: the association of place with behaviour that affects the specific community of social actors acting in this space, and also the effect their behaviour in this place has on the urban landscape as a whole. The existence of these codes is dependent on their enforcement by the dominant culture and the widespread acceptance by individual communities allied to the dominant whole.

The desired image of the city (in this case, the appropriated image of the capital) and the accompanying behavioural support are acted out and guided by the conceptual understanding of the socio-spatial boundaries of the city. Public, private and sacred are no longer subjective categories of judgement; rather the collective acceptance of such codes of order negotiates the socially acceptable behaviour that facilitates the dominant culture’s image of the urban space. As a result, social interactions that occur on the city street must occur in accordance with the spatial codes. Interactions taking place in a public space are governed by public codes while private locations are governed by private spatial codes. Furthermore, behaviour in each setting will continue to affect the overall image of the city.

Citizens of Ottawa are aware of the social structure of order and as anthropologist Mary Douglas suggests in Purity and Danger (1966), this awareness affects their social

¹ These codes of behavior are not shared between cultures. They reflect the social values and beliefs that may be culturally specific.

interactions. She explains, “people curb their actions in accordance with the symmetries and hierarchies they see therein and strive continually to impress their view of the relevant bit of structure on other actors in the scene” (Douglas, 1966: 100). The private consensus of the citizens is guided by the public codes of morals and behaviour (Douglas, 1966: 129). Based on rewarding acceptable behaviour that furthers the desired image of the city, for example, ‘Adopt a Park Program,’ the City of Ottawa has clearly appropriated a privileged urban aesthetic. The general consensus of the citizens reflects the codes of behaviour, which support this urban aesthetic.

Struggling to combat the control of public space, the presence of graffiti in Ottawa continues to increase. In this chapter, I argue that graffiti is created by an organised subculture. Graffiti writers contest the will of the community of control to create and maintain the privileged urban aesthetic of Ottawa; one that can only be achieved through the criticism of graffiti and its producers. For the community of creators, the presence of graffiti in the urban landscape is a positive addition to the visually sterile and isolating backdrop of the urban stage. The community of graffiti writers gains a sense of self-awareness and empowerment in their effort to transform the urban landscape from the privileged aesthetic into one filled with style and expression. Their version of the urban aesthetic is one that can be interpreted and understood more personally: one that reflects more appropriately the citizens of the public space.

Not long after Councillor Cullen had announced that war had been declared on graffiti, graffiti writers’ from Ottawa responded with a campaign of their own. Hundreds of stickers were affixed to numerous surfaces in the downtown core that simply read

² The third spatial code is related to those sites that are understood to possess “metaphysical mythical or

“What war?” I believe that the purpose of this question was twofold: the graffiti writers were suggesting that the wrath of the so-called war waged by the city had not had an effect on them or their production. But I also believe this question indicates the shared belief that to wage a war on graffiti is, in the opinion of the writers, absurd. The absurdity of such an idea contrasts the difference in approaches, values and beliefs between the community of control and the community of creators.

I believe that graffiti is a site of struggle. As Dick Hebdige argued in Subculture: the Meaning of Style the struggle between discourses is a struggle for the possession of a sign (1979: 17). In this case, the sign is the city street: the visual aesthetic of the urban landscape. Both the community of control and the community of creators understand how the aesthetic of the urban landscape is imperative to the identification of a place. However, these two groups conceptualise the value of graffiti in this aesthetic in very different ways.

The urban aesthetic of the community of control is a privileged one: one that is created by agencies of authority, protected by the community of control and supported by a large majority of the dominant culture. For these reasons, this privileged aesthetic and mechanisms for its defence are more easily identified and discussed. Chapter Six is dedicated to this purpose. The urban aesthetic of the graffiti writers in Ottawa is more difficult to theorise, as members outside the community of creators do not generally subscribe to it. However, I submit that the urban aesthetic that is advocated by the graffiti writers is one in which the citizens of the city can appreciate ingenuity and artistic creativity, and one where authority is not threatened by dedicated and organised youth.

While the privileged urban aesthetic is one that can be defined using words like “clean,” “maintained,” “predictable,” “private,” “ordered,” “safe,” graffiti writers share a belief that words like “free,” “creative,” “harmonious,” “competitive,” and “highly stylised” should inform their own version of an urban landscape.

The establishment of this desired aesthetic is reliant on the continued expression of graffiti writers. They perceive their existence as permanent and all eradication movements against them as futile. For unlike the community of control that views graffiti and graffiti writers as a negative, “out of place” phenomenon, graffiti writers themselves understand their own existence in Ottawa as an inherent element of the urban landscape. The city is their rightful place; it is the only stage upon which they have roles to play out. Graffiti is meant to be seen on private walls in public spaces. Since fame can only be rewarded through exposure, the city will always be the basis of their style. Therefore it is the understanding of the writers that an urban aesthetic cannot exist without the inclusion of graffiti.

By removing their work and punishing their practices, the community of control is forcibly removing them from their natural environment. They are conceptualised and treated as foreign invaders that purposefully challenge authority and order. As stated in Resistance through Rituals (1976) “subcultures arise out of contradictions within the larger society” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976: 33). I argue that the organised community of graffiti writers in the city is attempting to address the incongruent nature of the privileged urban aesthetic. Their existence is dependent on the city. Since graffiti writers believe graffiti to be an inherent element of the image of the city, their exclusion from the privileged urban aesthetic is seen as illegitimate and contradictory. In attempting to

address the exclusionary privileged urban aesthetic of the community of control, a subculture has been formed by the graffiti writers in Ottawa.

The Subculture

There exists a subculture of graffiti writers in Ottawa organised around distinct values and beliefs not generally held by members of the dominant culture. These values and beliefs contribute to their antithetical conceptualisation of the urban aesthetic. Furthermore, their conceptualisation of the city greatly affects the manner in which they perceive the importance of graffiti within their visual environment. And thus, the ideological struggle carried out by graffiti production begins.

I believe that graffiti writers in Ottawa represent a new type of youth culture. I also believe that understanding graffiti writers requires a re-assessment of the long-standing tradition of subcultural theory. An analysis of Ottawa graffiti writers in terms of this tradition gives rise to issues which in turn challenge some of the features of this tradition.

The prefix “sub” implies a “lower or secondary rank to the entity it modifies” (Thornton, 1997: 4). In the Subcultural Reader (1997), Sarah Thornton argues that the implication of the prefix illustrates a fundamental assumption of the subcultural scholarship: “namely that social groups investigated in the name of subcultures are subordinate, sub-alternate or subterranean” (1997: 4). Although the origin of the word subculture is unknown, my investigation suggests that Milton Gordon first used the term in 1947 with the publication of The Concept of Subculture and its Application (excerpted in the Thornton reader). He defined subculture in the following way:

The subdivision of a national culture composed of a combination of factorable social situation such as class status, ethnic background, regional and rural or urban residence and religious affiliation but forming in their combination a functioning unity which has an integrating impact on the individual (Gordon, 1997: 41).

The effect of such a unity was described as “a world within a world so to speak” (Gordon 1997:41). Members of a subculture hold more in common with each other than the rest of a larger group. Graffiti writers of Ottawa are members of the dominant culture. However, their relationship with each other supersedes their relationship with members outside the group. Fundamental to their organisation is the deviation from the norms and values held by members of the dominant culture: norms and values that respect and uphold ideologies regarding socio-spatial boundaries and behaviour.

In creation of the subcultural ‘world,’ members unite under new definitions and re-write rules that better suit their shared philosophy. For example, in his book Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang, (1955) Albert A. Cohen suggests that one’s ability to achieve status is determined largely by the standard or norms through which individuals are evaluated or judged in society. He suggests that individuals who have a difficult time gaining status would “gravitate toward one another and jointly establish new norms and new criteria of status which define as meritorious the characteristics they *do* possess, the kinds of conduct they *are* capable of” (Cohen, 1997: 51). The result is a group of people that exist more comfortably within the devised boundaries of their membership than outside the borders of their subcultural organisation.

Members of the community of creators have migrated toward one another in an attempt to redress a similar dilemma. The majority of writers express a sense of self-fulfilment and accomplishment in graffiti that is otherwise unattainable from their roles

on the larger social stage. Within the subcultural boundaries of graffiti, these individuals are aware of the ways in which they can achieve status. Their status is facilitated through a different set of determining factors, which I identified as the rules of engagement. These new “norms and criteria of status” are based on their own design thereby making clear the premises of and qualifications for success. It is these new rules of engagement that manage the production of graffiti that in turn allow graffiti writers to relate to and with each other on an insular level. This is not to say that members of the graffiti subculture do not identify with or share an understanding of many elements of the dominant culture. They are simply allied more closely with one another in a specific sense, which aids in their self-identification in a general sense.

Evidence in Chapter Three establishes that the subculture of graffiti writers has a structure of organised production that is governed by a number of rules of engagement. Chapter Four illustrates that these rules of engagement are not understood or even realised by the community of control that exists outside the subculture. Clearly, the community of control has confused the breaking of rules with the absence of rules (Hebdige, 1979: 92). However, these rules determine the norms and standard by which an individual is judged by his peers. They guide the aesthetic boundaries of production and demarcate rules of engagement regarding the selection of location and the hierarchical nature of crews. Contrary to the conception held by the community of control “which presents as lawless forms, the internal structure of subculture is characterised by an extreme orderliness” (Hebdige, 1979: 113). It is through this ordered structure that the graffiti writers are able to make sense of their world; it is through this ordered structure that the boundaries of their world are more clearly defined.

As in the case of graffiti writers from Ottawa, subcultures are typically distinguishable by age and sex. Caucasian, teen and young adult males ranging from 16 to 25 years of age dominate the youth subculture of graffiti in Ottawa, although there is a small group of writers in their late 20s. Graffiti writers in Ottawa did explain that women are seldom members of the subculture. Some writers believe that women's general apprehension of hanging out in back alleys and dark corners of the city can explain the female absence in the subculture of graffiti. However, the community of creators explains that the majority of graffiti is produced in groups. Therefore unless women form women-only crews, I question why they are not participating in co-ed crews. There was no clear explanation from my informants for women's absence in graffiti productions.

Although subcultures are distinguishable by sex and age, they are also typically distinguishable in appearance. In an effort to distinguish graffiti writers from mainstream Canadian youth, a discussion of the elements of their subcultural style is necessary. Although a large majority of spectacular subcultures are identifiable through their "visual ensembles," which characteristically distinguishes them from the surrounding cultures, the style of graffiti writers in Ottawa is not "displayed" or "obviously fabricated" (Hebdige, 1979: 101). For example, punks or skinheads, who appropriated particular fashion styles and changed their intended or natural meaning, generated a subcultural style that became a uniform. These uniforms operated as an act of defiance.

Graffiti is understood as a sub-set of hip-hop culture. Identified as a subculture of its own, hip-hop style is communicated by elements of deviant style as well. Sturken and Cartwright explain that the Carhart Brand of clothing, "originating as a blue collar work

gear,” was re-contextualised and became a popular element of hip hop style in the mid 1990s (2001: 65). This was followed by a similar appropriation of clothes manufactured by the Timberland Company. This brand of clothing, originally popular with Caucasian, preppy, conservative men became an element of hip-hop style. By altering the intended use, the subcultural style of hip-hop was able to intentionally communicate opposition and resistance through the adoption of these brand names.

These examples illustrate subcultural stylists’ practice of intending style to signify resistance and defiance. Herein lies the first challenge that graffiti as a subculture provides traditional subcultural theory. In this regard, the graffiti subculture differs from many other youth subcultures of the past. Graffiti writers do not rework commodities of fashion to subvert the intended meanings and invent new ones. Although the subculture of graffiti is expressed in a stylistic deviance which I will discuss later, it is also expressed through the adoption of mainstream cultural practices. Graffiti writers assimilate their subculture into the uniform of “normality” rather than one of deviance. The subculture of graffiti writers shares fashions with what has become the uniform of contemporary male youth: baggy pants, white sneakers and flat back base ball caps. Although “the cycle leading from opposition to diffusion, from resistance to incorporation” (Hebdige, 1979: 101) has enclosed each of these particular elements of style, thereby transforming them into stylistic trends rather than deviant symbols, it is in their diffusion that they become the uniform of the subculture of graffiti. It is in the uniform’s ‘trendiness’ that the subculture of graffiti is able to remain unidentifiable and anonymous.

The lack of any deviant style in regard to the clothes they wear or even the music they listen to suggests that this aspect of their subcultural style lies inside and in accordance with mainstream culture. This element of graffiti style may be explained in consideration of the importance that anonymity plays in the identity of the graffiti writer. By blending into mainstream fashion, the anonymity of the writer is maintained. A graffiti writer can no longer be identified through the typical stylistic ensembles identified as the “emphatic combinations of dress, argot, music, etc” (Hebdige, 1979:101). In this regard, the graffiti writer’s uniform could not be the catalyst for a moral panic as suggested by Dick Hebdige in Subculture the Meaning of Style (1979: 93). I submit that by adopting the styles of mainstream youth culture, this element of style should not be excluded as a characteristic of the subcultural style of graffiti writers. Rather, this mainstream style plays a fundamental role in characterising this ‘unspectacular’ element of the subculture of graffiti.

However, if the function of subcultural style is to “define boundaries of group membership against other groups” in order to communicate a perceived difference, an Otherness, then the subcultural style of graffiti lies in the aesthetic of all graffiti production (Hall, 1976: 117). By creating graffiti, the community of creators distinguishes their presence from other mainstream youth, the general public and the community of control. In this regard, the deviance lies in the physical placement of graffiti on private walls in the shared space of the city street. The event of producing graffiti is not limited to spray painting a wall. Rather, the rules of engagement over the aesthetic of production make it a much more complex act of deviance. A writer must consider the environment, the space, and visibility of his graffiti before he paints it. The

style of the subculture of graffiti therefore lies in consideration of the complex relationship of the visual product with its surrounding environment.

As a result of this consideration, the deviant nature of the style of the subculture of graffiti is twofold: firstly, in its illegal nature, challenging the rules and boundaries of social order; and secondly, in challenging the community of control's ideological notions of beauty and creative expression. The community of control hesitantly admires the graffiti pieces at Tech Wall. The creative and artistic expressions of graffiti go against the naturalised notion of both art and vandalism. "As such they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principles of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus" (Hebdige, 1979: 18). By creating some beautiful graffiti that can be admired or even liked by members of the public, graffiti writers challenge the cohesion and consensus required to uphold the privileged urban aesthetic. This capacity amplifies graffiti as symbolic power.

Furthermore, some citizens of Ottawa have shown appreciation for the graffiti at Tech. Unlike the community of control, the blurring of discourses created through graffiti in this form is not seen by some members of the public as a threat to the perceived order of things. I do not assume that everyone in the general public is repulsed by the idea of graffiti nor do I believe that everyone can admire it. However, the general public is not continuously contesting the existence of graffiti in their community. In Chapter Three, I made reference to the shared understanding of many writers that a small portion of the general public actually appreciates their graffiti. Dave stated that he did not want the public to dislike his work because they disapproved of his location or content. The

writers in Ottawa are conscious of their audience and therefore take into consideration the rules of engagement regarding the aesthetics of their graffiti.

It is the official discourse of graffiti as it is adopted by those in a position of authority and control that sees the symbolic power of graffiti as a problem. However, the basis of Dick Hebdige's concept of symbolic power is that of "shocking the straights." Underlying this potential of power is the assumption that the rest of society is "straight" and incorporated in consensus (Clarke in Thornton, 1997: 178). This is not the case in Ottawa. I submit that the symbolic capacity of the subcultural style of graffiti does not assume that its audience is either straight or incorporated in consensus. It assumes rather that style in this case is based in the subjective interpretation of the public and although this interpretation is unsolicited, it may possibly comprehend the writers' version of the urban aesthetic.

The absolute distinction between subcultures and 'straights' is increasingly difficult to maintain in the historical specificity of early twenty-first century Ottawa. In his critique of theories of youth subcultures, Gary Clarke suggests that "the current diversity of style makes a mockery of subcultural theory as it stands" (Thornton, 1997: 180). The second challenge that graffiti poses to traditional subcultural theory is its break from the previously held assumption of public consensus.

Graffiti writers create their pieces, murals and tags in the dark, deriving a sense of adventure and thrill from their cunning efforts. But more than the immediate rush that accompanies the production, graffiti writers also anticipate the reaction of the city, when, on their way to work or school, residents notice the new addition to their urban landscape. Some taggers write to offend while others produce pieces of colourful

imagination to surprise the public. However, in both cases the end result is knowing that over the course of a few hours while no one was looking, as an individual or in a group, they were able to alter not only the surface of the space but integrate their existence into the urban landscape. In doing so they have challenged the efforts of the community of control and the privileged urban aesthetic.

Graffiti makes a physical impact on the urban aesthetic of Ottawa. Furthermore, the physical impact of graffiti addresses the contradictory nature of the exclusionary privileged urban aesthetic. This is the third challenge that graffiti poses to traditional subcultural theory. Previous subcultural work conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s reports that the subculture's expression and resolution of the contradiction in society is magical or somehow symbolic (Shepherd and Wicke, 1997: 29). However, I would argue that the resolution evoked by the production of graffiti in Ottawa is not only symbolic, but also has a material effect on the visual nature of Ottawa's urban landscape. Graffiti writers transform the image of the city in a way that more accurately reflects the alternative visions of its constituent groups. Although the adequacy of this transformation is limited by the length of time graffiti is left up in the city, graffiti has the potential to challenge the taken-for-granted nature of the privileged urban aesthetic, which, I submit, it attempts to subvert.

The existence of graffiti subculture is not limited to the Ottawa region. On the contrary, I believe that the subculture of graffiti in Ottawa as presented in this thesis is the second generation of a subculture that emerged in the subways of New York City in the 1970s. It is merely a representation of the international membership of the graffiti subculture in 2002. However, very little literature is dedicated to the process of diffusion

that has physically and metaphorically transformed New York subway graffiti to the streets of Ottawa thirty years later. Like many other subcultures, after the diffusion of style has taken place, traditional subcultural theorists abandon the study.

In Subculture the Meaning of Style(1979) Dick Hebdige states that “the creation and diffusion of new styles is inextricably bound up with the process of production, publicity and packaging which must inevitably lead to the diffusion of the subculture’s subversive power” (Hebdige, 1979: 95). With this I cannot disagree. However, I do agree with Gary Clarke, who criticises Hebdige’s ability to “worship the innovators yet condemn the youth who appropriate that style when it becomes a marketed product and splashed across the Sun’s centre page” (Thornton, 1997: 179). I will not dismiss the subculture of graffiti since its deviant images have been diffused through the media and become the marketable product of popular culture.

I agree with the interest in the “original, authentic members of a subculture” and I understand that the process of diffusion “dislocates the style from the context and group which generated it” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976: 223). The popularity of hip hop culture is growing and one need only to turn on Much Music to view the pervasiveness of graffiti as it decorates the set of most rap music videos which now play on regular rotation. The image of graffiti is a resource for popular culture. However, the individuals that *produce* graffiti in Ottawa remain members of a subculture. As Hall explains, “a subculture must be focused around certain activities, values, uses or material, artefacts, territorial spaces which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976: 2). I believe this to be true of graffiti writers in Ottawa.

What enables the subculture of graffiti to continue to exist in Ottawa is the material effect that its production has in resolving issues for the young people that create it. I do not believe that these issues have remained the same for the new generation of Canadian writers as they were for the “original” subcultural innovators like Taki 183, Super Kool and Flame One. For graffiti writers in Ottawa, the subcultural style of graffiti becomes a tool by which they are able to gain a personal sense of accomplishment, pride, fame and adventure. But, more importantly, the subculture of graffiti has taken on a new meaning and use in the context of the City of Ottawa: the subcultural style of graffiti has become the way through which young, white, men are able to actualise their own presence in a city of their own design.

In the following chapter, I will present an analysis of the official discourse of the community of control. I will discuss in greater detail the privileged urban aesthetic of the community of control and suggest that its construction and the conceptualisation of graffiti in this discourse is evidence of the process of hegemony. Furthermore, I will argue that in an effort to protect the threatened existence of the privileged urban aesthetic, the community of control has developed a mechanism of defence, which conceives of graffiti as an indication of danger and pollution. The Conclusion will re-iterate my main arguments and make suggestions for future research into the cultural phenomenon of graffiti production and management in Canada.

Chapter Six: Hegemony and Ideas about Deviance and Pollution

As the context in which humans live and interact with one another, I question how space affects individual behaviour and social organisation. Irving Goffman suggests that understanding social activity as a performance permits a metaphorical analysis of the everyday that is best understood using terms like image, theme, plot, roles and script (Goffman, 1958:15). The space in which these roles are enacted is simply not a neutral backdrop against which individuals freely determine the plot or theme of the story. As urban anthropologist John Rennie Short explains in his book The Urban Order (1996), “space and place are crucial to what performances are given and how they are received”(1996: 252). The performances of everyday life are enacted in light of and in relation to the space occupied by the social actors.

When working together, members of communities form a collective image of the urban landscape that is defined by boundaries, behaviours and characteristics that are specific to the arrangement of each city. Therefore, an examination of a particular urban landscape provides clues into the “social order, social control, political power and cultural dominance” of a particular city (Short, 1996: 412). Clearly, then, relations of power become evident by identifying the kinds of interactions that are played out in specific types of locations. Ottawa is the particular urban landscape at issue here. By investigating the city in a particular context, we can gain insights into the power relations that are at work. These relations of power are supported by ideology.

The struggle over graffiti is based on two conflicting ideologies pertaining to Ottawa’s urban aesthetic. Both communities in this public debate are fighting for cultural

dominance over the constructed image of the city street. According to the community of control, the image of Ottawa must be maintained as the clean, green and proud city of the capital of Canada. For them, the guiding ideology of the official discourse is the privileged urban aesthetic. The broad significance of this ideology is its ability to become the 'common sense' way to view the city. Furthermore, as Hebdige argues, it is at this level of "normal common sense that the ideological nature" of such a view "is most effectively concealed" (Hebdige, 1979:11).

In the previous chapter I argued that the community of creators perceives that graffiti, as an inherent element of the city, should play a significant role in the urban aesthetic of the city. Its conceptualisation counters that of the privileged urban aesthetic held by the community of control. This privileged urban aesthetic is centred on a clean and orderly urban landscape, which explicitly devalues and excludes the presence of graffiti. Graffiti is therefore a site of struggle. The struggle is acted out as an attempt to manipulate and control the image and feelings derived from the public space of the city street.

This chapter will consider the struggle of graffiti: the struggle over the control of public space. I will argue that the community of control believes that graffiti threatens their ideal of the privileged urban aesthetic and offer some reasons as to why this is so. Using Howard Becker's notion of deviance and the pollution theories of Mary Douglas, I am arguing here that the community of control is attempting to win the hearts and minds of the citizens of Ottawa into believing and adopting a particular ideology. I believe that the official discourse, particularly the strategies for solution as discussed in Chapter Four, are evidence both of the attempt to impose the ideas of the community of control on all

citizens but also evidence of a degree of accommodation and compromise on their part. This dual strategy is characteristic of the process of hegemony. By drawing on the theory of hegemony, we are able to understand the management of graffiti in Ottawa.

The Privileged Urban Aesthetic

The ideology of the privileged urban aesthetic reflects the interest of the community of control in promoting Ottawa as a safe, tourist city, as a pristine representation of Canada. This ideology is supported by the individual members of the community of control and the institutional structures at their disposal. The ideology of the privileged urban aesthetic is supported by city councilmen, civil servants, small business owners, and concerned parents from across the region. As Althusser explains, “the peculiarity of ideology is that it is endowed within structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality,” to make it natural (Althusser, 1970: 162). The privileged urban aesthetic is understood by members of the community of control as natural and normal. The identity of the City of Ottawa has become enmeshed with this ideology. As Stuart Hall states, “identity is always a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative” (Hall, 2000: 21). By identifying the unwanted presence of graffiti, the community of control is more able to clearly define the image and identity of their City of Ottawa. The naturalised ideology of the privilege urban aesthetic locates graffiti outside the image of the city. If the privileged urban aesthetic is adopted by the citizens of the city, the absence of graffiti from the city street soon becomes understood as common sense or natural as the ideology itself.

The Ideological Threat

As the context for interaction, the eclectic nature of the urban landscape facilitates more complex social interactions than ever before. As a result, the collective space of the city is occupied by a variety of communities of social actors that together comprise the citizens of the city. An urban landscape is composed of complex communities of social actors all with an understanding of how the codes of spatial behaviour relate to themselves specifically, their community and the dominant culture as a whole. To contrast the city with the rural community, the city is the space in which a marginal community or culture is able to take on an “active role” organising and participating in their own “place” (Short, 1996: 412). Therefore, in the urban landscape, marginal communities are given the opportunity to actively exist under the blanket of the dominant culture all the while expected to respect the codes of behaviour and social boundaries of the city. In this case, “marginality applies to both the theoretical constructions employed by a group and to the perceptions of reality” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976:3). If the behavioural setting of the urban landscape facilitates diverse interactions of groups of people both dominant and marginal within shared and prescribed space, then why is it that graffiti is obviously perceived by the community of control as a threat to the dominant ideology of the privileged urban aesthetic?

The image of the city (and its capacity to reflect its citizens) is protected by the cultural domination of those in a position to apply an urban aesthetic to members of the city as a whole. In the particular case of Ottawa, I have called these individuals the community of control. Collectively they represent the shared conceptualisation of what the city should be. Social order in the urban landscape is solicited by the shared

conceptualisation of public, private and sacred space, as so determined by the dominant culture, which further determines the social relations of the city. The widespread dissemination of spatial codes is designed to ensure these boundaries are respected, consequently legitimating the power of authority.

If a marginal group's presence becomes known outside of their prescribed social area, I argue that the dominant culture interprets their existence to be a challenge to the social order of the larger whole. In the case of graffiti, its expanding presence from the back alleys of downtown to suburban subdivisions is interpreted as an element foreign to the aesthetic order of the city and is therefore understood to be a threat to stability and authority. Not only do graffiti writers manipulate the urban aesthetic with unsolicited images and colour but, by doing so, they challenge the order of the dominant culture, the hegemonic order. The graffiti in Ottawa both in and out of the downtown core disobeys the spatial codes of private, public and sometimes even sacred, therefore disturbing the basis of order.

If the City of Ottawa is defined by and self-identifies with its image as presented through the privileged urban landscape of the clean and safe capital of Canada, graffiti is not included in this image. Its presence therefore is seen as unnatural and threatening to the community of control. The resulting power struggle of the urban landscape “fundamentally revolves around the meaning of the city, what it represents, what it could represent and what it should represent” (Short, 1996: 390). Graffiti writers and their productions put into question the prescribed image of the city and the authority that construct it. Their initial existence as a marginal group isolated to the back alleys of the city centre was never meant to spill-over into the visual landscape of the city. The

mutual existence of both dominant and marginal groups was never meant to compromise the image of the urban landscape and the hegemonic ideology of the privileged urban aesthetic.

Since members of the dominant culture do not identify with the production of graffiti, graffiti writers and their visual culture are forced outside of the dominant culture and excluded from the aesthetic. Using Julia Kristeva's concept of the 'abject,' graffiti and graffiti writers are, as she explains, that which "disturbs identity, systems of order; what does not respect borders, positions, rules"(Kristeva, 1981:4). Like working class subcultures in England, similarly, graffiti is considered as abject because it "instils a sense of nervousness and anxiety about the territorial security of the dominant group"(Sibley, 1997: 220). Graffiti and graffiti writers soon become the unwanted "others" that are "sent into symbolic exile" by the unified community of control and their supporters (Hall, 2000: 258). In this process of identification and abjection – in identifying and banishing that which they are not - the community of control and the ideology of the privileged urban aesthetic become more clearly defined.

The community of control has transformed their anxiety of the struggle instigated by the presence of graffiti into a threat to society indicated by two separate but publicly undesirable elements of the city. I argue that they have manufactured a discourse of graffiti in Ottawa that treats the images as an indicator of danger and pollution. This construction of meaning is an effort to persuade the citizens of Ottawa as to the desirability of the privileged urban aesthetic. The privileged urban aesthetic "depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority" (Said, 1978:7). This understanding of graffiti is part of a dual strategy characteristic of the process of hegemony whereby the

community of control is attempting to persuade the public as to the legitimacy of their ideology.

The Winning of Hearts and Minds

Based on the perceived threat that graffiti poses to the privileged urban aesthetic, the community of control has responded in a defensive manner by intentionally constructing graffiti as an indicator of social decay and physical danger. Furthermore, to justify their perceptions and the resulting strategy for eradication, the community of control has framed the threat of graffiti as an economic issue of public security, thereby recruiting community support for *their* perception of graffiti as a perception that is natural and universal.

After having conducted the interviews, I have determined that part of the wider society does understand graffiti to be a problem to the same extent as the community of control. However, I was unable to identify large-scale, overt condemnation of graffiti in the form of a consensus that would justify a highly motivated program for its eradication. I therefore believe that both frameworks (deviance and pollution) are adopted by the community of control in response to the absence of undiminished indignation on the part of wider society to an increased presence of graffiti in the city.

In her book, Purity and Danger (1966), Mary Douglas explains the usefulness of the concept of pollution in increasing public attention and concern. She states “when action that is held to be morally wrong does not provoke moral indignation, belief in the harmful consequences of a pollution can have the effect of generating the seriousness of the offence and so marshalling public opinion on the side of the right” (Douglas, 1966:

133). Furthermore, in his sociological study of deviance (Outsiders, 1963), Howard Becker believes that more often than not in a situation where the public or dominant culture is expected to react, it first must be encouraged to react. He explains that someone must “call the public’s attention to the matter, supply the push necessary to get the job done and direct energies to get a rule created” (Becker, 1963: 162). By tapping into pre-existing understandings of deviance and pollution, the community of control is able to raise the attention of the public, thereby legitimating graffiti as a threat to the privileged urban aesthetic.

I believe that the official discourse of the community of control is manufactured around these strategic indicators in an effort to gain support from the public that otherwise may have noticed graffiti but was not motivated to react to it. These ideological constructions of graffiti become normalised. The “common sense” perception of graffiti as danger and pollution does not, as Stuart Hall explains, teach people *how things are*. Rather, ideology only allows discovery of “*where they fit* into the existing scheme of things” (emphasis his) (Hall in Hebdige, 1979: 11). Framed as danger and pollution, the dominant culture is led to conceive of graffiti in this fashion and is likely to protect the city from the threat of danger and pollution, thereby securing the existence of the privileged urban aesthetic.

Although facing a challenge, the community of control is able to remain in a position of authority and maintain a semblance of order by reinforcing this image of graffiti. In this light, the “credible image of social cohesion can only be maintained through the appropriation and re-definition of cultures of resistance in terms of that image” (Hebdige, 1979: 162). Graffiti therefore is placed outside the privileged urban

aesthetic and conceptualised as a danger or pollution from within this dominant ideology. Relying on expert information, moral crusaders such as the community of control make a rule that, more often than not, serves their best interest. I believe that the association of graffiti with danger constitutes a deliberate construction on the part of the community of control. I wish to discuss in some detail the 'dangerous potential' of graffiti as promulgated by the official discourse in what I believe is a strategic manoeuvre in the hegemonic struggle over the aesthetic of the urban landscape.

Graffiti as Danger, Deviance and Crime

The notion of graffiti as deviance and danger is constructed by a section of the community of control. These individuals who make up this section can be understood as "moral crusaders." Following Becker, a councillor like Alex Cullen and public servant Paul McCann can be understood as individuals whose position in society increases their likelihood of leading moral crusades that identify anti-social acts (Becker, 1963: 150). The moral crusade soon becomes "the professional discovery of wrongs to be righted, of situations requiring new rules" (Becker, 1963: 156). Over a short period of time, the annoying and morally questionable graffiti that lines the main streets and sidewalks of the city is transformed by the community of control into a sign of danger and violence threatening the safety of residents in and around the city. Because graffiti is identified as a danger to society, in this way the general public will be led to look at graffiti as a sign of a threat to public safety.

One may ask how the community of control is able to construct graffiti as a potential for danger. My view is that they are able to make graffiti an indicator of danger

by linking its production to gangs. The gang component acts to confirm suspicions that graffiti is the pastime of dangerous young people. This association acts to further the notion of who the community of control believes to be responsible for the problem of graffiti: disenfranchised young people angry at society who will strike back at any time. Through the adoption of a language that refers repeatedly to “gangs, destruction, senseless, violent, angry, isolated, youth,” it is obvious that what has occurred is the relocation of knowledge from other urban centres, specifically the United States, to Ottawa’s community of control.

Although the official discourse differentiates between two types of graffiti most easily categorised as tags or pieces, the war on street graffiti as a whole, and its criminalization, are rooted in tagging. In the case of Ottawa, it is clear that by further establishing the deviance of graffiti through an unsubstantiated link to gangs and gang violence, the moral crusaders are attempting to change the way in which the public conceptualises graffiti in a way that favours their authority and control. Graffiti’s perceived relation to gang communication, ‘real’ or not, enables graffiti to be associated with other illegal behaviour. Since the Ottawa police, as members of the community of control, cite tagging to be the most common form of graffiti, its intended purpose and authorship as related to gangs becomes a central element in the potential for danger manufactured and applied to graffiti as a whole.

Further heightening the threatening potential of graffiti is the assumption made by the community of control that graffiti is linked to and attracts other acts of vandalism and violence. For example, members of the community of control make associations between graffiti and fires in parks, destruction of public furniture and other acts of vandalism.

Although none of the informants from the community of control had evidence to support this association, I believe that by linking graffiti to (other) anti-social offences, the intention is to connect graffiti with hooliganism in general. Once this message is disseminated using ideological apparatuses (as evident in the partnership of solutions proposed in the Report on Graffiti Removal), the community of control has in effect convinced the wider public to judge graffiti writers in a fashion similar to that in which they would judge other minor criminals. This association further prevents the public from understanding that tagging can be conceived of as a stage of the creative evolution of an individual graffiti writer and of the subculture itself.

By making graffiti synonymous with other types of crime, and by applying the value judgements associated with other criminal acts to perceptions of graffiti, the level of deviance associated with graffiti increases. By suggesting this associative behaviour, the dominant culture is able to conceive graffiti as an element of gang culture and as part of a larger surge of vandalism capable of destroying and threatening any neighbourhood or park within the city at any time, day or night.

Graffiti in the form of pieces and murals is the second type of graffiti as distinguished by the communities of control and creators. Although the community of control does not believe that members of gangs staking territorial claim produce this type of graffiti, they have not resisted criticising this type of graffiti. Although this graffiti is less offensive than tagging, the community of control is suspicious of the motivation for its production. The creative expression that emerges out of the graffiti at Tech Wall is nonetheless understood to be motivated by a negative relationship that the producers of graffiti hold with and for society. This speculated relationship between graffiti writers

and society is based on what the community of control believes is exemplified by the act of producing graffiti. By ignoring or abandoning the rules that govern public, private and sacred space, the graffiti writers' disrespect for order is extended by the community of control into a condition that will manifest itself in a formal challenge to the stability of the city.

The community of control's belief in the anti-social motivations of graffiti helps to construct its image as a threat not only to the order and stability of the city but also to individual or community safety. The teenager ready to act out against society in a destructive and harmful way fulfils the criminal associations of tagging specifically and the dangerous nature of graffiti generally. The response that was evoked by the dominant culture in the 1960's over middle class youth's "public disaffiliation and relentless search for pleasure" can be used as an example of an over-reaction to the behaviour of young people, which is seen as a threat to the security of society as a whole. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson explain that the attitudes of youth culture in the 1960s were interpreted as attempts, "more deliberately to undermine social and moral stability" (Hall and Jefferson, 1976: 72). Such interpretation not only excludes young people from the dominant society, but also frames their expressive behaviour as threatening and dangerous to the order of the society. Graffiti writers, like youth cultures before them, are interpreted as "active agents of social breakdown" (Hall and Jefferson, 1976: 72).

The community of control has aligned the production of graffiti, be it tagging or piecing, with other anti-social acts. I submit that the community of control has constructed the perception that graffiti is destructive and a contagious threat to security. Furthermore, I submit that this unconfirmed relation of graffiti to other criminal acts by

organised criminal groups is an example of the enterprise that Howard Becker believes surrounds deviance. He explains that “deviance is a product of enterprise in the largest sense” (Becker, 1963:163). The enterprise of deviance is the formulation of a perspective on graffiti that elevates the by-law infraction to highly threatening behaviour.

The community of control is suggesting that public safety is at risk as a result of the increasingly deviant and dangerous nature of paint on a wall. A transformation occurs as a result of this conceptualisation. Graffiti is no longer only a nuisance to business owners, but rather it also fundamentally affects the order of the city, scaring stay-at-home parents, park users and children coming home from school. As a result, graffiti will no longer be tolerated “as the status quo.” Through the dissemination of the constructed image of danger, graffiti has become a major priority of the community of control and, simultaneously, the most recent priority of the dominant culture. As a violent, anti-social threat, graffiti is understood to pose a serious threat to the ideology of the privileged urban aesthetic.

The criminal aspect of graffiti, when inflated through notions of gang violence and anarchy, is evidence of the enterprise of deviance as suggested by Howard Becker. However, the construction of the image of graffiti as threatening or as a dangerous crime by the community of control is also evidence of the “mechanism of the law and order campaign” which has the ability of publicly signifying an issue that is “intrinsically escalated” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976: 76). Elements of the “signification spiral” as described by Stuart Hall can be found in the perception of graffiti as it is constructed by the community of control.

In the first stage of the spiral of signification identification of the issue must be made. The increased presence of graffiti as noted by each member of the community illustrates that identification has occurred. Secondly, a “subversive minority” must be identified. In Ottawa, the convenient scapegoat of “troubled youth” has been identified as the perpetrators of this crime. Thirdly the signification spiral requires that “convergence, the linking by labelling of the specific issue to other problems” must occur, which I have identified as the linking of graffiti to other acts of vandalism and its perceived usefulness for gang communication. Hall and Jefferson state that this convergence must be followed by a notion of a threshold that once crossed, “can lead to further escalation of the problem.” I would argue that the informants from the community of control agree that during the amalgamation of the new City of Ottawa, the maximum threshold has been crossed and the ensuing abundance of graffiti illustrates its escalation. Following the escalation of the problem, an element of explaining and prophesising is said to occur. This stage of the signification spiral often involves making analogous reference to the United States. Similar references can be found in many of the interviews conducted with the community of control. From Councillor Doucet’s recounting of the New York situation to Paul McCann’s recitation of the Detroit conference on graffiti, I would argue that the community of control in Ottawa is using American references as a means of explaining or framing the existence and future of graffiti in Ottawa. Finally, a “call for firm steps” must be made which can be identified as the strategy for eradication as designed by the city on the basis of the Ottawa Police Graffiti Task force of 1999. As illustrated by the steps taken by the community of control in Ottawa, graffiti is publicly signified as an escalating indicator of danger.

Through the use of the education system, corporate partnership, and the media, the community of control has united to note and combat the unwelcome presence of graffiti as it clouds the aesthetic of the city. Based on the fundamental spatial codes, the moral crusaders within the community of control have criminalised the production of graffiti. When the presence of graffiti was hardly noted and or isolated to the back allies of bars and restaurants downtown, graffiti was dealt with as a by-law infraction that was based primarily on the violation of boundaries associated with property ownership rights. However, with a “dramatic” increase of graffiti throughout the Ottawa region, it has been transformed into a deviant act that threatens the safety of the citizens and the order of the city itself. This image of graffiti has largely become naturalised and normalised by the dominant culture. Graffiti within the urban setting of the city street is interpreted as out of place. Coming “in” from some other location, the unfamiliar and threatening nature of graffiti is believed to be inherently evil.

As this perspective of graffiti grows within the wider society, it becomes less and less obvious that the origin of this perception lies in the creative initiative of the threatened community of control attempting to protect the desired image of the city. In response to the challenge that graffiti makes to the privileged urban aesthetic, the dangerous potential of graffiti is realised by the community of control and marketed as justification for its eradication to members of the dominant culture. The notion of danger is one of two elements important to this ideological construction. I would now like to interrogate the second way in which the community of control conceptualises graffiti within the parameters of the privileged urban aesthetic. As an indicator of decay, the

pollution potential of graffiti is linked to the ability of graffiti to indicate danger. In this way, the official discourse of graffiti is completed.

Pollution Power

As with the interpolation of violence and danger within the official discourse of graffiti, the community of control has also intimated that graffiti is a form of visual pollution that contaminates the city street. Graffiti as pollution is more obviously linked with the dominant ideology of the urban aesthetic that motivates the need to construct a negative image of graffiti. Like the association of graffiti with danger, the perception of graffiti as pollution is presented as a universal truth: that graffiti is inherently dirty and a pollutant to society. However, based on initial investigation, I was unable to locate overt condemnation of graffiti within the dominant culture based on the offensive merit of its aesthetic. I would argue that due to the perceived threat that the community of control believes graffiti makes to their privileged aesthetic, they have transformed their condemnation into a battle waged against the presence of a foreign element whose existence is polluting the city. In so doing, the community of control has again normalised and naturalised this perception of graffiti as a reality. Tapping into western society's known concern for dirt and decay, the community of control has raised the public's awareness of graffiti through its conceptualisation as a pollutant that has somehow found its way in to contaminate the City of Ottawa.

As I have already established, the city is a setting of complex interactions between a multiplicity of actors that are governed by boundaries and rules. The order that is created by widespread adherence to these boundaries has become an essential component

in the image of the city. The authority of the community of control lies in the familiarity of the boundaries and power of these boundaries to “reward conformity and repulse attack” (Douglas, 1966: 114). Graffiti is interpreted as an attack on the boundaries and rules ensuring social order. The repulsion in this case is the community of control’s conceptualisation of graffiti as pollution.

Cleanliness is synonymous with order. Disorder must therefore be synonymous with dirt or decay. In her book, Purity and Danger, anthropologist Mary Douglas explains that “there is no such thing as absolute dirt” (1966: 1). I would agree that the notion of dirt and the degree of its existence lies in the “eye of the beholder” (Douglas, 1966: 1). The association of graffiti with dirt and decay is therefore not necessarily held by all members of a society. In Ottawa, however, this association is clearly held by members of the community of control for whom graffiti is “dirty” and “disgusting”.¹ For them, graffiti is a form of pollution that tarnishes the urban aesthetic.

By framing the invasion of graffiti in the capital as the disorder that ensues from a foreign pollutant, the community of control has exploited the use of pollution to effect or create a response from the dominant culture. Therefore, the adoption of pollution in the conceptual framework of graffiti becomes a social function. The moral implications of contaminating one’s environment or someone’s private property links the ideology of pollution to public interest and response. By helping to cleanse and re-organise the shared social space of the street, the dominant culture conforms to the ideal of the community of control. The ideal urban aesthetic is internalised to be reflective of its

¹ Paul McCann and Councilor Cullen interviews respectively.

citizens, thereby increasing their desire to fight against anything or anyone that threatens its image and form.

Graffiti as pollution is interpreted as highly threatening. Not only is it visible on the street, on store-fronts, post boxes and stop signs but its physical presence acts to suggest the boundaries as they are understood by the dominant culture are either flexible to change or have been entirely dismantled. I argue that graffiti in Ottawa has crossed multiple social barriers. Firstly, graffiti writers and their visual productions have ideologically disobeyed the largely respected notion of private and public. However, it is the physical existence of graffiti that makes it a prime example of what Mary Douglas has called a “dangerous” pollution (1966: 139). This degree of pollution can only occur with the physical crossing of social barriers. When this happens, “the polluter becomes a doubly wicked object of reprobation, first because he crossed the line, and second because he endangered others” (Douglas, 1966: 139). By placing graffiti on the wall of a small business or inside the playhouse in a local park, graffiti writers have disobeyed the conditions that apply to the use of these spaces and, as a result, their graffiti is interpreted not only as a pollution contaminating the space, but one that harbours the ability to physically threaten the occupants who live or work there.

Pollution’s power is evoked only in situations or settings where boundaries are clearly marked. This is because their purpose is to “punish a symbolic breaking of what should be joined or joining that which should be separate” (Douglas, 1966: 113). I argue that the ideology of graffiti as pollution is adopted in an effort to re-demarcate the lines of order and keep separate the marginal expression of real citizens from the perceived unity of the city and natural or normal identification with the privileged urban aesthetic. For

these realities are not conducive to each other. Not only does the physical presence of graffiti contaminate social and visual order; it also harbours a certain potential that terrifies the community of control. The community of control recognises that graffiti is destructive to “existing patterns” but also that it has “potentiality” (Douglas, 1966: 95). Graffiti symbolises “danger” in the physical challenge it makes to the city. However, its ability to further challenge and disregard other aspects of social order makes it a symbolic power as well (Douglas, 1966: 95). I argue that it is the powerful potential of graffiti as pollution that fuels the strategy of condemnation and eradication.

The strategy of eradication of graffiti as proposed by Councillor Cullen and others should be understood not simply as the removal of paint from a wall, just as graffiti is no longer understood as simple paint on a wall. Rather, the threat that graffiti poses to the privileged urban landscape of the community of control defines the type of battle that has been waged concerning graffiti removal. This is both physical and ideological removal, a cleaning up, a scouring of dirt from the city street. However, the elimination of graffiti from the surface of the city is not a negative movement. Rather, for the community of control, the elimination of pollution is “a positive effort to organise the environment” (Douglas, 1966: 1).

The Graffiti Removal Project, Graffiti Paint Over project and the Adopt A Park program are examples of this positive effort. By cleaning and organising the city in such a way, the community of control and active members of the dominant culture have made it clear that the presence of graffiti in the visual landscape of the city is no longer permitted or tolerated. By ordering the environment in a way that removes the pollution that is graffiti, these Ottawa citizens are making the environment of the city “conform to

an idea” (Douglas, 1966: 1). This idea is based on the privileged urban aesthetic of the capital of Canada as it is enforced by the community of control.

Tourist Economy

The capital city of Canada attracts visitors from all over the world. The image of the capital is based on an ordered aesthetic that governs other capital cities around the world. Applied to the City of Ottawa, the privileged urban aesthetic is devised to accompany the perception of the international tourist. Bringing money into the country and the economy of the city, tourists are ensured the sanitised version of the city that is made available by the community of control. The removal of graffiti from unapproved and inappropriate locations in the city is integral to this aesthetic. Since graffiti is an indicator of such negative elements of an urban space, its removal allows the community of control to proceed with its job of presenting a clean and safe image of the city to visitors and citizens alike. The origins of this image are unimportant. What is most important is that the ideology of the privileged aesthetic is not compromised. A compromise would cause disturbances in the expectations of tourists and residents alike.

The economic repercussions of these disturbances are enough to justify the perception of graffiti as a dangerous pollutant that motivates the strategy of eradication. And it is also these repercussions that underlie what I have called the ‘sanctioned wall solution.’ I argue that although this strategy is seen as a compromise, it merely signifies an effort to effect control and management of the production of graffiti. This is the final strategy of the community of control. As Stuart Hall explains, there must be “a shift inside the control culture from informal outrage and moral crusading to formal constraint

and legal control” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976: 73). I believe that the sanctioned wall solution is an example of this shift, a shift motivated by the economic security resulting from the untarnished image of the city.

Debating the effectiveness of the sanctioned wall solution in discouraging tagging, the community of control clearly believes that the success of this strategy hinges on the careful selection of sanctioned space. More specifically, the success of such a program is dependent on hiding these spaces from the public. By ensuring that graffiti of any kind is removed from high traffic areas and isolated to walls outside tourist areas, the existence of graffiti cannot threaten the image of the city. Presented as a compromise by the community of control, I argue that the sanctioned wall solution essentially serves both groups (as it is a necessary strategy for cultural domination). However, it furthers the control of the dominant group by dictating and controlling the production of graffiti.

Accommodation Strategies

The community of control suggests as a solution to the graffiti problem in Ottawa, the offering of wall space dedicated to the production of graffiti ‘art.’ This compromise is problematic for many members of the community of control. However, in my view this strategy for a solution is a required element if the community of control is to maintain cultural dominance of the urban aesthetic over constituent groups with alternative visions. Inasmuch as the privileged urban aesthetic has positioned graffiti writers within their ideological space, it is argued that in order for cultural leadership to be sustained, negotiations must take place between the dominant and subordinate groups. Graeme Turner explains that

the dominant group has to engage in negotiations with opposing groups, classes and values – and that negotiations must result in some genuine accommodation. That is, hegemony is not maintained through the obliteration of the opposition but through the articulation of opposing interests into the political affiliations of the hegemonic group. (Turner, 1990: 211-12)

This genuine accommodation makes it difficult to argue that the ideology embedded in hegemonic processes serves only the interests of the community of control, which I submit it does in fact favour. By suggesting the sanctioned wall solution, the community of control is able to convince even the subordinate group of graffiti writers to accept their cultural leadership.

Becoming the “conceptual framework through which men interpret, make sense of, experience and live the material conditions in which they find themselves” the ideology of the privileged urban aesthetic becomes the social norm (Hall 1980: 33). The result is a city whose image reflects an order resulting from the compromise instigated by the agents of hegemony. This order will be preserved and protected by the ‘good will’ of the citizens who seldom question the origin of their loyalties or the urban aesthetic itself. The privileged urban aesthetic of the community of control has become such an ingrained element of the dominant ideology that not only is it sustained by participation of the dominant culture; it will be shielded from foreign elements should they arise.

In an effort to secure their understanding of the social order derived from a privileged urban aesthetic, the community of control has created social cohesion regarding graffiti through the construction of a perception that condemns the images and those that produce them. Through the positive involvement of participants from the dominant culture, graffiti has been conceptualised not as the public expression of a

minority in a private space. Rather, it is symptomatic of pollution that harbours the potential of danger. The ideology of pollution and danger that I believe informs the official discourse of graffiti does so in the interests of the image of the city. This image as it is defined by the community of control is dictated in part by economic interest. Graffiti, pollution or a threat to the security of persons is bad for business. Based on the widespread dissemination of similar conceptions of graffiti, particularly in other North American cities where the gang/graffiti relationship may hold, the community of control believes that graffiti will affect the business of the tourist industry, thereby affecting the economy of the capital of Canada.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that the depiction of graffiti as pollution and danger is adopted in an effort to shore up the lines of order and clarify the legitimacy of the urban aesthetic as a reflection of the city as against an image of Ottawa as an arena of personal expression for members of a youth subculture. Their presence, which is communicated in a physical, tangible, visual form threatens the image that is desired for the capital of Canada and therefore the City of Ottawa. Graffiti changes the entire dynamic of the city.

The ideology of the privileged urban aesthetic is one that has categorised graffiti as a symptom of urbanisation. Graffiti on the walls of a city indicates the co-existence of marginal groups within the greater whole that act out and disrespect spatial codes of behaviour. Tags and pieces indicate a loss of control and put into question the stability of the image of the capital of Canada. Members of the public will continue to be reminded of the presence of graffiti subculture through the writer's intentional disruption of the imagined public consensus and the privileged urban aesthetic that is dependent on the credibility of this image. Their presence is effective in altering the prescribed image and associated order of the city.

Although graffiti as it is understood in this thesis emerged from the graffiti of New York of the 1970s, the situation in Ottawa should not be compared to previous situations in other, particularly American, cities. To make this comparison is to assimilate the particular ideological and political struggle of graffiti in Ottawa into a general arena of consideration or judgement. This greater arena does not consider the significance of each distinct community of participants involved in the debate about graffiti in the capital. It does not take into consideration the impact that the privileged

urban aesthetic has on the management of graffiti, neither does it consider the limitations presented to the graffiti writers in producing graffiti in a city walled with granite buildings and marble statues. To examine graffiti in such a way is to detract from the imperative that a Canadian experience might be different from that of our neighbours to the south.

In regard to areas of future study, I believe it is important to note the classifications and distinguishing mechanisms that are used by both the community of control and creators to identify and group together the constituents of graffiti. For the community of control, street graffiti such as that discussed in this thesis is simply one type of graffiti that is produced in Ottawa. Political and or hate messages are also considered as graffiti. However, I submit that the community of control believes that the authorship of both types is the same. For graffiti writers, messages of hate and political statements that are painted on a wall are not considered graffiti. As longtime graffiti writer Rowley states, political and hate graffiti has “a completely different rationale behind it. There’s always an idiot fringe to everything, people that aren’t really involved in the greater good.” The greater good in this instance is the evolution and communication of the subculture of street graffiti: pieces and tags. Further consideration should be given to these varying categorisations and conceptions of what constitutes ‘graffiti.’ As I stated in the introduction, to examine all elements of graffiti as it is understood by the City of Ottawa would be too large an undertaking for the purposes of this research project.

Similarly, I have mentioned only briefly that the majority of graffiti writers in Ottawa are white males. Further examination of this highly gendered aspect of

membership would be useful in gaining a complete understanding of the graffiti subculture. In undertaking this work, one might compare or contrast the absence of women from many subcultures, and subcultural studies of the past. It was not the intention of this research to narrow the field of interest to gender relations within the graffiti subculture.

To conclude my examination of graffiti in Ottawa, I submit that it is problematic when the city as a shared environment excludes and denies the existence of a portion of its citizenry in order to further an ideology that is based on advancing a particular image of the city. Consequently, I also believe that it is problematic that such excluded members of the public, in an attempt to redress this exclusive image, act out in an illegal and costly fashion against their own city.

It was never my intention that this thesis resolve the moral debate that surrounds graffiti. As I stated in the introduction, the aim of this study was not to analyse the presence of graffiti in Ottawa in order to better address it as a problem. Clearly, the complexity of the perceptions of graffiti and of the associated discourses that were revealed in this thesis suggest that such a resolution may be futile and may in fact detract from the observations that have been made.

This thesis has highlighted the construction of meaning and perceptions by two separate groups within a shared space. Both groups become more clearly defined through their constituted images of one another. I conclude that graffiti is the physical embodiment of the tensions that arise between differences in perception. By looking at graffiti in this way, we are able to illustrate the idiosyncratic quality of perception as it is played out in the shared environment of the city street. If graffiti continues to be created

in an environment that constructs naturalized notions for its eradication, the importance of interrogating the dynamics of these constructs will continue to serve a useful end. This end is not the uncovering of 'the' solution to the problem of graffiti. Rather, the end of explicating the discourses behind the naturalized ideologies of both the production and management of graffiti may be to simply shed light on some of the preoccupations of this society and to provide some insights into the compulsions of its citizens.

Appendix I: Consent Form: Graffiti Writer

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you have understood to your satisfaction the information given to you by Jennifer Barthel regarding the study of the practice and management of graffiti that she is conducting for the completion of her Master's Degree in Canadian Studies at Carleton University, and that you are willing to be interviewed on the subject. You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time and by signing this form you are not waiving your rights to do so in the future.

Due to the illegal nature of graffiti, participating in this interview as a graffiti writer may increase your level of personal risk. By signing the consent form your anonymity may be violated thereby increasing your risk of identification and exposure. Therefore, unlike the other participants in this study, (curators, removers) **you are not permitted to sign this consent form in your legal name nor is your alias a suitable substitute. Instead, Jennifer Barthel will assign a fictional name or pseudonym to you which you should use to sign this consent form.** This pseudonym will remain your reference name throughout the interview process and will be referred to in writing where permission has been granted.

Jennifer Barthel is the only individual that will have access to the information that is gathered directly from the interview process. Please note that all text messages sent by e-mail will be erased after hard copies are made. However, you should be aware that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed through electronic communication. All data gathered from the interview will be kept in a locked box accessible only to Jennifer Barthel. The thesis will be accessible to the public through the Carleton University Library. The project may in the future be published in part or in whole in book or article form. Copies of any articles that arise from the interviews will be available upon request to all participants.

By signing this consent form, you give Jennifer Barthel permission to use information gathered from your interview in her thesis, and you acknowledge that a copy of this consent form and cover letter has been given to you for your own records and reference. Please check the option that suits you best.

R. I give permission to the researcher to identify me by **pseudonym**, to paraphrase me and to quote directly from the interview only after consultation about quoted statements which will ensure, inter alia, that no identifying information is revealed.

R. I give permission to the researcher to paraphrase me, but not quote me or use any identifying information.

Participant's Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Jennifer Barthel

Date

(613) 564-0553 jensbarthel@yahoo.com

Consent Form: Remover

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you have understood to your satisfaction the information given to you by Jennifer Barthel regarding the study of the practice and management of graffiti that she is conducting for the completion of her Master's Degree in Canadian Studies at Carleton University, and that you are willing to be interviewed on the subject. You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time and by signing this form you are not waiving your rights to do so in the future.

Due to your role in the removal of graffiti, you may not wish your identity to be exposed. By participating in this interview as a remover of graffiti and by signing the consent form, you may increase your risk of identification and exposure. **If identification is a personal risk, an alias may be used.** This alias will be your reference name throughout the interview process and will be referred to in writing where permission has been granted. **If anonymity must be maintained, Jennifer Barthel will assign a fictional name or pseudonym to you that you shall use to sign the consent form.** This pseudonym will remain your reference name throughout the interview process and will be referred to in writing where permission has been granted.

Jennifer Barthel is the only individual that will have access to the information that is gathered directly from the interview process. Please note that all text messages sent by e-mail will be erased after hard copies are made. However, you should be aware that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed through electronic communication. All data gathered from the interview will be kept in a locked box accessible only to Jennifer Barthel. The thesis will be accessible to the public through the Carleton University Library. The project may in the future be published in part or in whole in book or article form. Copies of any articles that arise from the interviews will be available upon request to all participants.

By signing this consent form, you give Jennifer Barthel permission to use information gathered from your interview in her thesis, and you acknowledge that a copy of this consent form and cover letter has been given to you for your own records and reference. Please check the option that suits you best.

R. I give permission to the researcher to identify me by name, to paraphrase me and to quote directly from the interview.

R. I give permission to the researcher to identify me by name, to paraphrase me and to quote directly from the interview only after consultation about quoted statements which will, inter alia, ensure that no identifying information is revealed.

R. I give permission to the researcher to paraphrase me and quote directly from the interview but only if my identity is protected and **an alias is be used**).

R. I give permission to the researcher to paraphrase me and quote directly from the interview but only if my identity is concealed and **pseudonym is used**.

R. I give permission to the researcher to paraphrase me, but not quote me or use any identifying information.

And

R. I give permission to the researcher to record our interview discussions

Participant's Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Jennifer Barthel

Date

(613) 564-0553 jensbarthel@yahoo.com

Appendix II: Chronology of Graffiti Events and Literature

1960:

Taki 183 Appears throughout Manhattan

1970:

MTA's cleaning cost \$300,000

1971:

MTA's cleaning cost \$600,000

July 1971:

New York Times reporter identifies Taki 183 as 17 year old Demitrius

1971:

Reisner, R. 1971. Graffiti: Two Thousand Years of Wall Writing. Chicago: Cowles Book Company, Inc.

1972:

Super Kool creates the first 'piece' with fat cap dispersion method

Hugo Martinez a sociology student from City College forms the United Graffiti Artist

UGA hold first exhibition at Eisner Hall, City College

UGA accepts \$600.00 from the Joffery Ballet for performance

MTA's cleaning cost \$1.3 million

Development of style: Phase II puffy letters, checkerboard, Pistol I creates first 3D piece

Competition emerges between style masters. Style wars take over titles of honour and competition between kings of the city previously determined by quantity of works

1973:

Kohl, Herbert and James Hilton. 1973. Golden Boy as Anthony Cool. New York: Dial.

First whole train is painted by Flint 707

New York Police arrest 1, 562 youth for defacing subway and public places

MTA's cleaning cost \$2.7 million

1974:

Emergence of throw ups brought on by IN's bombing the trains

UGA travels Chicago

Jack Pesigner forms the Nation of Graffiti Artists

NOGA hold first exhibition in the lobby of the Central Saving Bank

1976:

New York Housing and Development Agency evict NOGA

1977:

NOGA move to the basement of Methodist Church in south Bronx

Innovative design and style develops including fading, computer text and gothic

Able, Ernest and Barbara Buckley, 1977. Handwriting on the Wall. Towards a Sociology and Psychology of Graffiti. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

1978:

MTA's cleaning cost \$15 million

Castellon, R. 1978. Aesthetics of Graffiti. San Francisco: Library of Congress.

1981:

New York Mayor announces \$1.5 million plan to provide fences and German shepherd guard dogs for the Corona Train Yard

MTA announces \$22.4 million to fund similar fences at 180 other yard sights (razor wire will replace guard dogs)

1982:

Castleman, Craig. 1982. Getting Up. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

1983:

Columbo, John Robert. 1983. René Lévesque Buys Canada Savings Bonds & Other Great Canadian Graffiti. Edmonton: Hurtig.

1984:

Cooper, Martha. Henry Chalfant. Subway Art. 1984. New York: Thames and Hudson.

1985:

Blume, R. 1985. "Graffiti," In Discourse and Literature, ed. T.A. Van Dyjk. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company: 137-48.

1980s:

Continued practice of graffiti in New York Subway despite reports by MTA of a decrease

1990:

Bushnell, J. 1990. Moscow Graffiti: Language and Subculture. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Waldenburg, Hermann. 1990. The Berlin Wall Book. London: Thames and Hudson.

1991:

Coffield, F. 1991. Vandalism and Graffiti: The State of the Art. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

1992:

Whitford, M.J. 1992. Getting Rid of Graffiti. A Practical Guide to Graffiti Removal and anti-graffiti protection (London Underground). London: E & FN Spon.

1993:

Ferrell, Jeff. 1993. Crimes of Style, Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Community. New York: Garland Publishing.

Nwoye, O.G. 1993. "Social Issues on Walls," In Discourse and Society 4 (4): 419-42.

1995:

Sherri Cavan. 1995. The Great Graffiti Wars of the Late 20th Century. On line resource: www.graffiti.org/faq/greatgraffitiwars.html

Gadsby, Jane. 1991. Looking at Writing on the Wall: A Critical Review and Taxonomy of Graffiti Texts. On line resource: www.graffiti.org/faq/critical.review.html

1996:

Powers, Lynn. 1996. 'Whatever Happened to the Graffiti-Art Movement?' In Journal of Popular Culture 29 (4): 137-142.

1999:

Ottawa Police et al. 1999. The 1999 Graffiti Removal Pilot Project Report. Ottawa.

2000:

Ottawa Police. Community Development Section. 2000. Graffiti Pamphlet. Ottawa.

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