

Subway Art(e)fact

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: The Writing on the Wall.....	1
1970s New York City Graffiti.....	1
Definitions.....	1
Statement of Researcher Positionality.....	3
Rationale and Significance of Study.....	4
Research Question.....	7
Methods: Plan of Inquiry.....	7
Rationale for Research Approach.....	7
Subway Art History Project.....	8
Cultural Studies Methods.....	9
Trustworthiness.....	14
Limitations and Delimitations.....	14
Summary and Plan of Chapters.....	16
Chapter 2: The Invented Literature Lens.....	19
Conceptual Framework: The Imagined and Invented.....	19
Imagined Communities.....	20
Print Capitalism.....	22
The Invention of Tradition.....	26
Problematizing Invention Literature.....	32
Reading Austin with the New Lens.....	38
The Doubling in the Story of the “Freedom Train”.....	39
Austin’s Thick Context and Framing.....	41
Through Austin’s Open Door.....	45
Five Moments of Dialogue.....	49
Chapter 3: “Taki 183 Spawn Pen Pals”.....	51
The Early New York Graffiti Phenomenon.....	52
Austin’s <i>Taking the Train</i>	53
Castleman’s <i>Getting Up</i>	55
Interrogating “Taki 183”.....	57
Graffiti as Play.....	58
Discourses of Play.....	59

The Name-writing Game.....	60
Using the Imagination.....	67
Cult of the Child, Adults in Play.....	72
Questions of Origin.....	77
Austin and the Space Between Julio 204 and Taki 183.....	83
Taki 183 as Protagonist of a Bildungsroman.....	88
Conclusion.....	95
Chapter 4: <i>The Faith of Graffiti</i>	97
Elevating Graffiti to “Art”.....	97
A Shift in Interpretations.....	99
A Text in Limbo (Both Ignored and Echoed).....	101
(In)attention from Mailer Scholars.....	101
Graffiti Scholars: The Quotable Mailer.....	103
A Story Told in Three Covers.....	106
Reading the Images.....	110
Analyzing the Images.....	110
Naar’s Assignment.....	112
Noteworthy Changes from <i>The Faith</i> to <i>The Birth</i>	113
Five Images in <i>The Faith</i>	116
Conclusion to Close Reading of the Images.....	122
Close Reading of Mailer’s Essay.....	123
Faith Brings Us to Hip.....	124
Part 1: A Mystic and Optimistic Belief.....	131
Part 2: Praxis and Perspective.....	149
Part 3: Art and Optimism.....	160
Part 4: Binary and Hyperbole.....	168
Part 5: Mailer the Artist.....	174
Conclusion.....	177
Chapter 5: <i>Subway Art</i>	179
Fixity and Spread of Graffiti.....	179
<i>Subway Art</i> : A Text That Had Legs.....	181
The Photo Essay.....	181
Different Views of the Same Phenomenon.....	184
<i>Subway Art</i> in Conversation with <i>Taking the Train</i>	188

Five Storyline Threads.....	191
The Development of the Art.....	192
Front and Back Covers.....	192
The Photographers.....	194
The First Four Pages.....	200
The Contents Page.....	216
The Introduction: From Blade to Midg.....	219
History.....	224
The Didactic Guide to Graffiti Art.....	228
The Subway as Found Object.....	228
Vocabulary and Techniques	231
From Techniques to a Completed Subway.....	233
Writers, Names, and Crews.....	235
Kings.....	241
Style.....	244
The Moving Image, The Moving Imagination.....	248
Dedications.....	250
Conclusion.....	253
The Opposition and the End of an Era.....	254
The Opposition.....	254
The Buff.....	256
Lee’s Epitaph (and Challenge).....	258
Conclusion.....	260
Chapter 6: Conclusion of Thesis.....	263
“Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals”	265
<i>The Faith of Graffiti</i>	266
<i>Subway Art</i>	266
Recommendations for Future Studies.....	269
References.....	272

List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Dialogues among key graffiti texts</i> . A table showing the chronological volley of ideas about the graffiti phenomenon in texts throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.....	49
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List of Figures

Figure 1. Dondi as Gandhi. September 2010. Picture property of the author.....	4
Figure 2. Cover of Joe Austin’s (2001) <i>Taking the Train</i>	5
Figure 3. Front page of The New York Times Arts Section, October 26, 2010.....	9
Figure 4. Top half of the article “Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals,” July 21, 1971.....	51
Figure 5. A cartoon from the New York Daily News, January 6, 1972.....	95
Figure 6. Cover of Esquire magazine, May 1974.....	107
Figure 7. Cover of the original book <i>The Faith of Graffiti</i> , 1974.....	107
Figure 8. Cover of the second printing of <i>The Faith of Graffiti</i> , 2009.....	109
Figure 9. Jon Naar, “Hex Nixon,” <i>The Faith of Graffiti</i> , 1974.....	117
Figure 10. Jon Naar, “Star III,” <i>The Faith of Graffiti</i> , 1974.....	118
Figure 11. Jon Naar, “Evil Eddy,” <i>The Faith of Graffiti</i> , 1974.....	119
Figure 12. Jon Naar, “Rube(N),” <i>The Faith of Graffiti</i> , 1974.....	120
Figure 13. Jon Naar, “Kids Holding their Tags,” <i>The Faith of Graffiti</i> , 1974.....	121
Figure 14. Front and back covers of <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	192
Figure 15. The inside cover of <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	201
Figure 16. Half title page, <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	207
Figure 17. Frontispiece, <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	209
Figure 18. “Blade, Explosion.” Henry Chalfant, <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	219
Figure 19. “Midg,” Martha Cooper, <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	221
Figure 20. Boy running on top of parked subways, <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	229
Figure 21. “Dream,” <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	237
Figure 22. “Quik,” <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	238
Figure 23. “Kase 2,” <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	246
Figure 24. “Donkey Kong and Mario,” <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	248
Figure 25. “Deli” with punctum, <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	251
Figure 26. “The Buff,” <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	256
Figure 27. Lee’s epitaph, <i>Subway Art</i> , 1984.....	258

Chapter 1: The Writing on the Wall

1970s New York City Graffiti

The phrase “to read the writing on the wall” is a common enough expression, evoking ideas of interpretation that span languages, cultures, and time. To actually write on walls and objects in the popular present-day mode, that is, to write graffiti, has equally become a common enough activity, based on a particular reading, and also spanning languages, cultures, and recent time. The same style of graffiti, with the same traditional understanding, application, and interpretation, is found in many cities throughout the world. Most, if not all, of this graffiti shares a common point of reference: the 1970s New York City graffiti phenomenon. In this thesis, I examine three framing texts about the 1970s New York City graffiti phenomenon, which transformed the hermeneutics of graffiti and opened it up to becoming the quasi-worldwide phenomenon it has since become. My goal is to present a distinct story of how graffiti became an art.

Each of the three framing texts I examine represents a paradigm shift in the interpretation of the 1970s New York City graffiti phenomenon. These three texts are all *collaborative* graffiti texts (texts produced with both adolescent and adult input). They are also *constructive* graffiti texts that changed the hermeneutics surrounding writing on walls and objects. These texts located (“Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals,” 1971), elevated (*The Faith of Graffiti* [Mailer, 1974]), and fixed (*Subway Art* [Chalfant & Cooper, 1984]) graffiti as a practice and an object. I will approach these seminal texts by looking at the 1970s New York City graffiti phenomenon not as something that has always been defined, but as a growing practice (and later an object), which was filled with imagination and was forged both on walls and objects and in a public dialogue captured in texts. With this perspective, I will express a more refined understanding of the invention of the tradition of graffiti.

Definitions

Before I go further, I need to define four terms for this thesis.

Graffiti. “Graffiti” refers to both a practice and an object. First, graffiti refers to the evolving practice, throughout the 1970s in New York City, of writing one’s tag-name on walls and objects. Second, this practice culminated in an object - art that was located on the specific surface of the outside of subway cars and was also found on walls and other objects. Graffiti in this sense has been copied and is now seen in cities throughout the world (Austin, 2001). Most of the graffiti seen throughout the Western world since the late 1970s (knowingly or not, willingly or not) references the New York City graffiti phenomenon of the 1970s, and

what I will call graffiti throughout this thesis. In some cases, today, graffiti writers do not use the 1970s graffiti styles, yet they make a definite reference to them and to this period of development in New York City through adherence to certain rules, forms, and placements. Based on the popularity of the phenomenon and the term cross-culturally associated with it, I use the term graffiti in this thesis to refer to this exact phenomenon and no other writing or scratching on walls and objects. As an object, graffiti may also refer to either a painting or a photograph of a painting.

WoWO. The term WoWO (“Writings on Walls and Objects”) is a mix between an acronym and a neologism, which I have created as an umbrella term for all writings on walls and objects, including the earliest paintings and carvings dating back to troglodytes (cavemen paintings), the writings found on walls in Pompeii (Pompeii graffiti), the hieroglyphics of Ancient Egypt (Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics), the messages left by soldiers in the military (Military WoWO), and the profane writings found in toilet stalls (latrinalia). Graffiti as I define it is a subset of WoWO, just like latrinalia and Pompeii graffiti. I use the term in order to separate what I am studying, graffiti, from all other WoWO. What graffiti became, and how it has been picked up by young people almost all over the Western world, I argue, has no precedent; it is a unique cultural phenomenon.

WoWO points to all writings on walls and objects and allows for further individual classification of the various WoWO found throughout time. Cave paintings, Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, the writings found in Pompeii, the story of WoWO in the Hebrew Bible (the story of the writing on the wall in Chapter 5 of the Book of Daniel) are all part of this category called WoWO, but none of these are graffiti. I argue that graffiti has no actual connection to any of these practices, only imagined or invented connections. These practices cannot be graffiti because they do not refer to the phenomenon created in New York City during the 1970s, nor does that phenomenon refer to them (more on this in Chapter 3). Because of the ubiquity and popularity of the graffiti phenomenon, the word graffiti is now specific to the phenomenon which began, grew, and was fixed in print and meaning in New York City during the 1970s and early 1980s and is found today in cities throughout the world.

Consensus reality. Consensus reality is the “reality” upon which most people in a community mostly agree. Because there is no stable definition of reality, one can only talk of an agreed-upon-reality. In this definition, consensus reality is socially constructed through media and further (re)-produced in dialogue with other people. Even agreed-upon-reality is not agreed by all – but there is at least a consensus that “this” or “that” is “real.” “Consensus reality” can be thought of as analogous with “common sense” when discussing a topic. I use

the term in opposition to individual fantasy. Because I find fantasy or imagination to be so integral to graffiti, it is helpful to make a distinction between individual imaginings and the accepted consensus reality.

Individual fantasy. This term refers to the fantasy (or imagination) of an individual. I use this term to highlight the difference between one person's fantasy (or imagination) and the consensus reality. One's individual fantasy can be as fantastic as dreaming about fictional creatures or setting hard-to-reach goals for oneself. One's individual fantasy can be thought of as a cauldron where ideas are either forged into consensus reality ideas or are outright dismissed as folly.

Statement of Researcher Positionality

As a researcher, I must explain my positionality, that is, my relationship with the subject of the study. I have a long and complex relationship with the topic of graffiti. I have noticed graffiti around me since I was very young. I began practicing and painting on my own in 1993, when I turned 15. I'll never forget the moment when graffiti tags went from being the de facto background of my asphalt world to the most visible "thing" I could see, taking precedence in my life in a way I never could shake (no matter how hard I tried).

Ever since I began writing graffiti, I associated mostly with other graffiti writers. They passed graffiti lore down to me, along with information on which books and movies I should become acquainted with. I was attracted to the mythology around graffiti, especially the story that it was created by young people for young people and that adults had no place in it. To my teenage mind, that meant a lot. I understood painting graffiti to be a way to become an adult, like an important obstacle to overcome or a rite of passage to complete. I believed that if I worked hard enough at it as a teenager, that hard work and the evidence of it all over the city would be my golden ticket into a respectable adulthood.

Interestingly, in the graffiti cohort to which I belong (we can call it the 1990s), many graffiti writers didn't stop writing at age 18, nor at age 20, as earlier cohorts asserted in various graffiti texts (Castleman, 1982; Mailer & Naar, 1974; Stewart, 1989). At age 25, and even by age 30, graffiti writers from my cohort were still writing around New York City. Encouraged by them and also bolstered by the strong bond I had formed to the praxis, I continued painting until I was older as well, only stopping when the punishments became too harsh and the stakes for my adult livelihood were raised too high.

I went on to become a high school teacher. For seven years, I worked as an English teacher with young people in the juvenile justice department in New York City. In 2010, I created the Subway Art History Project with my friends and used it to teach my students

about certain famous names and events I thought they should know and, at the same time, try to make my lessons more engaging. Drawing on traditional images from what I always considered the bible of graffiti, *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), we repainted the traditional graffiti styles using the names of famous historical people, events, and phrases. In the Project, the graffiti writer Dondi became Gandhi (see Figure 1); the graffiti writer Blade became Plato; the graffiti writer Sin became Spinoza; and the graffiti writer Seen's iconic "Hand of Doom" became Joan of Arc. The image on the title page of *Subway Art* is a picture of two subways, one of which was painted with the "rest in peace" (RIP) memorial done for the graffiti writer Caine-I. We converted that image into Shakespeare's famous line from Hamlet "To be or not to be, That is the question". I brought the images of the graffiti we painted in the street inside the locked gates of the prison to show my students and start a new conversation. I was exploring the invention of tradition with the paintings, without knowing at the time of the Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) book by that title. *The New York Times* (2010) reported on the project, displaying two full color pictures, one on the front page of the Arts section, and by doing so inspired me to want to do something bigger with the idea. I wanted to approach graffiti as a scholar. That is what this thesis is; it grew from that graffiti art project.

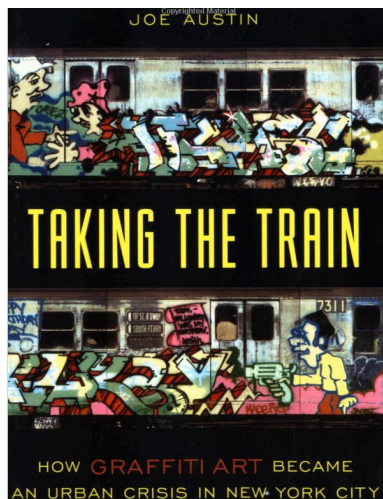


(Fig. 1. Dondi as Gandhi. September 2010. Picture property of the author)

Rationale and Significance of Study

Beyond the endlessly fascinating individualistic, and often affirmative, ethnographic accounts of the New York City graffiti phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s, only one academic study has been dedicated solely to an investigative interrogation of the framing and growth of graffiti in media - Austin's (2001) *Taking the Train*. My thesis should be understood as a continuation of and addition to the conversation Austin began. Where Austin's brilliant thesis highlighted the context of many aspects of life in New York City, and

the *one-sided* (usually negative) framing of graffiti in newspapers, as being that which formulated “graffiti art” as “an urban crisis” (Austin, 2001, cover), in my thesis, I give a close reading of the three paradigm-shifting collaborative and constructive graffiti texts that elevated graffiti to an original art.



(Fig. 2. Cover of Joe Austin’s (2001) *Taking the Train*)

On the cover of Austin’s (2001) *Taking the Train* is an image of graffiti art painted on a subway by one of the most celebrated graffiti artists of the late 1970s, along with the investigative query that sums up Austin’s thesis: “How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City.” The featured image is by the artist Kase 2, who is known by graffiti enthusiasts as one of the greatest graffiti writers and innovators of the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period I take in this thesis as the most influential for creating and recording graffiti art. Kase 2’s letters stood out from all other artists of the time because of how the letters were designed, how they connected, and the masterful three-dimensional effects. Many artists since have taken inspiration from his styles and used them as a base for how to create graffiti art. In books, magazines, and films, Kase 2’s work and life were made legend; the one-armed artist who invented the “computer rock” style is remembered as a “king.” The photograph of Kase 2’s graffiti art was taken by a photographer named Henry Chalfant who, along with Martha Cooper, in the mid 1970s, befriended some graffiti writers, spent years photographing their work, and meticulously stitched pictures together in order to show an artwork in its entirety, fixing graffiti in the way that it was performed and created in their seminal text *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) (more on this in Chapter 5).

In this thesis, I am interested in the story of how graffiti arrived at the artistic genius that is Kase 2 and how his genius was fixed as a model for graffiti. How does an activity that was once considered child’s play come to the crescendo of Kase 2’s computer rock style? The photo on the cover of Austin’s (2001) book, and the investigative query he posed and

answered in his book, begs the questions: “How did graffiti become an art?” and “How did graffiti come to inhabit a place of highly politicized discourse?” Austin’s thick context and attention to the details of newspaper editorials offers some of the answer, but a more complete answer comes from closely reading the three collaborative, paradigm shifting texts I have mentioned above.

As can be seen by the title of my thesis, *Subway Art(efact)*, the book *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) is central to this thesis. In *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper captured graffiti at a highly developed moment and fixed graffiti in that mode, presenting it to the world in a manner that could be reproduced “to the letter” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 236). Kase 2 was prominently featured in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), profiled and interviewed in the film *Style Wars* (Chalfant & Silver, 1983), and was well known as the inventor of computer-rock style. Austin’s (2001) choice to use Kase 2’s artwork on his book cover reveals an understanding of what was considered the best graffiti art, and it points to a story of graffiti that is aware of stylistic improvement, from the early naïve, incongruent, and asymmetrical stylings of young writers who were just becoming acquainted with the spray cans and the subway system, to a more advanced operation by those with years of accumulated and passed-down knowledge about how spray cans work and how the subway system works (or doesn’t work). It also points to Austin’s story of the discourse between those who were for and against graffiti in the struggle to control the meaning-making power of graffiti in newspapers and graffiti circles. The story of graffiti’s growth into an art and a highly politicized discourse is a story that takes place over time; it is not limited to hostile newspaper accounts or fantastical individual accounts, but also has constructive texts which, when read closely, reveal a more nuanced story.

Perhaps, instead of asking why Austin (2001) featured Kase 2 on his cover, one could ask why did Austin not feature a picture of the work of Taki 183 or Julio 204? Or why did he not use an image from *The Faith of Graffiti* (Mailer & Naar, 1974)? Or even more pointedly, why did Austin (2001) feature on his cover a picture from *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984)? I argue that, because *Subway Art* is a text that shows graffiti art at its best, it gives a fixed idea of graffiti that has been copied in cities throughout the world and tells the story of the growth of graffiti, which points to an understanding that not all graffiti is art and that there was a time when graffiti was not considered art at all.

Graffiti is often framed as a struggle between youth and adults. This claim is backed up by one-sided texts, either arguing for or against graffiti, with arguments that are stuck in the binary of graffiti representing *either* an immature crime *or* an avant-garde art. Because of

this, graffiti in graffiti studies is always-already accepted as a “real” object rather than the malleable cultural artifact full of imagination that I argue it is in this thesis. When scholars depend on texts that either outright appreciate or reject graffiti, this does not allow for refined readings of graffiti as imaginative or invented, because those texts are mostly concerned with putting forth an absolute argument to bolster their authors’ position. The collaborative texts that I investigate in this thesis momentarily free readers from the oppositional binary found in one-sided texts, enabling readers to ask deeper questions about what some people see when they read (or write) graffiti. For example, one such question is: “What constructive role did adults (writers, photographers) play in the framing and fixing of graffiti as it is understood and performed today?” Another is: “How did adult interpretation and framing of the adolescent imaginary affect the presentation and praxis of graffiti?”

Research Question

The primary question for this thesis is: What does a close reading of three paradigmatic texts for graffiti reveal about the process of the construction of graffiti?

Methods: Plan of Inquiry

In this section, I describe the cultural studies methods I utilize for this thesis. I also discuss in greater detail “The Subway Art History Project,” the graffiti art project that prompted the investigation taken up in this thesis. I show how my choice to focus on *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) as the central text of the investigation prescribes criteria for selecting my corpus. I then discuss how I plan to approach my corpus using methods from cultural studies. Finally, I discuss issues of trustworthiness, the limitations of my study, and the delimitations I put on my study.

Rationale for Research Approach

I situate this thesis in cultural studies, using interdisciplinary qualitative methods to examine three paradigm-shifting texts for graffiti. By doing so, I engage a conversation with a major text devoted to an investigation of the framing of graffiti in the media, Austin’s (2001) *Taking the Train*. One way to perform cultural studies is to apply the technique of closely reading a few texts from a constructivist perspective “with the intent of developing a theory or pattern” (Creswell, 2003, p. 18) that applies “to a broad range of cultural phenomena” (Pickering, 2003a, p. 1). In *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, Davis (2003) noted, “Qualitative forms of textual or discourse analysis tend to look at far fewer texts but in more depth” (p. 57). In my close reading of the three texts in my corpus, I apply a deep textual and visual analysis and place that reading in conversation with Austin’s (2001) scholarly investigation.

Pickering (2003b) emphasized what he believed should “remain a major component of cultural studies research” (p. 18), namely, reflection on “lived experience” (p. 18). Pickering quoted Kearney, who wrote “any consideration of the way individuals engage in the process of recreating their identities by continually reflecting upon their lived experience, is largely missing from current research” (p. 18). As I mentioned above, I spent many years writing graffiti and thinking about it. This lived experience informs my analysis. I suggest that my positionality as a graffiti writer and a scholar investigating graffiti is a positionality that is missing from graffiti studies. My positionality provides an advantageous grounding to my study based on an intimate knowledge of the practice.

Subway Art History Project

In 2010, a couple of graffiti-writing friends and I were painting in my studio in Brooklyn, New York. We were trying to invent new graffiti styles by working with the classic graffiti styles found in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). One idea was to use the negative space behind the work. Another idea was to play with the arrows and three-dimensional effects in a way to cancel out the letters. But the idea that would prove most fruitful was to change the names of the famous graffiti writers while keeping their iconic styles. My friends and I performed “detournement” (Debord, 1977) on the traditional graffiti styles by changing the names of famous graffiti writers to the names of famous people, moments, and phrases from history and we called the project “The Subway Art History Project” (hereafter, SAHP). The title was a play on words, with the double signification of what we considered the most influential graffiti text, *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), mixed with the generic university class title “Art History.” I thought the paintings were exciting, although I worried about the backlash from graffiti purists who might be upset that we used these famous traditional and very important styles but did not take seriously the traditional rules and spirit of graffiti. One of the most important rules in graffiti is to have one’s own style and never copy any other writer’s style. By copying famous styles, we could have made the project problematic.

The SAHP elicited more constructive criticism and questions than I could have imagined. Among friends and colleagues, SAHP generated discussion surrounding the story of and the traditional understanding of graffiti. Everybody I knew had an opinion about the style and about the names chosen. After seeing the traditional styles of graffiti we used to paint historically famous names, moments, and phrases, people raised many questions, including: “Why did you choose to combine that particular name with that particular style?”; “What is being said when those particular historically significant names, moments, and

phrases are painted in those particular styles?"; "What happens to these styles when spelling out such culturally relevant names?"; "What is the connection between the historically well-known names and the well-known graffiti styles you use?"; "Why is *Subway Art* the pinnacle of graffiti art?"; "What actual work does *Subway Art* perform for graffiti?"; and "Why do all graffiti writers recognize the styles from *Subway Art*?" In other words, we began a conversation.

On October 27, 2010, *The New York Times* published two full-color pictures of SAHP on the first and last pages of the Arts section with an accompanying article for which I was interviewed. The cachet of having one's work discussed and publicized in *The New York Times* is a powerful motivating force (more on this in Chapter 3), which nudged me further towards wanting to academically approach graffiti as it is reflected in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). *Subway Art* is central to this thesis and I closely read it in Chapter 5, approaching it as the text that fixed graffiti in a tradition and a method, which would be copied by young people in other countries for years after.



(Fig. 3. Screenshot of the front page of The New York Times Arts Section, October 26, 2010)

Cultural Studies Methods

One cultural studies method I use to closely read the mostly photographic book *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) is analyzing visual experience. In "Analysing Visual Experience," Pink (2003) noted that "visual cultural studies" "attends to the many moments within the cycle of production, circulation and consumption of the image through which meanings accumulate, slip and shift" (p. 130). Even though Chalfant and Cooper (1984) took the photographs in *Subway Art* with the intention of capturing particular people and actions at a particular time and place, the book went on to become an informative model, a guidebook of sorts for budding graffiti writers. Therefore, a close reading of the images proves beneficial for observing how "meanings accumulate, slip and shift" (Pink, 2003, p. 130).

One example of how meaning slips and shifts is the mythical retelling of the story of graffiti as a practice completely divorced from the adult world, that is, that graffiti is a practice created for young people by young people. What a quick visual analysis of the images reveals is the friendship and partnership between the young graffiti writers and the adult photographers that must have existed for the images to be created and photographed and for the book to be made. The “principle of multiple authorship” (Pink, 2003, p. 133) is illustrated when a visual analysis reveals the adult photographers’ names in the graffiti art. Seeing the collaborative approach towards creating graffiti taken in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) leads me to regard *Subway Art* less as a simple documentation of a movement and a moment and more as a text created in dialogue between the adult photographers and the young graffiti writers. This partnership shows the “‘shared’ and ‘intertextual’” “ethnographic documentary” (Pink, 2003, p. 133) process applied in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), which “shift[s] the emphasis from the idea of doing research about/on a group of people or person, to that of doing research with/for them” (Pink, 2003, p. 133). My understanding of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) as a text with multiple authors, and viewing Chalfant and Cooper as partners working with the young graffiti writers for the meaning making power of graffiti, guided my selection of my corpus for this thesis.

Investigating *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) as a scholar with insider knowledge of graffiti brought me to interrogate the narrative that *Subway Art* tells. The questions that followed were “What is the story of the growth of graffiti as it is presented in *Subway Art*?”; “How did *Subway Art* become the most important text in graffiti?”; “What narrative does it tell?”; and “What other textual actants were involved in the growth of graffiti?” To approach these questions, I looked for stories and texts that came before *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), from which *Subway Art* may have borrowed. In her chapter “Stories and the Social World,” in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, Lawler (2003) explained that “stories surround us” (p. 32) and “These stories are not simple reflections of a set of ‘facts’: rather, they are organizing devices through which we interpret and constitute the world” (p. 32). Narratives “become social and cultural resources through which people engage in ‘sense-making’” (pp. 32-33). Lawler explained that “...existing stories...become resources to use for social actors in constructing their *own* stories” (p. 33; emphasis in original). In *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) used past stories. Thus, I recognize that my choosing *Subway Art* as the center of my investigation is part of a particular narrative, but I maintain the *Subway Art* narrative is the most well-known graffiti narrative and therefore merits a close study.

Lawler (2003) defined a narrative as a story that “refers to an account which has three elements: characters..., action..., and plot. The plot is key” (p. 34). When thinking about the story of graffiti, we have the characters (teenagers in 1970s and early 1980s New York City) and the action (writing on walls and objects), but what is missing – or always under contestation – is the plot of graffiti. One plot I point to with this thesis is the struggle over the meaning making power of graffiti. I argue that graffiti still has no settled plot; the meaning is constantly up for grabs and contested. But, in *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) pointed to a fixed plot, namely, that young people in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s created an art on subways and the authorities stopped their art from continuing, making graffiti a quasi-censored artwork. As Lawler (2003) observed:

There is no narrative which can tell everything. What is told is selected because it is understood as having a meaningful place in the narrative. But it is then given meaning through its very inclusion in the narrative. As the readers or hearers of (the audience to) a narrative, people expect a narrated event to have a significance – to cause, and to be caused by, other events. (p. 34)

In this thesis, I take the position that certain texts changed the hermeneutics surrounding graffiti, leading up to its fixity as an art in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). I recognize that this narrative is one of perhaps many, yet I maintain that each of the collaborative texts that I chose for my corpus has a significant position in ever so slightly pushing the meaning making power of graffiti to include and adopt the challenge of being an art.

By looking at *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) as a text with multiple authorship, which has a constructive narrative and has traveled to various cities, I can articulate the five criteria for choosing the texts for my corpus. Texts I will read closely for this thesis must: (a) be collaborative; (b) be constructive; (c) represent a moment of change; (d) have been written during the period; and (e) have had a fairly large readership. I will now explain how the two other texts I chose as part of my corpus meet these requirements.

In *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) told a certain story about the growth of graffiti, which I investigate in further detail in Chapter 5. The book has six pages dedicated to the history of graffiti. Half of the first page is a reproduction of the top half of the first article ever written about the graffiti phenomenon, *The New York Times* article “Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals” (1971; hereafter “Taki 183”). I often heard about this article, especially in the context of the story passed down in graffiti circles that Taki 183 was not the actual “first” graffiti writer; other writers went before him, but the article made him a legend. This

newspaper article meets my criteria of being collaborative (based on its reliance on interviews with graffiti writers); being constructive (based on its description of graffiti); representing a moment of change (by being the first text to locate graffiti); and of having a fairly large readership (by the article being referenced so often, a point I discuss further in Chapter 3). I remember this text being a familiar topic among graffiti writers and, after reading Creswell's (1996) inspired use of the story of Taki 183 for a chapter in his thesis and Austin's (2001) minimal handling of the article for his book, I decided that I must give a close reading to the historically relevant article "Taki 183" (1971) in this thesis.

In his chapter "Engaging with History," in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, Pickering (2003c) observed that what is most valuable about engaging with history is "to bring its irrevocable otherness into encounter with the present in order that we may better understand how things have changed and how we have arrived historically within the present" (p. 202). By using this newspaper article about Taki 183, the first article to discuss graffiti, I can draw out the otherness of a world that didn't know graffiti as we do today and shed light on how we have arrived at our present understanding of graffiti. Pickering commented further, "The news is history written in a hurry. It is also produced without the benefit of hindsight" (p. 203). Pickering continued:

Close readings of news as historical sources can nevertheless prove very revealing even if they are just one part of an overall approach, not only for their temporally immediate treatment of a historical event, but also because they afford an opportunity to assess changes and continuities in both broadsheet and tabloid journalism. (p. 204)

The historical article "Taki 183" (1971) drew both pride and scorn for being the article that first articulated graffiti. Many later articles would be written against graffiti in an attempt to stem any damage done by this initial article (Austin, 2001) and the article would serve as the first moment of recognition for graffiti.

What becomes clear after a close reading of "Taki 183" (1971) is the major, yet unacknowledged, presence of the imagination when describing what graffiti means, does, and can possibly do at this early moment. Reflecting on the imagination in graffiti and my own personal use of the imagination with my own graffiti led me to two philosophical texts to use as theoretical grounding for my study: Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Communities* and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) *The Invention of Tradition* (more on this in Chapter 2). I use these texts to craft a lens for looking at graffiti, a lens that brings into focus the use of imagination and the way the invention of tradition is read in a close study of graffiti. I take the findings from those texts as my lens and apply them to my readings of the texts in my corpus.

Pickering (2003c) remarked that, when engaging historical texts, one should be aware that “We study the past in a radically altered fashion to the ways in which it was lived, for in looking back we select particular features from the past and subject them to scrutiny from a changed perspective” (p. 208). I must acknowledge that my reading of the article is also from a particular perspective, yet I attempt to handle the subject with care regarding the popular narrative of graffiti.

With the beginning of my thesis being the historical article that introduced graffiti to the reading public, “Taki 183” (1971), and the end of my thesis being the photographic essay that fixed graffiti as a praxis and commodity in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), and in light of my theoretical lens calling attention to the powerful use of the imagination and the invention of tradition in telling and sustaining a narrative (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), I recognized that my thesis needed a text that bridged between the two main graffiti texts in my corpus. I wondered, “What text(s) that meet my criteria could have aided in the growth of graffiti from how it is described in ‘Taki 183’ to how it is understood in *Subway Art*?” The answer came from an exchange I had with a former graffiti writer whose work appears in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). When I mentioned to him that *Subway Art* was the most influential graffiti text for my generation, he told me that Mailer and Naar’s (1974) *The Faith of Graffiti* was the most influential graffiti text for his generation. This was an incredible revelation for my study.

I had heard of *The Faith of Graffiti* (Mailer & Naar, 1974; hereafter *The Faith*). I once saw it from a distance at a graffiti art show, but I was not allowed to go through the pages. The book was well-known in graffiti circles and was a prized possession, making it difficult to pore over and read Mailer’s essay or to look at Naar’s photographs up close because everyone wanted to keep their copy in pristine condition. From a distance, it seemed like a book of naïve graffiti, children’s graffiti, even pre-graffiti. In 2009, a new version of the book was released and finally a new audience was able to read it. I found the book to be something of a letdown the first time I read it because it did not seem that Mailer said anything too important about graffiti. This anecdote reveals the importance of text for graffiti and reinforces my studying text about graffiti.

Without a close reading of the text, Mailer’s wider literary and public project, and a visual analysis of the book (which I give in Chapter 4), in the chronological context between “Taki 183” (1971) and *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), it is not easy to recognize the importance of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) as a paradigm shift in the hermeneutics of graffiti. Therefore, I approach Mailer’s influence on and contribution to the book through

textual analysis, using a close reading of Mailer's writing project up until writing his essay *The Faith* (1974) and taking into account Mailer's public persona. I also draw from *Picture Theory* (Mitchell, 1994) and *What Do Pictures Want?* (Mitchell, 2005), as well as the work of Mirzoeff (2009), to approach Naar's photos, and end by reading the images and words together.

Trustworthiness

At this point, I must address a couple of issues regarding the trustworthiness of my research process. As I stated, I have been immersed in graffiti for many years, painting it, reflecting on it, and attempting to improve my own graffiti practice. I have had close relationships and good conversations with many graffiti writers from various periods of graffiti and used their understandings to better situate my own understanding of graffiti. However, in this thesis I do not look closely at influences that came from outside of texts about graffiti and so the validity of my claims hinges on a story close to cause and effect, from text to text. As much as I aim to use the texts to uncover certain nuance, this same nuance masks other actants, particularly the influence of programs on television, news on television, film, other photographs, and possibly other writings I am not familiar with. Yet, because I designed this thesis to line up with Austin's (2001) work, I do not believe that the story that I claim is far-fetched. In fact, I would argue that, because my study lines up so well with Austin's study, such chronological alignment adds to the trustworthiness of my claims.

As I've already mentioned, this thesis hinges on my choice of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) as being the central and most important text for the fixing and spread of graffiti. I have taken into account other graffiti writers' suggestions. I have introduced a theoretical lens with which to review graffiti. Finally, I bring my paintings as ethnographic practice of the topic of study. Any issues of trustworthiness should only be limited to my positionality and choice of text, both of which I have described as being well-informed.

Limitations and Delimitations

My study is limited by its dependence on texts because so many important moments of the story of the growth of graffiti were not captured on film or, if they were, are stored as photographs in private graffiti archives. There were many more graffiti writers who were not able to work on texts or on creating books, but who worked on graffiti on walls and objects and pushed graffiti ever so slightly to other understandings. I encourage another graffiti scholar to investigate the films and the photographs that tell more of the story of the growth of graffiti. I also concede that my study is limited by my New York-centric understanding of graffiti and by the stories passed down to me and my experiences with graffiti in New York

City. While I cannot tell the whole story of graffiti, I can tell a story that is meaningful, particularly one that is meaningful to graffiti writers from New York City and graffiti writers who look to New York City as the birthplace of graffiti.

There are also a couple delimitations that I purposely put on my thesis. One of those is my focus on New York City. I recognize that there were graffiti-tagging movements that started in other cities, the most well-known being the graffiti writer Cornbread from Philadelphia in the mid 1960s (Powers, 1999), and another being the Los Angeles Chicano styles dating back to the 1930s (Phillips, 1999), but I do not approach those stories or styles because I do not agree that they had much influence on graffiti becoming an art. My study ends with graffiti being “fixed” in its most popular form in the text *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Therefore, I do not recognize simple tags or even early graffiti painted on canvas as the final product of graffiti. Rather, I see them as unsuccessful attempts in the dialogue to fix the meaning making power of graffiti, which was finally solidified in *Subway Art*.

I also put the delimitation on my study to only investigate graffiti starting in 1971. I do not use WoWO from other periods nor do I look to connect graffiti with a larger history of WoWO. I treat graffiti as a unique anomaly. As a Ph.D. student at the Graduate School of North American Studies at Freie University, for the first two years of my research I focused on famous instances of U.S. WoWO such as “Kilroy Was Here,” “Bird Lives!” and “Disco Sucks!”, as well as Nose Art like “Enola Gay” and “The Memphis Belle,” and U.S. soldiers’ writing on bombs (one famous example coming from the movie *Dr. Strangelove*). I did this because I was often told by various graffiti writers that graffiti had a real connection to the WoWO found in war in the 20th century. The WoWO “Kilroy Was Here” was often mentioned amongst graffiti writers as a forerunner and “bombing” is a quasi-universal term meaning “writing graffiti” in graffiti circles. I was certain that these examples of WoWO, and almost all historical WoWO, were forerunners of or somehow influential to graffiti’s growth. In 2017, however, I organized the Tag Conference, which shed light on many instances of ancient writings on walls and objects and forced me to rethink any certainty I had that all WoWO were somehow connected in a traditional sense, and to finally start to want to study graffiti apart from other WoWO. With my theoretical lens being invention literature, I have come to think that there is no connection, besides an invented one, between ancient or any other writings on walls and objects and the 1970s New York City graffiti phenomenon, which is the focus of this thesis. Based on my understanding that graffiti is a unique and separate practice in terms of WoWO, I chose to delimit the scope of this thesis to investigating texts

that were written during the time period when graffiti was forming and about the specific graffiti phenomenon in New York City during the 1970s. I do not mix graffiti with any other WoWO practice.

Summary and Plan of Chapters

The plan of inquiry for this thesis comes from the cultural studies tradition. I take an interdisciplinary approach and use qualitative methods to investigate three paradigm-shifting texts about graffiti. The research methods from cultural studies that I use are an analysis of visual experience, the investigation of narratives, and engagement with history, tempered with an auto-ethnographic connection to the topic. As researcher, I have a connection to the topic of graffiti, which I have made transparent. My Subway Art History Project, which elicited many questions, became the basis for this thesis. To support the trustworthiness of my position, I have explained how I chose my corpus based on my lived experience with graffiti and a close reading of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). I have also expressed the limitations and delimitations placed on my study.

Now that I have described my plan of inquiry, I briefly describe how the rest of the chapters are organized and what purpose they serve. In Chapter 2, I describe my theoretical grounding, apply the theory to a re-reading of *Taking the Train* (Austin, 2001), provide a short critique, and then show where Austin's academic text opens the door for my study. I also present a chart to depict the wider dialogue that I will bring out in this thesis and how the texts Austin investigated line up chronologically with the texts I investigate.

The focus of Chapter 3 is *The New York Times* article "Taki 183" (1971), which was the first time an author wrote about graffiti. I offer a close reading of "Taki 183" for its framing, imagination, and role in inventing a tradition of graffiti. I first look at how Austin (2001) and Castleman (1982) approached the article "Taki 183" (1971) and the origin story of graffiti. I then interrogate "Taki 183" itself and look at play in graffiti, imagination in graffiti, and adults' involvement in graffiti. I consider questions surrounding the origin story of graffiti and sort through different origin claims to explain why "Taki 183" is the first piece of writing about graffiti. I conclude by showing "Taki 183," framed as a Bildungsroman, opened the meaning of graffiti to individual personal meanings for graffiti writers. Through my analysis in this chapter, I show the openness of the play at the beginning and provide a position from which to watch the growth of graffiti.

In Chapter 4, I closely read a text that academics often ignore in graffiti studies, perhaps because it is full of contradictions and does not give a definitive meaning for graffiti: *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Yet, for graffiti writers in the 1970s, this same text was a

highly prized object because of Mailer's reputation and his raising of the hermeneutics of graffiti to include "art" as one of its lasting meanings. In my reading, I proceed from analysis of three different cover images, to Naar's photographs, to Mailer's essay. By reading the three different cover images used on each edition of *The Faith*, two from 1974 (the *Esquire* magazine cover and the book cover) and the third being the updated cover on the 2009 version, I show that the popular story of graffiti as expressed in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) was the dominant narrative about the story of graffiti. I read Naar's images closely to find what he was initially looking for with his framings and what he actually found. Then I closely read Mailer's essay, where I connect the "faith" he described for graffiti to his critical philosophy of Hip, which he expressed in his major essay, *The White Negro* (Mailer, 1957). In his essay on graffiti, Mailer (Mailer & Naar, 1974) attempted to locate graffiti's connection to modern and post-modern art housed in MoMA. Instead, he wound up connecting graffiti to his own personal life, even using it at one point to right a perceived wrong against him and the city of New York. Mailer and Naar's (1974) book, although full of personal projections and framings of graffiti, raised the level of discourse around graffiti and had an important impact on people writing and reading graffiti after 1974.

Subway Art (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), as noted, is of central importance to this thesis. Chapter 5 of this thesis is dedicated to a close reading of *Subway Art*. *Subway Art* captured graffiti at its most prolific and artistic in New York City during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Chapter 5, I look at what the photographic essay *Subway Art* leaves out by comparing it with other texts that reported on the same phenomenon. I show how *Subway Art* is in conversation with *Taking the Train* (Austin, 2001) and locate five storyline threads that run throughout the book. I discuss the two photographers who created *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) and their different approaches to capturing graffiti on subways. I show the development of graffiti in the 1970s and connect it with a history of graffiti from that same decade. I show the dilapidated subway as a found object, and read the didactic portions of the book, where individual graffiti writers are introduced and shown next to their graffiti creations. Some are said to be "kings" and the reason for this is shown in the images of their brilliant work. Finally, I introduce the police opposition and the process used to stop graffiti from being written on subways in the mid-1980s, namely, the buff. The last picture of the book both bookends graffiti in a particular time and space and serves as a challenge to future generations of graffiti writers to keep the art alive.

Each of the three texts just mentioned serves in my thesis as a paradigm shifting text for understanding graffiti. "Taki 183" (1971), the first article written about the NYC graffiti

phenomenon, is the text that located graffiti. Mailer and Naar (1974), in *The Faith*, raised the stakes of graffiti by proclaiming it (loudly) as an art. Chalfant and Cooper (1984), in *Subway Art*, fixed graffiti by showing the art of graffiti, which allowed for that art to be followed to the letter and pirated in cities across the world. In Chapter 6, I conclude with the findings of the thesis and give recommendations for how future scholars can (re)-view graffiti.

Chapter 2: The Invented Literature Lens

In this chapter, I present the invented literature lens, the theoretical grounding for my thesis, by explaining the theory and the ways the theory operates with my topic. I then discuss research and critiques relevant to the theory, and explain how I address relevant issues and concerns in my work. With the theoretical grounding in place, I move to a close reading of Austin's (2001) *Taking the Train* and identify an important literary doubling in his opening anecdote. I describe Austin's thick context and framing. I offer a short critique of *Taking the Train* and show where Austin left an open door for my study. I end the chapter by presenting a table to show how the texts studied in my thesis are in conversation with the texts Austin studied in his thesis.

Conceptual Framework: The Imagined and Invented

To cut a lens to re-view graffiti in this study, I bring together two texts: Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Communities* and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*. The authors of both texts are well-known for introducing a new perspective on the study of nationalism. They shared the conclusion that much of what is accepted about the logic of the "[n]ation, nationality, [and] nationalism" (Anderson, 1983, p. 3) in modern times was built upon a base of imagination and invention. Others have used these two texts together before as a lens to deconstruct invented traditions in many respects; when used together, the texts are called "invention literature" (Briggs, 1996, p. 463). While it may seem strange to use texts regarding the critical topic of nationalism in order to examine the topic of graffiti, such an investigation is justified by the expansion of graffiti to cities around the world, as graffiti writers invented shared traditions and fostered imagined and real solidarities between people who would never meet.

Just as Anderson (1983) explained that the study of nationalism was stuck in a binary, framing nationalism essentially either as fascist or liberal, in this thesis, I begin with the idea that in graffiti studies the common approach to investigating graffiti is also stuck in a binary: that it is either a crime or an art. Similar to Anderson (2006), who wrote that he was "less interested in particular nationalist myths...than in the general morphology of nationalist consciousness" (p. 226), I am less interested in the individual competing interpretations of graffiti than in the general morphology of the hermeneutics of graffiti that can be traced through collaborative and constructive texts.

To date, graffiti scholars have not taken up the concepts of invention and imagination. By examining texts through the lens of invention literature, I am able to highlight a narrative

of the inception, growth, and fixity of the invention of the tradition of graffiti. By studying the invention through text, the centrality of the imagination in the creation of graffiti becomes apparent; a community is created through imagination, grows through invention and imagination, and is fixed in real ways. At the same time, this reveals how the tradition of graffiti was invented, grew, fixed, and became available for further reproduction.

Anderson (1983), in *Imagined Communities*, deconstructed the conditions that contributed to citizens being able to imagine themselves as part of a nation. He pointed to the fixing of vernacular languages in print, which allowed for the homogenization of a printed language within borders demarcated by the language as creating solidarities between people who would never meet face-to-face. He traced how the imagined solidarities were disseminated through print capitalism and went on to create in the collective consciousness of people the idea that they were part of a community newly understood as a nation. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), in *The Invention of Tradition*, gave close readings of traditions strongly embedded in many cultures to justify nationalism, seemingly since time immemorial, and deconstructed how these traditions were created by looking at their inception, growth, and final fixing in consensus reality. Hobsbawm (1983) theorized, in the introduction to the book, how invented traditions are established, connected with an historic past and ancient materials, and followed to the letter and repeated until “it” (the invented tradition) is accepted as a tradition in consensus reality. Here I will highlight the parts of *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983) and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) that are most relevant to my research and the questions I am asking in this thesis.

Imagined Communities

Calhoun (1993), in “Nationalism and Ethnicity,” wrote that *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983) was “perhaps the most original, if not the most systematic contribution to the large recent literature on nationalism” (p. 233). Anderson (1983) observed that, before his intervention, most discussions about nationalism accepted nationalism as an ideology with a pre-ordained outcome in mind of proving it to be either of a liberal or fascist nature. Anderson called for a “Copernican spirit” (p. 4) - a paradigm shift to a new approach to studying nationalism. Instead of seeking to assign a plus or minus value to nationalism, Anderson renewed the discussion on nationalism by probing the origins of nationalism and then identifying nationalism as something closer to kinship and religion. By doing so, he reframed the understanding of nationalism, and highlighted the changes in thought, representation, and imagination in text, which may have had the unintended consequences of setting the conditions for the rise of the understanding of the “[n]ation, nationality, [and] nationalism” (p.

3). Anderson wrote that "all communities...are imagined" (p. 6). He described the imaginative work needed to sustain the idea of membership in a nation when he wrote, "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6).

For people living today, it could be a difficult stretch to understand "the nation" as a rather recently invented concept that exists more in imagination than in physical reality, because the world is ordered today according to the logic of nations, real borders, and learned stories that root nations in long histories. Anderson (1983) pointed to the revolutions taking place in the Americas at the end of the 18th century, along with the French Revolution, as moments when people who no longer imagined themselves as subjects of a kingdom were able to imagine themselves as part of a nation. This reordering of how citizens could think of themselves and their status as citizens was wholly new and, according to Anderson, aided in the rise of the nation.

In the Afterword of a later edition of *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 2006), written almost 25 years after the first publication of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson offered an updated simile to describe what "imagined" means in his text:

...neither 'imaginary' as in 'unicorn,' nor matter-of-factly real as in 'TV set,' but rather something analogous to Madame Bovary and Queequeg, whose existence stemmed only from the moment Flaubert and Melville imagined them for us. (p. 226)

In other words, imagined does not mean *not real* but, at the same time, the imagined is not as real as a physical object that one can see and touch. One will never meet face-to-face with Madame Bovary or Queequeg but, by reading about their lives, one can imagine their existence.

That Anderson (2006) used a literary simile to explain what he meant by imagination is appropriate, considering his original text showed the similarity in abstract thinking of envisioning the comings and goings of multiple characters in a novel and envisioning one's fellow citizens in a nation. Many different readers read the same story about Queequeg, and most, if not all, readers can agree on certain details of Queequeg's life, background, and behavior as a shared mooring of a certain reality. Queequeg, whom Melville wrote as a character from a fictional South Sea island who was treated as an equal (or better) by white Americans in the 19th century novel, represents a fantasy of a more meritocratic society in lieu of the xenophobic and racist society that the United States was at the time. Readers can refer to Queequeg and discuss the actions written about him as if he were a real person. By

doing this, readers refer to a written reality, perhaps a fantasy, which over time and after being shared by many readers can become part of the consensus reality understanding of the world.

Certain ideas are first imagined, then tested, until finally they become part of the accepted reality, or consensus reality. In other words, new ideas are imagined (often in print), tested, and if they succeed in making meaning, they might get to become part of the consensus reality. For example, John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) is often credited with first having the imaginative capacity to proclaim, in 1961, that man would one day walk on the moon. That imaginary idea became a reality eight years later; an idea credited to the individual imagination of JFK became a part of the consensus reality. Imagination here points to the widening of possibilities, not to a false sense of consciousness. Rousseau described the imagination as that which “extends for us the measure of the possible, whether for good or bad, and which consequently excites and nourishes the desires by the hope of satisfying them” (as cited in Engel, 2005, p. 520). This is what imagined means in *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983) - an intellectual enlargement of the realm of the possible.

Print Capitalism

Calhoun (1993) commented, “Anderson’s central contribution is to explain how communicative forms figured in creating the categorical identity or imagined community of the nation itself” (p. 234). For Anderson (1983), the *printed word* starred as the major actant for citizens’ ability to imagine the nation in which they claimed membership. Anderson pointed to features of print capitalism to identify how the individual citizen was persuaded over time to be able to imagine that they were part of a nation: the fixing of vernacular languages in print, the structure of the novel, the ubiquity of the newspaper in 18th and 19th century Europe, and the facility to “pirate in the positive” (Anderson, 2006, p. 207).

Vernacular languages. The utilities of the printed word towards imagining a nation are traced to Gutenberg’s printing press. With the growth of print capitalism, vernacular languages were regionally printed, which allowed people to read about the world in a language they understood, pushing Europe’s former elite universal language of Church Latin towards obsolescence. The fixity of vernacular languages that print created maintained a similar reference point, a mooring of how ideas could be expressed and discussed, for the people speaking the language. This mooring in vernacular language immediately set up barriers, or borders, which those who didn’t speak or read the language could not cross and, conversely, created imagined solidarities between people living within those linguistic borders.

Printed vernacular language gives vernacular languages the appearance that they are connected to the past even when it is known that they are rather recently fixed as languages. Anderson (1983) gave the example of modern English speakers reading the words of ancient burial rites, which then gave the impression of unity between the people of 400 years ago and today. Words written in English 400 years ago make sense today (or they do when further translated into the more recent vernacular form) and modern people can imagine their connection with the people who lived when the words were written, giving a sense of historical continuity. “Language,” Engels (2005) wrote in *Rousseau and Imagined Communities*, “fosters unity over time and across space” (p. 525).

With the fixity of vernacular languages and new borders based on language, the widespread growth of the printed word in books and newspapers allowed for citizens to read about other citizens and events within the borders of the nation and imagine a nation of people living simultaneously in “homogenous, empty time” (Anderson, 1983, p. 25). As Engels (2005) noted, “The novel, the newspaper, and now the television have made it possible for people to share common experiences and to imagine themselves as part of a community” (p. 531). When thinking about the solidarities and community imagined through writing (and the spectacle), parallels to writing and reading graffiti emerge. With novels and newspapers, the reader is transported through their imagination into the story world and imagines the characters as the author describes them. After one reads the same name many times over in graffiti, this same faculty of imagination is conjured in the mind and the reader imagines the experiences and communion with the graffiti writer, without ever meeting them.

Structure of the novel. The structure of the novel, Anderson (1983) explained, allowed readers to imagine various lives being acted out “at the same clocked, calendrical time, but by actors who may be largely unaware of one another” (p. 26). Anderson described the newspaper as “an ‘extreme form’ of the book, a book sold on a colossal scale, but of ephemeral popularity” (p. 34). The newspaper is read alone “in the lair of the skull” (p. 35), yet readers are reassured daily that what is written in the newspaper has a mooring in everyday life because they see other citizens also reading the newspaper; an imagined community with a consensus reality is conjured in the repetition of that act.

Readers of a newspaper, whether they agree with what is written or not, by dint of seeing other citizens consume the newspaper daily, trust that what is printed is part of the reality of the consensus. The framing in these stories becomes common sense framing over time in the consensus reality. Anderson (1983) warned that, from the framings found in newspapers and novels, “...fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that

remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations” (p. 36). Again, despite Anderson using the word “fiction,” the “fiction seep[ing]...into reality” that he was pointing to is not to be understood as a false consciousness or misreading of the world, but as an imaginative new possibility. The “fiction” that becomes part of consensus reality is a major point I will follow up in this thesis when looking at the individual fantasy that graffiti writers report and how that is translated by adults for a larger audience.

Fixed meaning. Another powerful feature of the printed word is its ability to give fixed meaning to actions that may have not been planned as such. That is, when ideas become actions and major events occur, those events are captured in the printed word and the event becomes known as a “thing.” To support this point, Anderson (1983) quoted Hobsbawm’s (1964) description of the French Revolution as not having been planned, and even not being understood during the time, but after having happened and been written about, captured in print, as “the French Revolution” “it” became a “thing.” As Anderson (1983) wrote:

Hobsbawm observes that ‘The French Revolution was not made or led by a formed party or movement in the modern sense, nor by men attempting to carry out a systemic programme. It hardly even threw up “leaders” of the kind to which twentieth century revolutions have accustomed us.’ But once it had occurred, it entered the accumulating memory of print. The overwhelming and bewildering concatenation of events experienced by its makers and its victims became a ‘thing’ – and with its own name: The French Revolution. Like a vast shapeless rock worn to a boulder by countless drops of water, the experience was shaped by millions of printed words into a ‘concept’ on the printed page, and, in due course, into a model. Why ‘it’ broke out, what ‘it’ aimed for, why ‘it’ succeeded or failed, became subjects for endless polemics on the part of friends and foes: but of its ‘it-ness’, as it were, no one ever after had much doubt. (pp. 80-81)

It is the “it-ness” of graffiti that interests me in this thesis: how something which did not exist in the 1960s all of a sudden did exist in the 1970s; how graffiti, which was first imagined in print in the *New York Times* article “Taki 183” (1971), came to seep into the consensus reality and become a “thing” to be reproduced by 1984. I am interested in the collaborative texts that shaped the “shapeless rock,” which was the tag-names of many young people, into a “concept and model,” which came to be understood as graffiti. In this thesis, I point to the power of the printed word to identify, elevate (or degrade), and fix happenings. I show that the printed word is not just lines on paper, but a cauldron where the imagination is forged into a “thing,” which can then become part of the consensus reality. What might be the

most powerful dimension of the written word after capturing a happening is the ability to reproduce what was written. Once an event has “entered the accumulating memory of print” (Anderson, 1983, p. 80), it “in due course” becomes “a model” (p. 80), an event or thing that can be copied and repeated, or what Anderson called “pirating” (p. 81). The French Revolution was pirated by many new nations (e.g., Haiti) that came after it and hoped to connect with the actions written about from that revolution. Similarly, I will show in this thesis that, when graffiti art was captured in print in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), it became a model and could be pirated throughout the world.

In summary, the most helpful points from Anderson’s (1983) *Imagined Communities* for this thesis are that the forces of print capitalism and the power of the printed word to conjure the imagination set the conditions for citizens to start imagining themselves as part of something bigger, deeper, and more powerful than their individual selves in the form of a nation. Imagination is not new; seeing oneself as part of a large group is also not new. It is the configuration of imagining oneself as part of a nation (e.g., rather than a subject of a kingdom) that Anderson says was novel, revealing the invented-ness of the “[n]ation, nationality, [and] nationalism” (p. 3). I understand his approach to ultimately show that nationalism was a product of imagination and was sustained by invented traditions.

Quoting Ernest Gellner for his important insights into the study of nationalism, Anderson (1983) wrote, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (p. 6; emphasis added). However, Anderson chided Gellner for equating invention with “‘fabrication’ and ‘falsity’” rather than “imagining and creation” (p. 6). Again, the imagination, as Anderson used it in *Imagined Communities*, refers to the imaginative possibilities of fantasy rather than seeking to say what is real and what is fake, or to find a difference between the false dichotomy of “Folklore and Fakelore” (Dorson, 1976).

With Anderson’s (1983) use of invention to describe how a community is formed by imagination, intersections between *Imagined Communities* and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) become visible. The authors of the two texts shared a common interest in deconstructing the taken-for-granted-ness of the logic of the nation. Both texts approached “the ‘anomaly’ of nationalism” (Anderson, 1983, p. 4) by looking at the pieces that constructed it, namely, imagination and invented traditions. But neither pushed the idea of a *false* consciousness so much as a *created* and *curated* consciousness. Just as with imagining one’s nation, one must use their imagination, suspend disbelief, or at least not question the details of so-called traditions, in order to respect tradition.

Putting *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983) and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) in conversation with each other is advantageous. The two share a common theme in approaching nationalism from the angle of the components that make nationalism legible, rather than a justifiable emotional reaction to the horrors of the 20th century in the name of nationalism. *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983) and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) work in tandem, when put in conversation, and investigate the ways citizens of nations imagine themselves, and other citizens as well, in the traditions which are said to bind them.

The Invention of Tradition

As Anderson (1983) did in *Imagined Communities*, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), in *The Invention of Tradition*, approached the topic of nationalism from a fresh perspective. In his review of the book, Brett (1993) wrote, “The Invention of Tradition is an important book; it opens up a new channel for investigation - a new means of self-understanding” (p. 68). Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) read through text the invented-ness of (amongst other things) the Scottish Kilt, British Royal Pageantry, and the adoption and adaptation of European administrative and bureaucratic framings in Africa. They made clear that traditions that seemed old or claimed to be old (for example, the Scottish Kilt and bagpipe) were “in fact largely modern” (p. 15) inventions. Hobsbawm (1983a) wrote:

The term ‘invented tradition’ is used in a broad, but not imprecise sense. It includes both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period - a matter of a few years perhaps - and establishing themselves with great rapidity. (p. 1)

When storytellers or those who frame the traditions in print connect them with past events or important dates that represent a moment of change, they help the events come to be accepted as traditions. Hobsbawm (1983a) also pointed to “the use of ancient materials to construct traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes” (p. 6).

In his review of *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), Quinault (1984) wrote that the essays in the book were “concerned with the creation of those traditions which used history to legitimate themselves” (p. 67). Invented traditions become formalized, or made part of a ritual that is repeated, and are said to be connected to the past. Hobsbawm (1983a) wrote that, since the beginning of the industrial revolution, the most prevalent invented traditions have been those that “establish[ed] or symboliz[ed] social cohesion or *the membership of groups, real or artificial communities...*” (p. 9; emphasis added). This quote highlights the utility of bringing key concepts in *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983)

and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) together as a conceptual lens, because the authors of both texts strengthen each other's major points with their own thesis. When the texts are placed in conversation, they give a deeper understanding of the components that allowed for nationalism to become a powerful framing tool.

I would like to synthesize all I wrote above about *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) with a concrete example. I will use the French Revolution and a tradition invented to celebrate the French Revolution in France - Bastille Day - to further clarify what about *The Invention of Tradition* I find useful for this study. As I already discussed, the French Revolution, as we understand it, was invented through countless writings and framings of the events that transpired between 1789 and 1799 in France. Hobsbawm (1983a) wrote about Bastille Day in *The Invention of Tradition*, noting that it became an official holiday 90 years after The French Revolution. The citizens of France in 1890 were told that they would all celebrate on the same day every year the event that became the founding event of modern France. Hobsbawm's formulation of invented traditions is clear in this example. Bastille Day, a celebration about a past event and a particular moment of change (in 1789), was connected to the past by using ancient materials (the French Revolution, the sacking of the Bastille) in a novel way (to claim a radical new beginning for their nation even though Napoleon III ruled over France in the 19th century), which used history to legitimize the French Republic and "establish or symbolize social cohesion and the membership of groups"(p. 9), and then enforced and made a tradition through yearly repetition.

Another interesting aspect about invented traditions is that, after they are formalized or a ritual is created around the tradition, the tradition must be "followed to the letter" (Ranger, 1983, p. 236) if it is to be taken seriously. Referring again to the invented tradition of Bastille Day, if one wanted to follow the tradition of Bastille Day "to the letter," then one cannot fly a U.S. flag and wear a Cowboy hat in France on Bastille Day; that would be going against the tradition of flying the French tricolor and wearing a beret (or some other very French article of clothing). Yet, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) highlighted, in *The Invention of Tradition*, that even the French tricolor and beret were invented and had to be thrust into a tradition in order to make them seem so naturally French.

"Followed to the letter" is a phrase that works well on two levels for graffiti. In order to make graffiti after 1984, one must reference the graffiti tradition as it was captured in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s; the most popular way to do that is to literally copy (follow) the letters and how they were created from that same time period. When traditions are

“followed to the letter,” observers who show up after the tradition was invented and fixed believe that they are upholding important traditions (whether wearing a beret or adding a 3-D effect or cloud or arrow to their graffiti letters), which actually might be completely new. Ranger (1983) showed this by discussing how Europeans in colonial Africa, believing they were respecting ancient African traditions, actually reinforced earlier colonial codification and control.

In his review of *The Invention of Tradition*, Burke (1986) pointed to the essays by Cohn (1983) and Ranger (1983) for:

...stress[ing] the importance of misunderstanding by the British rulers of India and Africa in creating new traditions, a point which surely deserves to be extended beyond the modern colonial context to all situations where dominant groups misunderstand the culture of subordinate groups, but have the power to make their misunderstandings stick. (p. 317)

This is a point I will examine with reference to the adults who interviewed young graffiti writers and how the adults then translated or framed what the writers said as part of a tradition for an adult readership. A compelling example is when Mailer (Mailer & Naar, 1974) reported that stealing paint (he aptly called it “inventing” paint) was an important part of the (invented) tradition of writing graffiti (more on this in Chapter 4), a “misunderstanding” that stuck.

Hobsbawm (1983b) ended the book, *The Invention of Tradition*, with an essay discussing the mass-produced invented traditions in Europe from 1870 to 1914. While describing how May Day was one of the invented traditions that spread from nation to nation without official decrees, “emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period - a matter of a few years perhaps - and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (p. 1), Hobsbawm (1983a) mentioned the cultural artefact, the “proletarian cap,” and what it might have meant to those wearing it and those seeing it be worn in the late 19th century. Without going into much detail, Hobsbawm (1983b) invited other scholars to write that story, commenting, “The rise of the proletarian cap awaits its chronicler” (p. 287).

Studying the “rise of the proletarian cap” is in the domain of Cultural Studies and is aided by an interdisciplinary approach to Cultural Studies. I appreciate Hobsbawm’s (1983b) open invitation for further study of the proletarian cap for two reasons: (a) his open invitation frames his theory as a conversation (rather than a closed monologue) and gives examples of less consequential Western cultural artifacts that could be deconstructed along the lines he has given; and (b) because the proletarian cap seems so inconsequential at first glance (similar to graffiti). After all, how could a commonly used cap signify anything too important? But as

Hobsbawm described it, it may well need a chronicler to show how a simple article of clothing managed to spread to many places and call upon a particular solidarity and other meanings that may have been implied by the wearing of it. Lavers (1985), in his review of *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), wrote, “One might say that most traditions are similar to archaeological sites awaiting the scientist to reveal the layers” (p. 95). This is an important understanding of invented traditions; that is, just because traditions are invented does not make them less real. Likewise, pointing out their structures or the fossil-like evidence they left behind does not expose them as being false, but merely helps to make sense of the evidence they left behind.

To summarize, in *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) described how traditions are manufactured. They are often invented, then connected to historical moments in time, perhaps moments of major change, and that history is used to legitimize the tradition. Traditions can be created by a government or can spring up from popular movements. Traditions are followed to the letter, repeated, and give credence to (imagined) nations in that they support particular stories about particular people.

At the end of his review of *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), Nye (1985) suggested that further interdisciplinary research that used *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) as a lens “must seek to understand the process by which the individuals and groups who were responsible for creating and implementing these traditions convinced not only their audience of the historicity and legitimacy of new symbols of power, but also themselves” (Nye, 1985, p. 722). This is the process that interests me in this thesis, namely, observing how the tradition of graffiti came to be created through close readings of the texts that located, elevated, and fixed graffiti.

The reviews of *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) I just mentioned come from publications in such diverse fields as history, geography, sociology, and anthropology. Other reviews, which I have not mentioned, come from the *American Anthropological Association* (Handler, 1984), *The Scottish Historical Review* (Wormald, 1985), *The American Journal of Sociology* (Nagel, 1985), *The Appalachian Journal* (McKinney, 1984), and *The Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (Gillespie, 1984). I note the reviews published in such diverse publications because this reveals the interdisciplinary appeal of the theory and the interest in various fields of using cultural studies for deconstructing or re-evaluating the mythologies built into various topics. Many scholars from various fields have built upon both *Imagined Communities* (Anderson,

1983) and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) to probe what were thought of as unquestionable traditions and framings.

What the authors of these two texts, *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983) and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), did was question some taken-for-granted aspects of culture by studying their formation. Anderson (1983) questioned the taken-for-granted-ness of the nation by investigating its sudden appearance some 200 years ago and its ability to establish itself as a highly reproduced model. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) questioned the taken-for-granted-ness of traditions, and the concept and logic of tradition itself, at the same time explaining how traditions the world over are invented. As Burke (1986) wrote, these texts can be used for other less pressing, yet still very real, subjects where “dominant groups misunderstand the culture of subordinate groups” and “make their misunderstanding stick” (p. 317). As Lavers (1985) suggested, if one looks at it like an archaeologist would, and merely understands the workings of the cultural artefact without a learned emotional response, one can investigate the process by staging an archaeological dig through texts that allow for traditions to go from one’s imagination to the consensus reality.

I want to give another example of how the printed word aids fiction in seeping into consensus reality by reading how even Anderson (1983) used a traditional metaphor, which upholds a Eurocentric idea of modernity, for explaining his novel approach to nationalism. Because the world is often explained through metaphors, similes, and imagination, it is helpful to closely read paradigm shifting texts to observe how “fiction seeps... into reality” (p. 36). Anderson used the fiction of metaphor to explain his theory when he used the phrase “Copernican spirit” (p. 6) to describe his unique approach to nationalism. In the West, Nikolas Copernicus is widely considered the first to recognize that the Earth revolved around the Sun and not vice versa. To one day think that the Sun revolved around the Earth, and the next day understand that the Earth actually revolves around the Sun, is a massive paradigm shift. Thus, by having Copernicus remembered in print¹ in many texts as the person who found that the Earth revolved around the Sun, “Copernicus” has been turned into a metaphorical short-cut for the idea of a paradigm shift because his discovery changed the way humans thought of themselves and their place in the universe. But the story of Copernicus is a fabrication close to fiction and reflects an imagined Euro-centric history because it overlooks the scientists in other cultures who had already discovered this knowledge, as well as other European thinkers who had proven their knowledge of this phenomenon before Copernicus.

¹ Most notably by Immanuel Kant (1787) in *Critique of Pure Reason*.

² “it is worth remembering that as recently as 1965, the leading British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, later Lord Dacre, could uncontroversially observe that the “chief function in history” of indigenous peoples the world over “is to show the

Anderson's (1983) use of the story of Copernicus as the perfect example of a paradigm shift is not only an illustration of "fiction seeping...into reality" (p. 36); it also highlights how traditions form according to Hobsbawm's (1983a) theory. Copernicus is said to come from the period when the Dark Ages were ending and the Enlightenment was beginning; his discovery marks the end of the Dark Ages (here Copernicus is connected to a historical moment of change, which then introduces the so-called Enlightenment). In this story, Copernicus represents the rise of the Western use of scientific evidence in the face of the authority of the church; his name is often spoken in the same breath as Galileo and Newton (creating scientific tradition and continuity). A "Copernican spirit" has come to signify a "paradigm shift." While Copernicus has become a traditional scientist to point to for such a shift in thinking, referencing the story of Copernicus is also an invented tradition and filled with imagination (or at least void of serious inquiry). Anderson (1983) utilized invented traditions to justify his study into imagined communities, which shows the ease of jumping scales when using metaphors to describe our world. I don't mention Copernicus to take away from his legend or the mythical idea around him, or to find fault in Anderson's argument, but instead to highlight invention literature's strongest points on the power of the written word: that once an event is written down, it becomes a model for reproduction, is followed to the letter, and repeated. The individual fantasy that Copernicus was the first to realize that we live in a heliocentric universe was written down, eventually becoming part of the consensus reality and the *traditional* name to use when describing a paradigm shift.

What I have outlined above are the pieces from the two books that I find most valuable for my study. When appropriate, I will refer to *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983) or *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) to show the similarities between what is said about graffiti and the theories from those books, with the understanding that, "Once established, traditions have a life of their own that is neither enhanced nor curtailed by scholarly efforts to prove or disprove their authenticity or antiquity" (Mikesell, 1985, p. 289). That is, this thesis and the lens I use do not prove or disprove the authenticity of claims to art for the practice of graffiti. Proving or disproving the authenticity of claims to art for graffiti is not the goal of this thesis; my goal in this thesis is to reveal the recorded parts of the process that elevated graffiti to such a high level of discourse. However, I do recognize that misinterpretations of this thesis, either purposefully or disinterestedly, could further or hinder claims of authenticity for graffiti.

Problematizing Invention Literature

Briggs (1996), in his essay “The Politics of Discursive Authority in Research on the ‘Invention of Tradition,’” used the term “‘invention’ literature” (p. 464) to refer to studies that use both *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983) and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) as a lens. Such literature can be misunderstood, having negative ramifications for the inventors of the traditions and the people who feel connected to the traditions. As Briggs (1996) wrote, “the word ‘invention’ leads to popular misconceptions” (p. 461) and could “be less useful to subaltern communities in defending land claims and the like” (p. 463).

Interestingly, many of the reviewers for *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) that I have already discussed shared in a visceral sense the concerns Briggs (1996) articulated. Reviewers claimed that Trevor-Roper² (1983) wrote his essay on “The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland” to “debunk” Scottish claims (Burke, 1986, p. 316); “follow a long English custom of mocking Scots and Scottish life” (McKinney, 1984, pp. 86-87); or overlook important detail in its handling of the Scottish (Quinault, 1984, p. 67). In other words, many reviewers of *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) read it as being slightly offensive when the light is shown on the invented-ness of certain Scottish traditions, because perhaps some of those traditions are beloved and deeply ingrained as symbols of what it means to be Scottish. If the British represent an unmoving force that claimed nations around the world as part of their own empire, the Scottish then are a stand-in for the nations that were subsumed by the title “The British Empire.” Interestingly, reviewers did not push back much when Hobsbawm and colleagues (1983) discussed the invented-ness of the pageantry of the British Monarchy. British pageantry is fine to critique, uncover, and call invented, because of its cultural dominance, but when oppressed people’s traditions are called into question (in this case the Scottish being oppressed by the British), it seems that many are uncomfortable with the arguments of *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Linnekin (1992) brought up this point when she wrote, “**Whose** discourse should be decentered and

² “it is worth remembering that as recently as 1965, the leading British historian Hugh Trevor- Roper, later Lord Dacre, could uncontroversially observe that the “chief function in history” of indigenous peoples the world over “is to show the present an image of the past from which by history it has escaped” (Mirzoeff, 2009, p. 46). I add this quote because on second look there may be more to Trevor-Roper’s ideas than meets the eye. Trevor-Roper had rather particular and mostly Euro-centric ideas of the world.

deconstructed remains a contentious issue” (p. 252; emphasis in original). This is the fine line scholars of invention must walk, because when discussing the invented aspects of cultures, when the people of those same cultures are not in positions to contest the findings or when they are subject to the whims of a more powerful nation, the deconstruction of the last walls of defense for them against being completely subsumed by a more powerful nation could be what leads to the end of their culture and perhaps even their lives.

Briggs (1996) shared the story of his own research to illustrate the need for sensitivity to oppressed peoples when discussing invented traditions. He first explained that Native Americans played an important role in the politics of race and culture in Venezuela. He then told of two different Native American dance music troupes and their competing claims to represent the Warao indigenous culture to the greater Criollo Venezuelan populace. He discussed the “subject positions occupied by all participants, including Warao dance and song troupes, persons who perform the nahanamu in their home communities, criollos mediators, officials in CONAC and other government agencies, and anthropologists” (p. 448). He noted that it could be said that the people involved in the sharing of the Warao dances with the Venezuelan people were “inventors” of Warao tradition because the traditions they shared were “structured in ways that enhance their fit with aesthetics and technical requirements of multicultural espectaculos and their value for achieving nationalistic and institutional agendas” (p. 448). However, he warned, by writing as an academic that the Warao traditions were invented, his work could be used to displace or disenfranchise the very people he engaged and reported on, which is not what he wanted to do. Briggs looked closely at how his subjects invent the traditions they lay claim to and complicated his findings by describing his positionality as a researcher and outsider to the Warao culture. He gave a detailed account of his positionality as researcher in order to “assess the political-economic location of the metadiscursive practices” (p. 439) he used. He concluded that if all traditions were accepted as invented, then the forces of racism and the limitations on access to higher education would make it impossible to compete with academic accounts of indigenous tribes’ cultures. He ultimately counseled that researchers must think about the repercussions of their work, for they could be doing harm to the very cultures they are studying. I agree with Briggs’ comments and point out here that, in Chapter 1, I gave information about my own positionality as researcher and my connection to the topic.

Briggs (1996) pointed to Handler and Linnekin (1984) as painting with broad strokes when they argued that “all traditions are invented” (p. 273). Briggs (1996) worried about the effect this could have on indigenous cultures and subaltern communities. Depending on how

the word invented is understood, studies that highlight the invented-ness of subaltern communities and traditions could make the same communities vulnerable because the last line of defense between some indigenous tribes and the modern world is the modern world's respect for the seemingly important traditions of the indigenous tribes. By calling into question the authenticity of their traditions, the last line of defense is wiped away. In this way anthropologists and the people whom they study become pawns in a push to subjugate even more the subaltern communities of the world.

Linnekin (1992) highlighted a factor that Briggs (1996) did not address. Linnekin (1992) located an irresolvable conflict in the blending of scholarly adherence to independent critical thinking and the predilection of anthropologists to often “represent **and celebrate** indigenous culture in explicit critique of Western society and colonialism” (p. 260; emphasis in original). The problem she pointed to is that the personal investments of the researcher, the informants, or the relationship between the two become a hurdle for the researcher who tries to adhere to independent critical thinking about the cultural tradition. But Linnekin did provide a foundation for Briggs' (1996) later argument when she wrote, “to readers outside the discipline and to many scholars ‘invention’ suggests *de novo* creation and hence inauthenticity” (Linnekin, 1992, p. 252). This is how some of the reviewers of *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) understood Trevor-Roper's (1983) handling of Scottish traditions; that is, because he discussed details that were usually cloaked, he ruined the mythical appeal of Scottish tradition. As Linnekin (1992) wrote, “talking about culture is intrinsically controversial; the political and personal stakes are too high” (p. 259).

Both Briggs (1996) and Linnekin (1991, 1992) had concerns about the use and representation of scholarship outside of the academy. Briggs (1996) pointed to Linnekin's work on the invention of Hawaiian tradition being used with malicious intent by the U.S. Navy. Linnekin (1991) responded to the use of her material by the U.S. Navy in an open letter and expressed her dismay with their taking her work out of context to further their territorial and military goals (p. 175). She argued that it was not her intention to aid the U.S. Navy; she intended only to perform independent scholarly work on Hawaiian tradition.

Linnekin's (1991) response to the U.S. Navy is an example of how scholars can continue to defend their work even when powerful entities attempt to seize control of it. But Linnekin's strongest point towards this end was defining two different groupings of researchers using invention literature: the “objectivists” and the “post-modernists.” Linnekin wrote that, “Objectivists uphold a distinction between ‘genuine’ and ‘spurious’ traditions” (p. 254). The Objectivist approach allows for a “single authoritarian voice or narrative center” (p.

252) and passes what could be crucial judgement on whether certain traditions are closer to the false dichotomy of “Folklore and Feklore” (Dorson, 1976). Linnekin (1992) later wrote that “‘postmodernism’...is useful for describing a set of approaches that reject the positivist paradigm and eschew the premise of unitary, authoritative narrative voice” (p. 252). The use of invention literature in a post-modern sense “[t]ak[es] into account multiple, contingent points of view” and “is sometimes referred to as ‘decentering’, which implies the abandonment of a single authoritative voice or narrative ‘center’” (p. 252). Linnekin identified the post-modern approach to invention literature as being the proper way to use invention literature. Accordingly, in this thesis, I take the post-modernist approach to invention literature.

Although Briggs (1996) understood that “the ‘goal’ of invention literature is to advance post-modern critiques of nationalist ideologies” (p. 464), he was also aware that “‘invention’ literature extends and legitimates scholarly control over the discourses of others” (p. 463). Briggs began his essay by pointing to Jackson’s (1989) essay, “Is There a Way to Talk about Making Culture without Making Enemies?” and, echoing Linnekin’s (1992) understanding that “‘invention’ is itself an inflammatory word, inescapably implying something fictitious, ‘made up’ and therefore not real” (p. 249), Briggs (1996) definitively answered Jackson’s provocative title with “no” (p. 435).

Briggs (1996) was right to be worried about the use and representation of scholarship outside of the academy. But Linnekin (1992) was not convinced this should impede scholarly research and the post-modern effort to deconstruct. Instead, she sought to put a wide distance between ideas of authenticity and invention with concern to tradition when she wrote that “The issue of the invention-of-tradition literature is not authenticity, but the very nature of culture, culture change, and cultural process” (Linnekin, 1991, p. 173). Linnekin (1992) made a point of saying that researchers must have distance from their subjects and that “Indigenous discourse...is equally subject to deconstruction” (p. 260). She recognized, however, that this meant that postmodern writers could potentially be seen as politically incorrect.

Briggs’ (1996) argument forces researchers to step back, to think what they are saying, pause, and make sure they are not harming anyone with their work, while at the same time not forgetting that independent research is important to academia. Perhaps this study can serve as a middle ground in this debate. No one can deny that graffiti as I have defined it, coming out of New York City in the 1970s, was invented. Graffiti is a real-life modern example of an invented tradition and does not have the urgency of the identity of a subaltern or oppressed group. It was admittedly invented within the last 50 years. There are people older than graffiti

alive today. But graffiti does assume a place in consensus reality and there is a highly politicized discourse around it, with laws enacted to govern it and museums giving room to appreciate it. Claiming that there is an authenticity or not to graffiti could disrupt that dynamic. But understanding the invention of graffiti in a post-modern sense does not heighten or lessen claims of authenticity or undermine those people who identify with it on a personal level. What understanding the invention of this tradition does is deflate all learned (in the last 50 years) emotional responses to the topic and place graffiti (and the debates around it) under a microscope to investigate how it came to be so highly politicized. It shows that people born after 1971 were born into an ongoing debate that reached a fever pitch in the 1970s and 1980s and, thus, any unreflective stance on graffiti might just be one learned response of the two available, which both were formed under a different context and in a different time. While I agree with Briggs (1996) that U.S. and European academics could be doing more harm than good when bringing invention literature to indigenous studies in the Global South, where the outcome of those studies can then be used to settle land disputes or claims of cultural authenticity, I do believe that using invention literature to deconstruct Western traditions is important for self-understanding and a valid goal of Cultural Studies.

For people who are invested in a tradition, it could be rather painful to hear that they are invested in make-believe, which is what a perfunctory reading of invention literature might affirm. But, as I already pointed out, the definitions for both “imagined” and “invented” are not invested with nihilistic energy to call everything false consciousness, but instead – and this is crucial - are both terms that point to the potential for the written word to create “things” where “things” were not before. Older graffiti writers, people who were in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s writing graffiti on subways, who identified with the mythology of graffiti, could complain about this thesis for this same reason. They could say that this thesis takes away some of the mystique surrounding graffiti, and doesn’t allow for it to be remembered as an exclusively youth project. I respect that opinion but see this thesis performing more of an archaeological dig than destroying a tradition.

This not wanting to “extend or legitimate scholarly control” (Briggs, 1996, p. 463) over the subject of graffiti may have influenced Austin (2001) to have erred on the side of caution by accepting verbatim the words of the graffiti writers without pushing back on those understandings or questioning what they meant. It could also account for why Austin’s (2001) *Taking the Train* glosses over the texts closely read in this thesis, because those texts show the collaboration between young graffiti writers and adults.

Perhaps one argument that can be built upon Briggs' (1996) argument is that more people who identify as part of the culture should become involved in the academic conversation about the culture they claim community with. This might be my best role: to use my insider status as a graffiti writer to deconstruct graffiti in an academic setting. Graffiti studies have relied heavily on ethnography, and I don't say that disparagingly. What I think that shows is the newness of the tradition and the postmodern sympathy to treat it with an ethnographic approach, rather than in an objectivist manner, to speculate on its meaning making power. To counteract or balance this reliance on ethnography, this thesis gives close readings of three paradigm-shifting texts that helped invent the tradition of graffiti.

In summary, one critique of invention literature is how people outside of academia might use it to displace or otherwise harm the very people being studied. Briggs (1996) pushed for researchers to be more transparent in understanding and elucidating their position as researchers vis-à-vis the subjects being studied. It is a delicate dance, which requires, on the one hand, a strict adherence to academic standards to stick to the facts and, on the other hand, a certain empathy for the subject being studied so as not to invent a destructive lens (deconstructing without being able to reconstruct), so as to leave the subject more or less as intact as it was when the researcher first found it. The power of the written word in creating and expanding the possibilities for humans is the major take-away from these studies. What interests me in this thesis is that the framing of conversations, or even that they are written about at all, can bring an urgency to certain ideas to be accepted in the consensus reality rather than just being fantasies of an individual.

Introducing written language to non-literate indigenous communities and their pre-literate traditions is already jumping scales and taking the traditions out of context. Writing about a pre-adolescent game (graffiti) that has no rules, governing body, or literature about it is also jumping scales; it takes the game out of context to explain it, opening it up to a completely new hermeneutics. What invention literature does is highlight the power of the written word for identifying, elevating or degrading, and fixing new ideas and worldviews. The actual studied tradition itself becomes less interesting with invention literature probing it than the sublime power of the written word for framing human thought. For non-literate indigenous cultures, the introduction of the written word alone changes their traditions; the written word "fast-forwards" the tradition from a pre-literate world to one that is ruled by the written word. The written word highlights the disparities and inconsistencies between one tribe and another and identifies, elevates or degrades, and fixes the particular tradition it studies. This can also be done by non-academics; simply by recording events, a photographer

or writer can be responsible for identifying to a larger audience, elevating or degrading, and fixing a tradition.

Reading Austin with the New Lens

With my new invention literature lens, shaped by *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983) and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), I now turn to Austin's (2001) *Taking the Train*, asking what might be found if one highlights the imaginative aspects of graffiti instead of the "real" context. What if, instead of seeing graffiti as an "it" already there with emotional energy, one sees a "thing" that was invented. One could then ask what role certain texts had in the invention of this "thing" graffiti and the mostly imagined community it conjures. In this section, I provide a short literature review, mostly on Austin's (2001) *Taking the Train*, in order to situate this study in conversation with his study. I will return to the book later in the thesis to probe some claims and to highlight the differences of opinion and approach taken by Austin and myself.

Austin's (2001) *Taking the Train* is the most comprehensive academic text on the first 20 years of the graffiti phenomenon in New York City. Austin's rich contextual research set the stage for understanding why graffiti art was negatively viewed in the consensus reality and bemoaned adults' missed opportunities to appreciate and accept the contributions of young graffiti writers in the 1970s. Austin voiced a narrative about New York City that is usually brushed aside. He described the context in which graffiti art and the negative reactions to it developed in the petri dish that was New York City in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s by discussing racial and financial inequality, corruption, poor planning, racial tension, the influence of the press, detailed insight into the mayors of New York City, insider graffiti information, and poor oversight of the Metropolitan Transit Authority (hereafter MTA). He gave many examples of how texts framed graffiti art as an urban crisis by reading the 120 letters and editorials written in *The New York Times* from 1972 to 1974, other articles and framings of graffiti art in various media in New York City from 1981 to 1984, as well as letters written to and by the mayor's office, which showed what seems like a coordinated effort by *The New York Times* and the mayor's office to eradicate graffiti.

I begin by reading Austin's (2001) opening anecdote about graffiti in 1976 to show how an invention literature lens can give new insight into reading graffiti and the stories told about it. Then I briefly describe Austin's use of context, framing, and the dialogue between young graffiti writers and adult critics in the media, which competed for the meaning making power of graffiti in the 1970s and 1980s. I offer a brief critique and show where Austin left an opening for this thesis. I conclude by explaining how cogently (chronologically speaking) the

texts he read and the texts I read together reflect more completely the dialogue about graffiti in its early years of development and the players involved.

The Doubling in the Story of “The Freedom Train”

In his prologue, Austin (2001) offered two anecdotes about graffiti art in New York City, one from 1976 and the other from 1984. Both anecdotes foreshadowed the story that Austin told about graffiti in his book, that graffiti was created by young people with good intentions and that the adult backlash to graffiti in those early years of development was unwarranted, uneven, and cruel. More importantly for the purposes of this thesis, both anecdotes used appeals to nationalism in a traditional way to make clear Austin’s ire with the officials of New York City at the time.

The first anecdote is a tale about “the Freedom Train,” which has been passed down in graffiti circles ever since 1976. By the time it came to my graffiti generation of the 1990s, the story always felt like more of an urban myth than a real event because there were no photographs of the subway from the anecdote. Interestingly, this anecdote is referred to in a painting in the opening pages of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) (more on this in Chapter 5). Austin wrote that he took his information for this anecdote from Castleman’s (1982) *Getting Up* and Stewart’s (1989, 2009) *Subway Kings*, two mostly ethnographic texts that I will also discuss in this thesis. The anecdote describes how three graffiti writers from Queens (Caine-I, Mad 103, and Flame one) painted completely, from top to bottom, eleven subway cars in a mixed U.S. flag and graffiti art motif on July 3, 1976, the night before major Bicentennial celebrations were set to take place in New York City and be broadcast to the rest of the nation. The writers painted images they thought would be accepted by authorities as an addition to the festivities planned by the city for “this most patriotic of national holidays” (Austin, 2001, p. 2), but instead the MTA immediately separated every car of the train, destroyed the paintings, and then arrested the writers at their homes the next day.

Through the lens of invention literature, the literary doubling (comparing and contrasting the familiar with the strange) in Austin’s opening anecdote is fascinating. Caine and friends painted a train with a nationalist theme, with the imagined audience being all of New York City, although, if captured by news cameras, the imagined audience could be the entire nation. Caine and friends were the first to paint a whole-train, eleven cars, with the imagined audience for that feat being all graffiti writers. The painting is recorded as the first “top to bottom - whole train” painting, what is considered by many to be the pinnacle of graffiti art. They painted each train, referencing the nationalist tradition of using flag motifs to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the nation, as well as the new graffiti tradition of painting

masterpieces on the sides of subways. The painters thought they'd make their (imagined) nation proud, and instead they were arrested. They thought they'd make their (imagined) graffiti writing community proud, but their work was never allowed to be seen (although a few pictures have surfaced in the last decade (Freedom Train, 1976), which may have been the worst punishment for young people invested in the imagined impact of their work.

What insights can be gleaned from this literary doubling? Perhaps graffiti writers used the same imagination to imagine their nation and the citizens who make it up that they use when imagining their audience, their peers, and the reception that their work might possibly draw. Perhaps, because of newspapers and other media, the writers imagined their work would be viewed by many, debated, and ultimately praised for celebrating the nationalist sentiment of the moment. Perhaps the writers' attempt to have their fantasy (this first "whole-train" will become legend and be spoken about for a long time) become part of the consensus reality, as it eventually became when written about or hinted at in many graffiti texts (Austin, 2001; Castleman, 1982; Chalfant & Cooper, 1984; Stewart, 1989, 2009; and now this thesis), reflects the power of the written word to create.

The doubling of nationalism and graffiti in this anecdote hints that there is something about the framing of the nation (Anderson, 1983) and the invented-ness of tradition (Hobsbawm, 1983a), which applies to how graffiti writers initially framed their activity and how that same activity grew to become a tradition for young people in cities around the globe. What we can see in this anecdote is the similarity in the imagined community summoned in the mind of the graffiti writer when painting a whole-train in a nationalist motif and how the writers attempted to appeal to tradition in their work in two ways: (a) by using the traditional flag motif (summoning nationalism), and (b) by using names, letters, and words in their art (summoning the newly invented graffiti tradition).

Austin (2001) portrayed this anecdote as a great injustice, which came about because of the negative framing and scapegoating policies by authorities on graffiti in the 1970s and 1980s. He pointed to the lost opportunity for adults to accept and praise the graffiti of young people in the mid-1970s and what could have been for graffiti art. His lost opportunity is an exercise in imagination as well, because Austin never saw the trains which he lamented over. Had he seen them, he might not have been so inclined to dwell on their artistic merit and yet still give the paintings high grades for effort. His lost opportunity is speculation because who can say that graffiti would have grown to what it grew to, if not for the constant battle between the authorities and the young people in the 1970s and 1980s?

Austin's Thick Context and Framing

Austin (2001) provided thick context about the conditions that were in place for the consensus reality in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s to find graffiti to be more of an urban crisis than a beloved art. Graffiti viewed as an urban crisis was years in the making, according to Austin, with many factors culminating together by the 1970s to make it seem like common sense in the consensus reality that this writing on walls and objects was a destructive act. As much as Austin gave context for the negative framing of graffiti in the 1970s, he also gave myriad respectably hip influences, which graffiti writers may have used to create their style and make up a part of their imagination regarding what graffiti meant and how they performed it.

Austin (2001) crafted his thick context with a sober look at the inequality between the wealthy and the poor. He then moved to discuss the segregation, systematic racism, and the uneven and harsh treatment of Black Americans in New York City for decades. Austin provided detailed insights into the approaches of Mayor John Lindsay and Mayor Ed Koch's administrations to combatting graffiti and even greater detail on the mismanagement of the subway system and how that led to a breakdown of service, breakdown of subway cars, and breakdown of civility on the subways. The culmination of a broken-down subway system in a city on the verge of bankruptcy, divided by racial and economic segregation and the devaluation of teenagers, is the context which drove much of the negative framing of graffiti in various media outlets, most notably *The New York Times*.

After setting up the class and racial dichotomies, Austin (2001) pivoted to the binary at the heart of his thesis: young people versus adults. Austin gave context to what may have influenced graffiti writers to write the way they did and where they did, and the substantial frequency of their graffiti. He pointed to advertisements, the marquee lights on Broadway, the influence of the spectacle surrounding boxing, and comic books and cartoons as stylistic influences on graffiti writers, and also to the broader societal upholding of fame as a virtue as an influence on their output. He then pointed to the protests against the war in Vietnam, the Black Power movement, and Hippie culture as ideological influences on graffiti writing in general. All of these influences served the teenager versus adult binary because they put the teenage graffiti writers in the same camp as progressive movements against the old guard of the U.S. and set the teenage graffiti writers to be victims of their environment. Interestingly, Austin did not mention the legend of "Kilroy Was Here" as being an influence on graffiti. I agree that "Kilroy Was Here" did not have any direct influence on graffiti, but it is mentioned in many graffiti texts (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984; Stewart, 1989; "Taki 183," 1971). I point

this out to highlight that Austin (2001) framed graffiti to be connected to progressive movements, which were against authority, and he allowed nothing to be construed as influences outside of that, such as the mythological praxis of U.S. soldiers in World War II and the Korean War. After all, if graffiti were inspired by what soldiers did in war, then graffiti would lose its grassroots or anti-authority cachet.

Austin (2001) gave insightful insider information on how subways were painted, which writer was “king” on which subway line in which year, “the benches,” police behavior, how subways were cleaned, and which graffiti writers appeared in the background of television programs and commercials. This last point interests me because of the lens I cut for this thesis. Austin told his readers about the imagined reception of three graffiti writers’ names (Pnut, Jester, and Diablo) (p. 50) on a subway car used in the opening credits of the popular TV show from the late 1970s, *Welcome Back, Kotter*. He wrote that, because of Pnut, Jester, and Diablo’s graffiti tags being on the subway in the opening credits of that show, some graffiti writers would refer to the show as “their show” (p. 50). This insider information is the kind of very specific knowledge that only graffiti writers would be interested in, which points to the imagination at work and the imagined community in graffiti when graffiti writers read graffiti. I would argue that more viewers would talk about John Travolta’s famous line from *Welcome Back, Kotter* - “up your nose with a rubber hose” - than which graffiti writer’s name was on the subway in the opening credits. Only graffiti writers pay such close attention to the graffiti in the background of TV shows and commercials.³

The influences Austin (2001) identified are all enjoyable and hip, or at least understandable for a young person. For Cultural Studies, they show the influence of previous cultural artifacts on new cultural practices and they point to the imagination at work in the idea of being famous. But again, Austin identified no influences that could be seen as square, that is, hip influences hip (more on this in Chapter 4). Austin also provided no actual evidence for these influences, only the reports of some graffiti writers, as opposed to all of the hard evidence he gave for the framing of graffiti as a crisis.

The context Austin (2001) chose to emphasize supported his argument that young people created art, which he equated with standing up to the adult system. As much as he

³ This is an example of where my insider knowledge is useful. I know this from personal experience. In the 1990s, when I was writing graffiti, the program “New York Undercover” was filmed almost exclusively in the streets of New York City. Many graffiti writers were featured in the background of that show. Although I never cared for the storylines, my graffiti writer friends and I would discuss which graffiti tag we saw in the background of each episode. My tag was featured once and I felt like a movie star. I remember thinking that I should be given credit at the beginning of the show as a guest star. However, nobody ever spoke to me about that moment of glory. I realize now I may have imagined the impact my tag, in the background of a poorly written cop show, had on the world.

objected to the negative framing of graffiti art in newspapers and the rhetorical strategies employed, Austin did not acknowledge his own framing of graffiti and the rhetorical strategies he employed. Austin's framing - young people versus adult - supported his belief that graffiti was indeed an "important grassroots urban mural movement" (p. 5). He used "grassroots" as a euphemism for homegrown, for the people by the people, and authentic, implying that young people created graffiti on their own. In this thesis, I reject that mythology in favor of a wider view of constructive adult involvement, the importance of the imagination, and the invention of tradition. When reading the dialogue of competing ideas for the meaning making power of graffiti between young proponents and adult detractors, the adult involvement needed to elevate the hermeneutics of graffiti is a major facet of Austin's thesis.

The dialogue. By the dialogue of competing ideas for the meaning making power of graffiti, I refer to the competing interpretations of graffiti, which can be read in the passage of laws in numerous municipalities to restrict the activity and in the choice by museums and galleries to display and praise graffiti. The dialogue that Austin (2001) highlighted was mostly between graffiti writers and opponents of graffiti in print. He read the negative editorials about graffiti in newspapers and the reaction from graffiti writers in their publications. From the context and these framings, graffiti seems like a mythological and pure movement, which ruined politicians' careers and showed the tenacity of youth even in the face of adult obstruction.

I use dialogue, or discourse, to describe the back and forth conversation, and struggle for the meaning-making power of graffiti, taking place in newspapers, magazines, books, television and film and of course on the subways. I highlight this word because I later use it to point to how the texts in my corpus engage with the texts in Austin's (2001) corpus. I will explain that the one-sided texts about graffiti that make up most of his corpus were not only in conversation with each other but with other texts, the texts in my corpus.

Austin (2001) approached graffiti as an already created thing, and a progressive thing at that. I find this to be an anachronistic reading because graffiti as I define it isn't really fixed until the late 1970s. Where Austin read a fully framed praxis from the start, I argue that graffiti became what it became because of the dialogue over time. In other words, it still was nebulous and playful in the first few years, with many actors working anonymously on their own and not sure of what they were part of, but it grew in importance and stylistically as the printed words of the dialogue accumulated.

Some of the written dialogues Austin (2001) pointed to included: (a) Richard Goldstein's articles in *New York Magazine* vs. the negative framing in *The New York Times*;

(b) positive letters to *The New York Times* vs. negative editorials in *The New York Times*; (c) academics who appreciated the art vs. subway passengers who did not agree; (d) obscure art magazines vs. public opinion in newspapers; and (e) graffiti writers vs. Mayor Lindsay. The major takeaway from these volleys was that the framing of issues in newspapers could and did influence consensus reality, and the negative framing of graffiti ultimately turned the consensus reality in New York City against graffiti art. But I argue in this thesis that there are much stronger texts on the side of graffiti, which framed graffiti in a positive light and also participated in the dialogue. Those texts ultimately influenced the consensus reality to accept some graffiti as art and convinced young people all over the world to pirate graffiti.

That the art of graffiti was accepted was an unintended consequence of *The New York Times*' crusade against it. There was a major fight between those who yearned for visual order and those who leaned more towards the open acceptance of creativity in shared space. I do not make that claim to assign blame or applaud anyone, but to highlight that, just as Anderson (1983) argued that the unintended consequences of print capitalism led to the capacity to imagine one's bond with all people living inside of borders, one of the unintended consequences of the dialectic battle for the meaning making power of graffiti was pushing graffiti writers to double down on their belief in their art and improve the styles of graffiti, which pushed adults who saw the artistic merit in graffiti to work towards fixing that viewpoint. With this thesis I want to expand that dialogue by adding the three texts I investigate. I do not accept that the dialogue was only between adults and young people, but instead that some adults agreed with the idea that there could be an art in graffiti and they applied their know-how towards framing it that way.

A short critique of *Taking the Train*. Austin (2001), while being immensely critical of the adult administrators of New York City over 50 years, was not as critical of the graffiti writers he investigated. At times in his thesis, it seemed that he took the side of the graffiti writers, serving as an ambassador of sorts, telling their story from the perspective of being victimized. He performed that which Linnekin (1992) wrote about when she discussed the important caveat to using an invention literature lens, that is, he "represents **and celebrate[s]**" graffiti culture "in explicit critique of Western society and colonialism"(p. 260; emphasis in original) and in a fashion similar to how some indigenous scholars represented their subjects, without seeing that perhaps the backlash from officials in New York City may have been partially responsible for the growth of the phenomenon.

Austin (2001) continued to seemingly represent the young people in New York City when he wrote:

The condescending adult perceptions of youths' challenges to established authority, the exploitative relationships between young people and the consumer marketplace, and the social emphasis on the transitory nature of the adolescent life stage all work to make "youth" appear to be the antithesis of "cultural tradition." (p. 41)

As the quote suggests, Austin read a battle for the meaning making power of "youth" and wished to represent the ever-changing group "youth" as an autonomous group that added to culture and shaped conversations. Reading *Taking the Train*, I couldn't help thinking that Austin (2001) was attempting to right a wrong by highlighting the autonomy of youth in creating culture. But what this framing did not recognize was that, perhaps, what added meaning to the discourse around graffiti were the negative adult reactions as well as constructive adult interventions.

Austin (2001) rarely, if ever, interrogated the words or self-descriptions given by graffiti writers, as is seen in his repeating of the important concepts "king" and "toy" without asking any questions of these terms or the imagination involved in them. Austin wrote, "The pinnacle of status was to be known as a 'king.' A king achieved that title through community recognition..." (p. 52). He continued with a definition of "toys:" "*toys* - neophytes or writers who were judged to be lacking in the requisite skills, experience and commitment" (p. 53). I explore these designations more in Chapter 3, showing the graffiti writer Taki 183 was called "king" for his saturation of New York City; Lee was called "king" for his artistry and bold full cars; and Austin quoted Min as saying a "king" is one who can also fight and beat up other graffiti writers (p. 177). "Toys" were labeled such not from a single rubric but depending on the graffiti writer speaking. The changing solidarities behind labeling one a "king" or a "toy" announces the imagination at work.

This critique is not to say that Austin (2001) was wrong. On the contrary, I think his study was necessary as a correction to the continued negative framings of graffiti, which are often made when discussing graffiti, as if it is common sense that graffiti is an act of destruction. Austin's thesis is part of the continuing dialogue and serves on the side of graffiti being more positive than negative. I only point to where Austin played it safe, and where he was respectful to the people and subject he studied. Nonetheless, I want to push back a little on those places in order to ask deeper questions about graffiti and the power of the written word. Now I will pivot to where I believe Austin left room for my study.

Through Austin's Open Door

Austin (2001) left the door open for future research, and for this thesis in particular, when he alluded in his writing to the imagined community and the invention of tradition. I

discuss five of those moments in this section: (a) Austin's discussion of the child protagonist in Kohl's (1972) *Golden Boy as Anthony Cool*; (b) Austin's description of how graffiti writers understand their graffiti; (c) Austin's mention of community and tradition; (d) his insistence on youth-culture traditions being taken seriously by adults; and (e) his point that journalistic negative framing of New York City led to a consensus reality that understood the city to be in a crisis.

When discussing a character from a book, whom he claimed to be an early precursor to graffiti writers, "Johnny" from Kohl's (1972) *Golden Boy as Anthony Cool* (hereafter *Golden Boy*), Austin (2001) wrote, "Despite an imagined audience that was much larger than Johnny's own neighborhood, these names were almost always written within local boundaries" (p. 46). With "imagined audience," Austin recognized that graffiti was brimming with imagination and that the graffiti writer imagined the reception of their work more than they could ever actually know for certain if others had seen it, pondered its meaning, or praised its artistry. Austin recognized that the character in Kohl's (1972) book imagined that many more people saw his name written in the alleyways of his neighborhood than possibly could have, and that the character imagined how that audience would have experienced seeing his name. Yet Austin (2001) never said outright that graffiti writers might be working from this same imaginative space as the pre-adolescent in Kohl's book. I will return to this topic in Chapter 3.

Austin (2001) wrote that "Writers understood themselves to be humanizing and beautifying surroundings" (p. 181). This was a different understanding of graffiti than the consensus reality, which again shows the difference between how graffiti writers understood their work and how those in the consensus reality understood graffiti. This also suggests a different viewpoint on the plasticity of graffiti as opposed to the reality of a physical object or the taking of a position with real world outcomes. Graffiti writers understood themselves differently than how the community consensus understood them. After a while, some of their imagined ideas about their reception would seep into the consensus reality.

Austin (2001) also left a wide opening for this study when he wrote, "writers see themselves as part of a meaningful alternative community and an enduring cultural tradition" (p. 167). For the purposes of this thesis, beyond writing "community" and "tradition" in the same sentence, Austin pointed to the importance of the imagination by writing that graffiti writers "see themselves as," meaning that graffiti writers have a separate belief about what they are doing when they write graffiti. This connects with the terms "individual fantasy" and

“consensus reality,” which I use throughout this thesis to show the changing meanings of graffiti and how those meanings are molded in texts.

Austin (2001) also wrote:

Youth-culture traditions, frequently disparaged in the current generation, are well-remembered by adults in later moments of dreamy nostalgia, but are rarely noted as important traditions that had a powerful impact on later collective life in and of themselves. The history of popular music, dance and dance events, dating practices, rituals of daring, drinking, and drug use, and a large portion of the car culture are examples of easily recognized youth traditions. (p. 41)

It is worth noting that all “youth-culture traditions” mentioned above have been written about in books and shared in film, and have travelled from culture to culture throughout the world. Pop music, drinking, drugs, and car culture have obvious adult mediation built in to them and the adult mediation at work likely would be visible in other “youth-culture traditions,” as well. To assert that these traditions are not mediated by adults is to accept the mirage of “youth-culture traditions.”

Without questioning “youth-culture traditions” and “traditions” particularly, it is apparent that Austin’s (2001) greater concern, a concern that many empathetic academics share, was to represent his subjects in a positive light to celebrate his informants’ culture. A closer reading of “youth-culture traditions” might reveal much more adult involvement in and influence on “youth-culture traditions” than Austin may have wanted to acknowledge. As already noted, traditions are created and then historical moments are used to legitimize them. By naming cars, drugs, and dancing, Austin added to the idea that youth was a separate category with its own historical traditions. In this thesis, I pick up from Austin’s observation by investigating tradition and highlighting the adult intervention in youth traditions.

Austin (2001) stood up for the ever-changing group of youth; by simply standing up for youth traditions and writing about them, Austin helped youth traditions be remembered and be understood, and so come into focus for adult readers. This is similar to the positions Briggs (1996) and Linnekin (1992) took in their discussions about whether non-literate indigenous tribes should be studied because of the unintended effects of what studying them might do to their precarious and dangerous situation of confronting the literate and technologically advanced modern world. If Austin (2001) was interested in youth traditions, then examination of traditions is called for, including an examination of how the idea of youth traditions sheds light on adult observations and interpretations of “youth-culture traditions.”

I agree that there are youth traditions, but none so pure that it has no adult intervention, as Austin (2001) seemed to imply. In fact, those that are without adult intervention would not likely be studied or recorded by adults because that very act would change the tradition. Austin recognized that “[w]riting names, messages, and drawings in the shared public spaces where young people congregate or pass by has been known to exist in cities since the early nineteenth century” (p. 41) and he added that “[t]hey have not usually received widespread public notice” (p. 41). In this thesis, I argue that the widespread public notice that adults paid to graffiti in the 1970s and 1980s was what propelled graffiti to become a “youth-culture tradition.” I add to Austin’s work by looking at how adults and youth worked together to frame graffiti in text.

One final example of an opening in Austin’s (2001) thesis for this study is when he claimed the representation of New York City as a “City in Crisis” was hysterical-pseudo-journalism, which “created an (imagined) consensus about the crisis of New York City” (p. 76). Austin showed that, with the framings in newspapers describing New York City as a fallen Rome, a consensus reality developed regarding how most saw New York City at the time. The consensus reality should not be understood as completely made up, but as being framed by various media, starting with the decisions they make about what they report on and how they report on it. Here Austin lightly pointed to what I am highlighting in this thesis, that there is a consensus reality, which is influenced by print and is different from individual ideas or fantasy. For example, with graffiti one can see its artistic value and the criminal qualities; the idea of graffiti is not stable like a physical object, but rather depends on which consensus reality one subscribes to.

Austin’s (2001) *Taking the Train* highlights the power of the press, which is essentially the power of the printed word, in shaping and framing consensus reality. This aligns with the lens I bring to this thesis because both *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983) and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) pointed to the same idea - that consensus reality is framed by shared public texts. It also aligns well with the texts I choose to closely read in this thesis and highlights the power of the printed word on two levels: (a) on paper, in books, and newspapers; and (b) on walls and objects.

Austin (2001), in *Taking the Train*, masterfully showed the intense dialogue for the meaning making power of graffiti by examining both the framing of graffiti in *The New York Times* and in publications created by graffiti writers such as the *Graffiti International Times*. Where *The New York Times*, according to Austin, frequently published scathing indictments about the damage of graffiti, the *Graffiti International Times* only published pieces that

defended or otherwise propped up graffiti as a positive activity and object. Most other texts in graffiti studies comply with this binary - the binary of young and old, hip and square, visionary and philistine - because most other texts are ethnographic, sympathetic, and tend to play up to their graffiti informants' interpretations while playing down the law and order framings. This binary is apparent in Castleman's (1982) *Getting Up*, Stewart's (1989, 2009) *Graffiti Kings*, and most importantly in Chalfant and Cooper's (1984) *Subway Art*.

Five Moments of Dialogue

In this thesis, I examine crucial texts of the graffiti phenomenon using the invention literature lens I have developed in this chapter. In conversation with Austin (2001), I trace five moments of dialogue among the crucial texts (see Table 1).

Year	Text	Dialogue	What it did	In which text and chapter is it discussed?
1971	"Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals"	Dialogue A	Established "graffiti" in text	This thesis, Chapter 3
1972-74	120 negatively framed pieces in newspapers	Dialogue B	Framed graffiti as being a plague on New York City	Austin's (2001) Chapter 3
1974	<i>The Faith of Graffiti</i> (Mailer & Naar, 1974)	Dialogue C	Raised the stakes around graffiti	This thesis, Chapter 4
1981-84	Articles about graffiti	Dialogue D	Framed graffiti as a failed art	Austin's (2001) Chapter 5
1984	<i>Subway Art</i> (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984)	Dialogue E	Fixed graffiti as art and showed what it was	This thesis, Chapter 5

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I discuss the first text ever written about the graffiti phenomenon, *The New York Times* article “Taki 183” (1971). That article is often blamed for encouraging the growth of graffiti. It is the first volley in the dialogue on graffiti, which I refer to as Dialogue A. For Dialogue B, I refer to Austin’s (2001) Chapter 3, where he read 120 editorials and letters in *The New York Times*, written between 1972 and 1974, which negatively framed graffiti. I consider these writings as a corrective measure for the initial instigation with the “Taki 183” (1971) article. I present dialogue C, a close reading of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), in Chapter 4 of this thesis. This volley elevated graffiti from child’s play to an art. *The Faith* was conceived of and created during the same time the 120 negative framings of graffiti appeared in the press and can be viewed as a response to those 120 articles. Dialogue D is Chapter 5 of *Taking the Train*, where Austin (2001) read articles in various publications from the years 1981 to 1984 that discussed more negative framings and graffiti’s failure to become a saleable art in the downtown New York City gallery scene (a certain idea of the end of graffiti comes through here, almost as a failed experiment). In Chapter 5 of this thesis, I present a close reading of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) as the final dialogue (at least as far as graffiti enthusiasts were concerned), Dialogue E, because that text showed what graffiti art was without need of the downtown scene to approve of it and fixed how graffiti would be performed for years after its printing. More dialogues may indeed come after *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), including the growth of graffiti in Europe, New York graffiti writers traveling and spreading graffiti, and the harsh penalties meted out after politicians latched onto Wilson and Kelling’s (1982) Broken Windows Theory are a few examples. Still, none have been able to diminish that which was already created and brought to the public in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984).

Chapter 3: “Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals”

In this chapter, I offer a close critical reading of the first defining text of the graffiti phenomenon: “Taki 183” (1971). My goal is to examine, through an analysis of this text, how the graffiti phenomenon began, how it was framed in its earliest incarnation, and the nature of the performance embraced by the graffiti phenomenon. What becomes apparent through a close reading of the text is that a performance that began literally as child’s play was recast into a higher-stakes game the moment adults became involved. Adult actants inconspicuously shaped how the graffiti phenomenon would take its final and most influential form and imposed a consistent narrative for producing, reading, and theorizing graffiti.

Attempts to identify a precise beginning for the graffiti phenomenon are fraught with complications. Given the very nature of graffiti, a simple, concise, and accurate understanding of the exact “first name” of the graffiti phenomenon cannot be established. Nonetheless, I maintain that there are meaningful writings that can be emplotted on a historical continuum of WoWO, and that there are moments where close examination can reveal meaningful differences between two examples of WoWO. I also maintain that, by reading the early graffiti phenomenon as play, the story of this particular WoWO can be understood as a local child’s name-writing game, which was recast as a coming-of-age tale, then recast as a marker of crime, and yet again recast as the newest art form, until finally the story supported formation of a subculture that maintains some or all of those significations. In this chapter, I thus begin with a discussion of academic texts that have utilized “Taki 183” and explore what conclusions were drawn from it. I then move to reading the phenomenon discussed in the article for its discourses of play, which opens a wider discussion about the origins of the graffiti phenomenon. I conclude by reading “Taki 183” for its Bildungsroman qualities.



(Fig. 4. Top half of “Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals,” The New York Times, July 21, 1971)

The Early New York Graffiti Phenomenon

Scholars of graffiti studies frequently reference the article “Taki 183” as the first moment an institution took notice of the graffiti phenomenon (Cresswell, 1992; Hochtritt, 2008; Kan, 2001). Yet, because the text has, perhaps surprisingly, never been subject to a close reading analysis, it remains an unexplored surveyor’s mark for the blurry beginning of the graffiti phenomenon. Therefore, rather than merely referencing the article as a placeholder for the official start of the graffiti subculture, I interrogate the text itself and how scholars have situated it in the context of graffiti studies. In particular, in this section, I analyze how two scholars, Austin (2001) in *Taking the Train* and Castleman (1982) in *Getting Up*, made use of “Taki 183” to construct their own larger narratives about the graffiti phenomenon.

In various texts about the graffiti phenomenon, authors mention the name of graffiti writer Taki 183 as shorthand to indicate exactly which WoWO is being discussed (e.g., Chalfant, 2014; Duncan, 2010; Loring, 1973; Walmesley, 2005). Taki 183 signifies the New York City graffiti phenomenon of the 1970s because Taki 183 became the trope of New York City graffiti for at least 20 years after the original article, “Taki 183” (1971) was published. Examples of the power of “Taki 183” as a signifier include *New York Magazine’s* 1973 “Taki Awards” for best graffiti, *Interview Magazine’s* use of Taki 183, and the 1985 film *Turk 182*. Mailer and Naar (1974) invoked the Taki 183 trope in *The Faith* (discussed further in Chapter 4) when Mailer introduced his intermediary for the graffiti phenomenon, Cay 161, as “the famous Cay from 161st street, there at the beginning with Taki 183” (p. 4). Chalfant and Cooper (1984), in their groundbreaking text *Subway Art* (discussed further in Chapter 5), gave half of the page devoted to the history of graffiti to the reproduction of the top half of “Taki 183” (1971), thereby, and quite crucially, implying that there was no history of graffiti before this article. Chalfant and Cooper (1984) framed “Taki 183” (1971) in the same way they framed the teenage graffiti writers in their book: as an important actant for making the practice of graffiti popular. Chalfant and Cooper (1984) wrote this comment beside the article excerpt: “The competition for fame began in earnest as hundreds of youngsters, emulating Taki 183, began to ‘tag’ trains and public buildings all over town” (p. 14). Authors of various newspaper articles on the graffiti phenomenon for years to come pointed to “Taki 183” (1971) as the first moment of graffiti in order to situate the new writings they were finding in their cities (Harris, 1987; Mittelstaedt, 1987; Wadler, 1981). Although Taki 183 was not technically the “first graffiti writer,” his name became the personification of the graffiti phenomenon simply because of the article, “Taki 183” (1971).

Two notable texts on the graffiti phenomenon, Austin’s (2001) *Taking the Train* and Castleman’s (1982) *Getting Up*, pointed to the importance of “Taki 183” (1971) in the history

of the graffiti phenomenon. In his review of Austin's (2001) *Taking the Train*, Lachmann (2002) wrote that it "...is the most comprehensive history of graffiti now available. It should supplant *Getting Up*, Craig Castleman's (1982) pioneering study, as the basic reference work for this phenomenon" (p. 39). Despite Lachmann's (2002) claim, Austin's (2001) work need not supplant Castleman's (1982) work because the two take different approaches and temporal viewpoints towards understanding the graffiti phenomenon. Instead of supplanting work, the lacuna in graffiti studies calls for work that engages deeply with the available material and asks new questions of it. In this light, by using a vital text of the graffiti subculture, "Taki 183" (1971), Austin (2001) evaded the question of graffiti's origin, the implications of origin, and misconstrued the importance of the form. In contrast, where Austin evaded engaging the article, Castleman (1982) invented a romantic narrative about graffiti in New York City in his reading of "Taki 183" (1971), yet ultimately fell short of closely reading it.

Austin's *Taking the Train*

Taking the Train is an insightful study in which Austin (2001) utilized quantitative and qualitative research to investigate how authors in the Editorial Section of *The New York Times* switched from framing the graffiti phenomenon as an adolescent endeavor, likened to art, to framing it as a dangerous nuisance and a crime. Through this shift in frame, those authors cast the graffiti phenomenon as the visible scapegoat for many of the non-visible problems taking place in the deteriorating and bankrupted city. Yet while Austin made use of *The New York Times* as a major producer of the public's perception of the graffiti phenomenon, he did not closely read *The New York Times* article credited with establishing the larger graffiti subculture, "Taki 183" (1971). Instead, like most writing about the graffiti subculture, Austin (2001) used "Taki 183" (1971) as a placeholder for the moment that graffiti was recognized by an institution and the unofficial-official start of the graffiti phenomenon. That is, Austin (2001) invoked "Taki 183" (1971) as a trope without unpacking it as such.

Austin's (2001) account of the genesis of the graffiti phenomenon was quite purposely blurred. Separating the graffiti phenomenon from other forms of public writing, while viewing all public writing on walls and objects (WoWO) as an ongoing custom, Austin wrote that the "originating influences" of the graffiti phenomenon "form a web of historical and cultural connections, a tangled, rhizome-like network that works against establishing a clear, singular 'root'" (p. 38). Austin gave such various sources of inspiration for the graffiti phenomenon as advertising, television shows, and landmarks, and also stated that graffiti had roots in Black, Latino, and hippie cultures. Austin hinted at the playfulness and child-lore

tradition of WoWO: “Writing names, messages, and drawings in the shared public spaces where young people congregate or pass by has been known to exist in cities since the early nineteenth century” (p. 41). Yet by citing various roots, Austin obscured where the graffiti phenomenon came from and at the same time, sharpened a focus on one definite graffiti phenomenon first written about in “Taki 183” (1971).

Controversy surrounds “Taki 183” (1971) and its place in the origin story of the graffiti phenomenon (Gastmann, 2010; Siegal, 1987; Stewart, 1978).⁴ From a graffiti writer’s perspective, there is resistance to recognizing forever the graffiti writer Taki 183 as the first graffiti writer because, admittedly, he used the fruits of other children’s original ideas when he chose “the form” of the name Taki 183 (Austin, 2001, p. 42). Moreover, he could not have been the first to write graffiti on walls and objects around New York City solely because *The New York Times* put forth that notion; after all, what does a media institution know about what kids do in the street? This stance, opposing the suggestion of adult influence and denying adults know any “real” information about young people’s practices, bespeaks the central quality of child’s-play that is found at the start of the graffiti game and follows graffiti-purists into their old age. Austin (2001) adopted this stance in his evasion of “Taki 183” (1971) and his decision instead to use Kohl’s (1972) book, *Golden Boy*, to locate a new “official” starting point of the graffiti phenomenon. Austin’s choice was reasonable in that it seems he wanted to be sensitive to the graffiti-purists and respect the narrative that the “real” story was known only by those (kids) who lived it. But, he never explained that he based his decision to use *Golden Boy* primarily on “Taki 183” (1971). In the original article, Taki 183 mentioned that Julio 204 invented “the form” of [name] and [street number], a statement that implied that “the form” was important to the graffiti phenomenon (a subject to which I will return later). Austin (2001), who only appears to have learned of Julio 204 from “Taki 183” (1971) and assumed the form’s importance based on “Taki 183,” leaped over “Taki 183” in order to proclaim Julio 204 as the innovator and the direct link to the protagonist of the child name-writing game in *Golden Boy*, Johnny of 93. By making this leap, Austin (2001) took what he wanted from “Taki 183” (1971; namely, the overlooked actant, Julio 204, now reclaimed by Austin) and left “Taki 183’s” many years as a trope in the press without further examination. Moreover, by seeking one definite name to credit with initiating the graffiti

⁴ I make this claim on the basis of later interviews of Taki 183 after publication of “Taki 183” (1971). Taki 183 always talked about the origin story, and he was always refining statements. He defended small claims and he changed minor details over the years. Everybody wanted to know how he got in *The New York Times* and he always gave a fantastic story about wealthy neighborhoods, hardnosed journalism, and how as a teenager he discovered how to get newspapers to take notice of his hobby because the world is a meritocratic one.

phenomenon, Austin (2001) discredited his own earlier claim that it was not possible to establish “a clear singular ‘root’” of “originating influences” (p. 38).

Austin (2001) undertook his study at the end of the 1990s, and it was permeated with a touch of nostalgia for the golden years of 1970s subway graffiti as well as a certainty of its prestigious place in art and cultural history. Austin ended his text by stating, “I remain convinced that writing manifests the greatest art of the late twentieth century. But that argument will have to wait for another book” (p. 271). However, Austin did have that argument at the heart of *Taking the Train* without recognizing it explicitly, as can be seen in Austin’s underlying activist concern with setting the official narrative straight about graffiti. In the process, Austin reframed the State’s accusatory narrative of the criminal significations of graffiti to a story of a bankrupt city distracting from its own decay by implicating the art of young people.

The two gaps I find in Austin’s (2001) research, namely, (a) not clarifying the genesis story of the graffiti phenomenon by dismissing “Taki 183” (1971), and (b) instead offering *Golden Boy* as first artifact of the graffiti phenomenon without unpacking the text, are critical arguments I engage with in this chapter.

Castleman’s *Getting Up*

In *Getting Up*, Castleman (1982) provided an activist perspective, similar to Austin (2001) but from a different temporal period. Castleman (1982) undertook his study at what many consider the height of the graffiti phenomenon in New York City, the late 1970s, and he did not attempt to reread historical accounts or spend too long behind the curtain of the important cultural production work that was taking place at *The New York Times*. Instead, he documented the making of the graffiti subculture in real time, focusing mainly on the practitioners, during a stretch of years when galleries and museums had not yet accepted graffiti and teenagers the world over had not yet adopted it. Throughout his text, Castleman expressed that this graffiti phenomenon was a valuable art form and should be recognized as such, revealing his anxiety over whether graffiti would one day be accepted as respectable art. This anxiety was at the core of Castleman’s study: much of what he wrote can be read as offers of proof that this graffiti phenomenon was art. Castleman was not necessarily interested in the origins of the graffiti phenomenon, as he did not dwell on this question at all. Rather, what Castleman found important from the start was who was “the best.” Thus, he devoted his entire first chapter to interviewing one of the premier graffiti writers of the time, Lee.

In *Getting Up*, Castleman (1982) recognized “Taki 183” (1971) as the first written piece about the graffiti phenomenon; on his References page, he listed the newspaper articles

he used to investigate the graffiti phenomenon in chronological order, beginning the list with “Taki 183” (1971). Castleman (1982) made the important observation that “Taki became something of a folk hero” (p. 136) and recognized how it happened. He quoted Jochnowitz (1978), who said:

The New York Times is... responsible for the prevalence of graffiti. 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 became a major one. (p. 146)

Castleman (1982) came close to interrogating the production of the article when he wrote, “The *Times* article presented Taki as an engaging character with a unique and fascinating hobby” (p. 135). Yet, Castleman did not follow up on either of these observations, the unique narrative of “Taki 183” (1971) or the fascinating hobby Taki had; as a result, Castleman’s (1982) reading was more conjectural than close. He posited a narrative about how the article may have come to be written by *The New York Times* but did not explore what the article itself might reveal.

Castleman (1982) wrote that the curiosities of New Yorkers were “sufficiently aroused” with concerns about what one teenager in Manhattan (Taki 183) was writing on doors and lampposts, which led “the *New York Times* to send one of its reporters to determine its meaning” (p. 135). However, the original “Taki 183” (1971) article itself never insinuated that New Yorkers were “sufficiently aroused” to curiosity and *that* is why the article was written.

After the publication of “Taki 183” (1971), many rumors and myths of how a graffiti writer could gain the attention of *The New York Times* and other media outlets were put forth in an attempt to explain the incredible feat of young Taki having his graffiti play taken so seriously. Unsophisticated understandings of the adult world abound in the tales of graffiti writers in *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982). For example, when describing the subway he painted and how he thought passengers in New York City were reading his graffiti art, Lee said “They probably didn’t know it was graffiti; they probably thought the city was doing something good for a change. They probably thought they paid some muralist to do it” (p. 12). By capturing this childlike simplicity and imagination, Castleman conveyed an authentic insider’s voice about this happening. However, Castleman seemed to make similar imaginative leaps in his own narrative as the young graffiti writers made when imagining the impact their work had on others.

Castleman (1982) also reinforced another misconception in his reading of “Taki 183” (1971) when he claimed that Julio 204 was interviewed and then implied that Taki 183 inspired Julio 204. The article did not contain an interview of Julio 204; rather, Taki mentioned Julio 204 in the article as an early inventor of “the form,” the opposite of what Castleman (1982) reported. Moreover, since the “Taki 183” (1971) article was published, the importance of “the form” in signifying the emergence of the graffiti phenomenon has been overstated. As I discuss later in this chapter, it is the autonomy of the form, not the strict adherence to any technical prerequisite, which makes “the form” valuable to the child’s play in the name-writing game.

Interestingly, questions about the genesis of the graffiti phenomenon usually congregate between Julio 204 and Taki 183. Thus, Castleman’s (1982) handling of the two names shows how little interest he had in questions of genesis at the time of his study. Nonetheless, Castleman’s ethnographic study provided useful insight into how graffiti writers saw themselves, read the phenomenon, and worked to continue to produce the idea of a graffiti subculture. I use Castleman’s interviews to support the idea that the genesis narrative was purposely blurred and also to gain insight into how graffiti practitioners framed the practice.

Interrogating “Taki 183”

Both Austin’s (2001) and Castleman’s (1982) studies are significant to the scholarship on graffiti, but neither went far enough in engaging with the widely referenced framing text of the graffiti subculture, “Taki 183” (1971). “Taki 183” represents a moment of fixity for the graffiti subculture and offers a site for analysis of a new vision of the early graffiti phenomenon. The three questions I will ask from a close reading of this article are: (a) What is this graffiti? (b) How did it start? and (c) How is the story of Taki 183 framed in the article?

One clarification is in order before I present a close reading of the article. I have referred to “Taki 183” (1971) in *The New York Times* as an “article,” but that is, in fact, misleading. This piece is not attributed to any author and is not clearly part of any established section of the paper; it simply appears on page 37 of the newspaper, one page before the obituaries and two pages after the Op-Ed page.⁵ Hence, after questioning the article’s journalistic

⁵ Although it is not written on the page, this piece seems to be part of the Op-Ed section. The *New York Times* created the Op-Ed page (opposite of the editorial page) one year before this piece was written, in 1970, in order to give voice to outside writers and outside topics. It sought out controversial pieces from a wide variety of writers and provoked “deliberate outrage” with the pieces it printed (Socolow, 2010, p. 282). In this same newspaper from July 21, 1971, on the first page of the Op-Ed section, there is an excerpt from the writings of one of the notable figures of the Black Panther Party, Fred Hampton, post-mortem. On the next page, where the “Taki 183” piece is, two-thirds of the page is occupied by a piece titled “Life Is an Uphill Struggle for the Latins in Paterson,” by Paul L. Montgomery. Under Montgomery’s name is “special to the New York Times.” This is followed by a section titled “News Summary and Index,” giving brief descriptions of articles featured in the newspaper and an index of other articles. Two pictures accompanying the “Latins in Paterson” article show

authenticity and not finding a satisfying answer to who wrote it, I will not refer to this anonymous written information as an “article” but as a “piece.”

Graffiti as Play

In this section, in order to explore the three questions mentioned above, I discuss graffiti as a game, a local name-writing game, in which preadolescents in the 1960s in New York City engaged. The game involved known friends, a collective imagination, and personal inventiveness. These children wrote their chosen and given nicknames on the walls in areas where children congregated and adults rarely went (alleyways, backyards, abandoned buildings), displaying their ephemeral imagined personas and fantasies and interacting with other children’s written messages.

In 1970, playful teenagers continued this name-writing game in areas where teenagers and adults commingled, including subways, busses and other high-traffic areas. What was a game to Taki 183 and his cohort was portrayed as a coming-of-age story in *The New York Times* (“Taki 183,” 1971). The child’s game crystalized into a teenage game of name writing, with the boundaries expanded to all city spaces, effecting a contestation of space and imposition of a (secret) identity, which became the focus of the discourse around WoWO.

As a result of the ubiquity and the affected appeal of the modern-day graffiti subculture, the concept that writing one’s name all over the city was part of a game has been eclipsed by the more intense and productive readings of graffiti as art and/or crime. In graffiti studies, the graffiti phenomenon is not closely read for its qualities of play, although there have been notable exceptions, such as Schacter’s (2014) *Ornament and Order* and Cooper’s (2006) *Street Play*. The subculture that grew from the graffiti phenomenon is usually read as a

glimpses of life in Paterson: one picture of a dilapidated storefront and one picture of children playing in the spraying water of an open fire hydrant. These pictures, coupled with the pictures of graffiti from the “Taki 183” article, suggest two separate visions of what this new graffiti could mean, with a scene of a city in disrepair and a view of children’s play. The “Latins in Paterson” article has an author with a byline, yet “Taki 183” does not. This page feels like a forgotten page, a filler page, a page without advertisements and also one without articles written by journalists. This page serves as a bulletin board, or even a wall, where anyone with a message (as long as it fulfills the requirements: 750 words, starkly different viewpoint, non-journalist) can discuss a topic that interests them. The editors at *The New York Times* were experimenting with allowing non-journalists to write pieces for the newspaper. Because “Taki 183” does not have an author with a byline, it may have been written by the Editorial Board or by an invited guest writer. The article has the familiar markers of a newspaper article; it presents interviews of Taki 183, Ray AO, and a TA patrolman, as well as facts from the TA officials about the number of man-hours it takes to remove graffiti and how much it costs the TA. Nonetheless, the impetus for the article, the author’s connection to the subject, and the author remain a mystery. If the author was not a reporter, then how did the author locate Taki 183? Did the author know Taki 183 personally? What was the process for approving this piece? And does the fact that it is found on what seems like a forgotten page reveal how uninvolved and unimportant the article was to *The New York Times* editorial staff? This article, which now is remembered as the article marking the beginning of the graffiti subculture, was not on the front page or even the first 20 pages of the newspaper, where important articles are usually found. This crucial article to the graffiti subculture is seemingly hidden on the 37th page, one page before the obituaries of a Wednesday newspaper. On the front page of that newspaper, on the bottom, is a small key titled “News Index” telling which sections are on which page. The News Index has a description for what is happening on the 37th page: “News Summary and Index.” The Editorial section is on page 34; the Op-Ed is on page 35; Obituaries are on page 38; and Women’s News is on page 40. “Taki 183” is an anonymous piece, not quite an Op-Ed and not quite a staff article, which simply appears on a page reserved for “News Summary and Index.”

serious entity, not to be questioned and not to be undermined. This serious reading of graffiti subculture as a clandestine assemblage of artistic criminals, which obscures the game at the start and center of the phenomenon, can create the impression that scholarly and other writing about graffiti is often founded in the imaginations of the practitioners and theorists involved. It is worth considering, however, the many features of play embedded in graffiti writing.

Discourses of Play

I begin with a conventional and open definition of play and then use two particular discourses that conceptualize play, *imagination* and *adults-in-play*, in order to examine the slow genesis of the graffiti phenomenon. With this frame, I will read “Taki 183” (1971) for its Bildungsroman qualities and also demonstrate that the graffiti Taki 183 has no ideological connection to the famous WoWO “Kilroy Was Here.”

In *Play*, Garvey (1977) wrote:

Most students of play would accept the following criteria:

1. Play is pleasurable, enjoyable. Even when not actually accompanied by signs of mirth, it is still positively valued by the player.
2. Play has no extrinsic goals. Its motivations are intrinsic and serve no other objectives. In fact, it is more an enjoyment of means than an effort devoted to some particular end. In utilitarian terms, it is inherently unproductive.
3. Play is spontaneous and voluntary. It is not obligatory but is freely chosen by the player.
4. Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player. (p. 10)

Garvey’s criteria for play are open enough to allow for a number of routines and ordinary behaviors to overlap with play.

Play is open by its very nature, which makes play an elusive concept to theorize because of the many ways it can be conceptualized. Scholars agree on notions of play only when play is left “a conceptually open category” (Harker, 2005, p. 59). While Harker (2005) wrote that “we all know what playing is” (p. 59), he continued “there can be no one theory of playing as such, just theorizations that are themselves always differential relations of movement and rest, akin to an open-ended conversation” (p. 59).

Depending on the space-time of the play, numerous interpretations of what the play means can be elicited. Harker (2005) pointed to Sutton-Smith’s (1997) study and wrote, “any attempt to define playing in its being, using either its form or function, will be theoretically limited” (p. 58). Sutton-Smith (1997) had noted, “playful contests as pictured in interpretive thought are a Rorschach, a projective screen, for scholars’ ideological preferences” (p. 82).

Depending on one's life experiences, age, location, and outlook on how children should be taught, one can see what one wants from play. For example, contact sports can be viewed as either detrimental to raising a well-balanced child or exactly what is needed to make a strong individual, amongst many possible readings. For the graffiti phenomenon as well, depending on the researcher, one can read the imposition of writing one's chosen name on walls and objects all-over as a way a young person can learn to have a strong voice or as a praxis that will lead to a life of criminal behavior.

Two ontological qualities common to all kinds of play are: (a) "variations within the rules, which can be subjectively experienced in feelings of freedom and power," and (b) "feigned signification which enables play to falsify experience" (Lindquist, 2001, as cited in Meire, 2007, pp. 1-2). These two qualities echo the two consistent elements that Corsaro (2005) identified in children's peer cultures: (a) "children make persistent attempts to *gain control* over their lives" and (b) "they always attempt to *share* this control with each other" (Corsaro, 2005, as cited in Meire, 2007, p. 3; italics in original). I will examine these qualities in the name-writing found in *Golden Boy* (1972) and "Taki 183" (1971).

The Name-writing Game

As mentioned above, Austin (2001) bypassed "Taki 183" (1971) and offered instead Kohl's (1972) book *Golden Boy* as a newfound artifact, yet unclaimed by graffiti studies, for a glimpse at what seems like the earliest graffiti writers. *Golden Boy* is not about the graffiti phenomenon; yet, if we trace the name-writing game found in *Golden Boy* to the graffiti phenomenon written about in "Taki 183" (1971), we can identify the qualities of play that overlap in the child name-writing game and the graffiti phenomenon and observe the slow process of genesis.

Golden Boy as Anthony Cool is a somewhat misleading title because the subject of Kohl's (1972) book is much larger than just the preadolescent fad of writing nicknames in the same style television shows used to introduce characters (e.g., Jerry Mathers as the Beaver). Although he devoted more chapters to political and serious WoWO, Kohl positioned the preadolescent name-writing game to capture the meaning making power of WoWO alongside more familiar examples of U.S. WoWO. The title moors the overall topic of various U.S. WoWO of the period to the preadolescent name-writing game, and minimizes the seriousness of the subjects the other WoWO addressed by keeping the child's play always in the foreground.

Kohl (1972) introduced Johnny Rodriguez, a 14 year-old Puerto Rican boy who "was born in the neighborhood" (p. 3), dropped out of middle school, and became a private pupil of

Kohl's with the goal of learning to read and write. Johnny went to Kohl's apartment for private tutoring. Each time, similar to the way one used to sign in to an office in a sign-in book, Johnny wrote "Bolita" with the date of the meeting on Kohl's elevator wall. Kohl saw that same moniker written on Johnny's notebook and asked him to stop writing in his elevator. But, instead of castigating Johnny, Kohl decided to engage the functionally illiterate preadolescent with the reading and writing he was involved in on a day to day basis: the name-writing game. When Kohl walked by Johnny's block, he noticed many different names written on a wall and he noticed that Johnny's name appeared in different forms, "Bolita," "Johnny of 93," and "Bolita as Johnny Cool," along with other children's names in different forms (e.g., Gilbert as Fire Box, Anna as Brillo, Willie as Papo; p. 8). As Kohl observed:

The more I attended to that particular wall, the more I felt like a voyeur, peering in on the lives of strangers. I found myself looking closely at the young people in the neighborhood, identifying their faces with names and nicknames from the wall, manufacturing intrigues and adventures for them. (p. 9)

Kohl, a teacher of English language arts, who had years of experience teaching young people to read and write, stumbled upon a pre-adolescent name-writing game where youthful fantasy reigned. Kohl (1972) immediately began "manufacturing intrigues and adventures for them" (p. 9). Kohl then used the pre-adolescent name-writing game as a diagnostic tool to assess Johnny's reading level. By having Johnny write down all the words he knew from the walls (as well as brand names and names of sport stars), Kohl deduced that Johnny could read and write better than the first-grade level that he had been told Johnny was reading at. Kohl wrote, "I helped him to read by using what he knew as the basis for my teaching" (p. 17). The seasoned teacher had a breakthrough with Johnny by reading, writing, and discussing the names and the fantasies written on the wall. Kohl ended the anecdote by noting, "Before long he got bored with reading and writing about what he already knew and began to explore the world beyond his block" (p. 17). By confronting his student with the writing and reading he performed on his own, and asking questions of it, Kohl motivated Johnny to vocalize and write about the fantasies embedded in the writings. This allowed for Johnny to progress beyond the pre-adolescent name-writing game and a reading and writing level diagnosed as a "first-grade level" (p. 15). Kohl made the intriguing and seemingly innocent WoWO that he was introduced to, and that he used to aid his student's educational growth, the title of his study on U.S. WoWO.

Beyond the name-writing game children played in the Upper West Side of Manhattan in 1967, Kohl (1972) described other examples of WoWO. His examples included political

WoWO of affluent high school students in the suburbs of New York; WoWO found in universities in California; the ever-important historical graffiti that dated back to troglodyte wall paintings; latrinalia; racist WoWO; territorial gang WoWO; political slogan WoWO; and the stylistic graffiti preferences of white and black teenagers in the late 1960s in Berkeley, California. These various forms of WoWO may not seem as if they are linked by anything more than being examples of WoWO; however, they do have one shared quality - the WoWO are all involved in ideas that are part of consensus reality.

The name-writing game stands out from Kohl's (1972) other examples because it is not racist, not demanding of social change, and not a gang message or political slogan. It is not a hippie message nor is it a message proclaiming Black power. The name-writing game in *Golden Boy* is different from all of the other examples of WoWO because it does not join in any consensus reality ideas, but is only concerned with the imaginations of the young people playing the game. The rewards (or goals) of the name-writing game are different from what the other WoWO demand because the name-writing game is not concerned with the world outside of the imaginary world sustained by the game. The two ways of writing WoWO - as a legible subject in a consensus reality (U.S. WoWO) and as an illegible subject which is not part of the consensus reality (child WoWO) - are thus placed in dialogue. As they come up against each other, the need for legibility imposes legibility in the illegible, a move that would then mask the original illegibility. That is, the playful name-writing game that worked outside of a consensus reality dialogue is later assumed to be part of consensus reality, and it is demanded that this game be explained in mature consensus reality terms.

The preadolescent name-writing game of this period does not make mature sense as part of a larger and legible dialogue in consensus reality. The preadolescents were too young to write political or ethnic slogans, and they were not sufficiently well versed on adult affairs to have a clear message to write within the adult discourse that usually existed in WoWO. There were no legible demands; the name-writing game was merely one way in which children played. It is in that juxtaposition between the urgency of all other WoWO in the text and the play of the name-writing game that playfulness is found. Sutton-Smith (1997) distinguished play from playful, "...reserving the concept of playful for that which is meta-play, that which plays with normal expectations of play itself, as does nonsense, parody, paradox, and ridiculousness. Playful would be that which plays with the frames of play" (p. 148). The preadolescents writing names, different names that identified their different fantasies, was a playful way to appropriate U.S. WoWO of the time. Through the game, the children took the previous boundaries that regulated WoWO and opened them. Writing

messages within a binary of legible positions is not the only way to write on walls and objects. Now, “nonsense, parody, paradox, and ridiculousness” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 148) also could be written and read.

Kohl (1972) elevated the children’s playful usage of WoWO by positioning an example of their writings as title, anchor, and perhaps only generally agreeable use of WoWO in the text. When compared with the other WoWO, and especially when acknowledging the contentious time-space context of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, it is easy to appreciate the allure of politically uninvolved preadolescent WoWO. Although within a mere five years later, in New York City, others would write of graffiti as a crime and/or art (see Austin, 2001, p. 164; Mailer, 1974, p. 11), this name-writing game being played by preadolescents was at the time a pleasant distraction from the other taxing and demanding WoWO and the former legible boundaries of WoWO.

Austin (2001) did not give a close reading of *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972), yet what is found in Kohl’s book is not the graffiti phenomenon but a proto-graffiti phenomenon played by people who would later be excluded from the actual graffiti phenomenon, *preadolescents*. What is found in this artifact is Austin’s (2001) implication of “the early nineteenth century” (p. 41) in the graffiti phenomenon. We find a “functionally illiterate” (p. 42) young boy, 14 years-old, writing in crayon, in marker, in pencil, in spray paint, in chalk, and with sharp tools on the elevators of apartment buildings, on backdoors, and fences and in “places where adults rarely travel, like alleys” (p. 41). What is found is a link from Julio 204, via a misunderstanding of the importance of “the form,” to the graffiti phenomenon, but the more important aspect of “all-over” in the graffiti phenomenon and subway graffiti of Taki 183 and his cohort is not found in Kohl’s (1972) book. As if validating Sutton-Smith’s (1997) observation that “playful contests as pictured in interpretive thought are a Rorschach, a projective screen, for scholars’ ideological preferences” (p.82), in seeking an earlier artifact than “Taki 183” (1971), Austin (2001) confused the name-writing game of *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972) with the graffiti phenomenon of “Taki 183” (1971) and incorrectly established the beginning of the graffiti phenomenon.

Austin (2001) chose *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972) based on “Taki 183” (1971). In “Taki 183,” Taki gave credit to an unknown graffiti writer, Julio 204, for having invented “the form,” and Austin (2001) correctly connected the dots from Julio 204’s form to “Johnny of 93’s” form, which Kohl (1972) said was written on walls in 1967. Austin (2001) wrote, “JULIO 204’s innovation to the name form was to drop the “of” from the “[Name] of [Street number]” form (e.g., Johnny of 93), which rightly secures his place in the history of writing”

(p. 46). Although the connection between the two names is easy to see, Austin's reading misrepresented the importance of the "form" as being "[Name] and [Street number]," rather than the more critical aspect of the autonomy of how one could create and write their own selected name in the game as being critical to play. Meire (2007) called this feature of play "variations within the rules, which can be subjectively experienced in feelings of freedom and power" (p. 1).

The form is not actually set as [name] and [street number]. Rather, the autonomy to choose one's name and the form in which it is written, is the "form" of the graffiti name and a substantial quality found in play. Johnny indeed wrote "Johnny of 93," which quite correctly could have influenced Julio 204, but Johnny also wrote "Bolita" and "Bolita as Johnny Cool." These names did not adhere to a strict literal form, but were "subjective[ly] experience[d] in feelings of freedom and power" (Meire, 2007, p. 1) that came from being able to choose one's own name. In other words, the only "form" in the early child's play game of name-writing was that the form was open and players could choose any name combination they wanted.

Golden Boy (Kohl, 1972) offers a valuable opportunity to observe play in the name-writing game. The question then arises, is there similar play and playful spontaneity in "Taki 183" (1971)? In the piece, the author interviewed a contemporary of Taki's, Ray AO. Ray AO, simply by virtue of his name (RAY AO "for all-over"), serves as an example of the preadolescent child's play and the variations in the rules that make it enjoyable. That Ray AO did not have a street number in his name, and instead had AO as his second name, demonstrates the variations on the rules for writing names. With Julio 204 and Taki 183, an exact location of where they were from was given in their respective second names, which then associated them with specific neighborhoods and streets. In contrast, with Ray AO, although the second name is concerned with place, it did not signify allegiance to one street or neighborhood but instead "all-over." Having "all-over" as one's second name can also be read as a statement, not that he is from all-over like a nomad or transient, but that he writes his name all-over, the way a graffiti "king" would. This points to the lesser importance of utilizing one specific name form (e.g., [name] and [street number]) and the greater importance of being able to choose one's own name and write it in any way, and place, one chose.⁶

In "Taki 183" (1971), it was writing "all-over," in places where teenagers and adults commingled, that made Taki famous and began the graffiti phenomenon. The author of the piece stated that Taki's name "appears in subway stations and inside subway cars all over the city, on walls along Broadway, at Kennedy International Airport, in New Jersey, Connecticut,

⁶ This is seen more overtly over the next two chapters where [name] and [street number] are almost all but forgotten by graffiti writers.

upstate New York and other places.”⁷ The author led the reader to believe that the fact that Taki 183 had written his name “all-over” was a triumph of adolescence because he “Spawn[ed] Pen Pals” (1971). Taki basked in that admiration when he said, “The guys knows [sic] who the first one was” (“Taki 183,” 1971). The “first” that Taki 183 was pointing to was not that he was the first to write on walls and objects, but the first to commit fully to a new rule of play, the first to write all-over.

In his analysis of peer culture, Corsaro (2005) wrote, “The concepts of sharing and gaining control are important to children’s production of and participation in initial peer cultures” (p. 140). Taki showed the control he had in his peer culture, not by showing his autonomy by straying from Julio 204’s form and writing a different name, but by explaining the new rule added over the last year to the name-writing game, writing all-over, and framing his early dedication to the rule as being an important actant that influenced his peers. We cannot be completely sure that Taki 183 actually inspired other teenagers to write graffiti, but this cause and effect personal narrative does reflect the desire by Taki 183 to “gain control” and “share this control” (Corsaro, 2005, p. 118). Still, we cannot assume that one graffiti writer can affect many others and, in turn, many will follow one or another, or that there is an unstated agreement taking place in the writing that all share in, or that there is a power in “all-over” that all players can tap into.

Taki himself seemingly undermined the personal accomplishment of having others follow his lead when he shared authority on the game with another writer, saying “I took the form from JULIO 204” (“Taki 183,” 1971). The sharing of responsibility and control are valuable aspects of children’s peer cultures. As Corsaro (2005) wrote, in children’s peer cultures “they always attempt to *share* this control with each other” (p. 118). Taki did not always brag about writing his name all-over in the piece. In fact, at times he seemed embarrassed by it, saying “I didn’t have a job then...and you pass the time, you know” (“Taki 183,” 1971). When Taki was performing his feat, he was not aware that adults would take interest; he was simply part of a teenage game. His graffiti was not on walls by itself; other teenagers were writing their names on walls and objects, too. This game was understood as a community game, and no single player was all-important. The game and the peer culture that it sustained were more important than any one player, and Taki showed this by both explaining his control in the game and sharing the control with Julio 204.

⁷ Observation: the anonymous author has intimate knowledge of where Taki 183 has written his name. How could this reporter have possibly seen the names written in all of these locales? Either he trusts Taki 183 at his word that he did this (which means this whole piece is based on teenage boasting) or the anonymous author was with Taki 183 in Bear Mountain and at the Airport.

In *Golden Boy*, Kohl (1972) wrote, “Once I asked him why he put his name on the walls of buildings in his neighborhood. He replied, ‘Because all the kids do’” (p. 12). In Johnny’s response, the play was a shared play. It was not about the individual but the group, a means of both avoiding blame and claiming a generational unity in the game. The cohesiveness and unity implied by the similar styles, forms, and overlapping messages in the name-writing allude to an agreement that there was a game taking place amongst many children. Both Johnny and Taki pointed to the community of players rather than their own individual achievements when confronted with questions about the practice. As Meire (2007) noted, “The sharing of the intersubjective space of play – being engaged together in the same activity – is a hugely important element of the fun of playing” (p. 3). Yet, this same sharing, which is so important to child peer cultures and supports the justification that “all the kids” do it, is too open of an understanding to sustain play for very long. New boundaries will be made to exclude some players and invite new participants.

Meire (2007) commented on the social dynamic of exclusion and inclusion as a feature of child’s play:

When play is a social activity, inclusion of co-players implies exclusion of other children: before or outside of play (refusal to enter the play), and sometimes in the course of the play itself. Identity markers like ethnic origin and especially gender are used in inclusion and exclusion. (p. 4)

Understanding who the new game excludes is valuable, because it reveals a blurry genesis story and also the notion that the originators of graffiti were not of a particular ethnicity but are best described as teenagers in 1970 from New York City. The new game does not exclude based on race or religion, gender or class; the players in 1970 who were older than the pre-adolescents from just two years prior (they might be the same preadolescents who became adolescents) excluded the exact group who created and molded the initial game, preadolescents. Preadolescents found themselves excluded when the boundaries of the game opened to “all-over.” One group who cannot go “all-over” are preadolescents. With preadolescents out of the game, the practice can be read as a more serious endeavor, which will encourage adults to participate in the shaping of the phenomenon.

“Taki 183” (1971) conveyed the playfulness of the name-writing game in 1970, when teenagers began playing a preadolescent game in spaces where adults and teenagers interacted. I suggest that the features of play in the early game, especially gaining control and sharing that control among peers, were motivating forces behind the growth of the graffiti phenomenon. What spawned so many imitators was not Taki 183 the individual, per se, but

the rules of play and features that made play enjoyable. I also suggest that the graffiti phenomenon opened the boundaries of previous legible WoWO so that players could write illegible messages or nonsense in WoWO. At the same time, as the rules of the game expanded to include writing the same name all-over the city, this excluded the original name-writers, the preadolescents, thereby denying the graffiti phenomenon's growth out of a preadolescent game, which is then furthered when imaginative explanations of the graffiti phenomenon are (seemingly) accepted in consensus reality.

Using the Imagination

In this section, I explore the role of imagination in play in general and in the graffiti phenomenon in particular. As Meire (2007) observed, the intersubjective space of play is social, material, and/or *imaginary*. It consists of relations (of inclusion and exclusion) with other people; with places and objects such as *toys*, play equipment or the play environment itself; and with the imaginary, such as fantasy play that relates to future roles. (p. 2; italics added)

The imaginary was on display in the names the preadolescents wrote on walls in *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972). Kohl noted, "I mentioned Jaime as Batman and he said laughingly that it was Jaime's fantasy about himself. Maria was called the Black Queen because of her attitude..." (p. 10). When confronted with the meanings of the writings on the wall, Johnny recognized the fantasies his peers projected through WoWO. Moreover, through the child writings, "Jaime as Batman" and "Maria the Black Queen of 89th," the fantasies were visible to all observers. The children did not actually gain superpowers by the claim; that is, the Black Queen of 89th was still Maria, and Batman was still Jaime. However, when the graffiti phenomenon was made more mature with "Taki 183" (1971), the fantasy element became more difficult to discern. The names in "Taki 183" did not reference famous icons nor did they show familiar forenames. The names the adolescents chose were for the most part illegible. What was it that the graffiti phenomenon teenagers wanted *to be* with their written projections? That is, what did they imagine?

The author of "Taki 183" (1971) placed the quote "**He's the King**" (bold in original) in the middle of the piece. The quote served as a subheading for a section, a bold line the reader must cross in order to understand the graffiti phenomenon. The anonymous author quoted an anonymous youth "lounging on a doorstep" on 183rd street, perhaps in front of the same door photographed in the piece with Taki 183's name written in the middle and all of the other names seemingly revolving around Taki 183. The anonymous youth welcomed the reader into the imagination of the graffiti phenomenon by claiming that a 17-year-old in

Washington Heights, New York, was “the king.” This fantasy, that there were young people who wrote their names on walls and objects and they were kings, was the doorway to understanding the more mature graffiti phenomenon. If one did not accept this fantasy role play, the rest of the graffiti phenomenon would not make sense. However, if one accepts kings and queens, one enters the imaginative play at work in the graffiti phenomenon. Friends who understand the imaginative story unfolding on walls and objects make the new member of the court feel as if all royal claims are true.

Two remarks recorded in “Taki 183” (1971), one made by Ray AO and one by the anonymous youth, point to a second quality common in play: “feigned signification which enables play to falsify experience” (Meire, 2007, p. 1). The anonymous youth said of Taki 183, “He’s the king,” and immediately after, Ray AO was recorded as saying “It’s got everyone doing it.” Being a “king” implies conquering lands and having masses of adoring followers beholden to the king. Yet this status of “king” is double edged. As important as it sounds, teenagers are also aware of its fantasy nature and that fantasies are “inherently unproductive” (Garvey, 1977, p. 10). Thus, the claim to being royalty in the graffiti phenomenon is best understood as a playful boast that “falsifies experience” (Meire, 2007, p. 1). The caveat not given in “Taki 183” (1971) (to the horror of graffiti-purists) was that being a king in child’s play is a Sisyphean task, for child-kings are soon overthrown. Being the king in child’s play is a lot like being the citizen to whom the mayor gives the key to the city or a declaration of the day to be “Your name here”-day. One doesn’t actually gain anything; the key doesn’t fit any real lock; it’s more of a dream, a fantasy, and a memory one can talk about. The remark that Taki 183 “has got everybody doing it” seemed a logical statement after Taki 183 was crowned the king by the anonymous youth. Ray AO didn’t really know what caused the spike in the graffiti phenomenon but, based on his agreement with the momentary fantasy of his youth peer group, it made sense to imagine that all of the children in the city were inspired by the one king, Taki.

The claims of cause and effect implied by the statement, “It’s got everybody doing it” and by the full title of the piece, “Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals” (1971), make sense only in the imagination of the graffiti writers who accepted Taki’s status as “king.” These two statements of causality about Taki 183’s graffiti are the first written instance of “agency” being applied to this graffiti phenomenon. According to Gell (1998),

Agency is attributable to those persons (and things, see below) who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than mere concatenation of physical events. (p. 16)

The graffiti Taki 183 wrote is given agency by the title of the piece and the imagination of the young people interviewed. The graffiti writer Taki 183 becomes *the* agent for the proliferation of graffiti in 1970s New York City. As Gell noted, “Whenever an event is believed to happen because of an ‘intention’ lodged in the person or thing which initiates the causal sequence, that is an instance of ‘agency’”⁸ (p. 17).

It would be very difficult to conclusively prove that Taki 183 actually spawned or inspired imitators. It is more likely that any number of other factors combined to make the name-writing game grow in popularity at that time, including an increase in availability of materials for the production of graffiti (such as spray paint); a decrease in public spending on transportation in the city (as Austin [2001] outlined); and teenagers’ fear of the draft to the Vietnam War, which manifested in teenagers wreaking havoc in public spaces (Prial, 1971; “Taki 183,” 1971). But, a measure of poetic license in our stories is allowable and the bold claim that Taki 183 was king was accepted, making Taki 183 the self-confirming king who inspired the imitators. The only evidence for this agency, apparent in the enormous claim the author made in the title, was in the imaginative words of the unidentified youth who claimed that Taki 183 was the king. Because this unidentified youth was said to live on 183rd street, he may have had personal loyalties to Taki 183; other early observers of the graffiti phenomenon might not share his conclusion. Teenagers who lived a mere ten blocks away might call a different graffiti name “the king” based on their loyalty to that person and their block. The subjective fantasy of Taki 183 being a king who spawned imitators represents a worldview unto itself. Readers must join the fantasy in order to dwell in the imagined world of Taki 183 and the graffiti phenomenon.

With a declared king in a game that many take part in, of course, hierarchies emerge. Some participants will be labeled imitators, and some may even be described as being the spawn of the king. Not yet in “Taki 183” (1971), but in later writings (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984; Gastmann, 2010; Mailer & Naar, 1974), the imitator, the novice, the one who was young and not so adept at writing graffiti all-over, was labeled the plaything or “toy” (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p. 27). With this naming of the worst player (and usually the youngest player, sometimes a copy-cat preadolescent sibling) of the name-writing graffiti game as a plaything, as a toy, there was a wink to the inherent play in the graffiti

⁸ I bring up agency here in order to direct the reader to observe how the agency assigned to graffiti changes and grows over a short period of time as seen in the three texts in my corpus. Here, in “Taki 183” (1971), the agency afforded to graffiti is that it can influence others to pirate it. In the next chapter, Mailer and Naar (1974) will endow graffiti with politically subversive agency (amongst many other readings), and in Chapter 5, graffiti will reach its peak agency as an original art which “lights up the city” in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p. 6).

phenomenon. Because the graffiti writer who did not play well was labeled a toy, those who did play well did not think themselves part of a game at all; they were much more serious, like kings. Although many have written about the graffiti phenomenon and used the terminology of kings and toys (e.g., Chalfant & Cooper, 1984; Lachmann, 1988; Mailer & Naar, 1974; Stewart, 2009), none have explicitly recognized that they were writing about something that mostly took place in the subjective fantasy worlds of their informants.

In discussing play, Sutton-Smith (1997) pointed out that “Children often act out (play) what later they will be able to talk about as made-up stories” (p. 143). If to be king did not require noble birth, but rather was based on the meritocracy of who could write their name the most, then anyone with enough determination could become king. When others agreed with the parameters of the rules and the claim, the fantasy blossomed in the intersubjective space of the imaginary and the person who wrote their name frequently on walls and objects was accepted as king. This fantasy of a teenager elevated to king was the biggest pay-off for graffiti writers. It was their imagined status as a king, or being the best in one subjective way or another, which continuously revealed play as the core aspect of the graffiti phenomenon. Castleman (1982) demonstrated this by giving his first chapter to (king) Lee’s fantastic interpretation of the impact his work had on the people in the city. Harker (2005) wrote that “play is most clearly defined as ‘the active exploration of individual and social imaginaries, built up in the spaces of everyday life’” (p. 50). By overlooking important factual details (that kings and queens do not exist in the United States)⁹ and allowing fantasy to remain the foundation of the overall argument (e.g., “Taki 183 is king” who “spawns pen pals”), most scholars and other writers created and maintained the intersubjective space of the graffiti phenomenon.

One other individual fantasy particular to Taki 183 appeared at the end of the piece. Taki 183 imagined that if he were to go to a psychiatrist “and tell him I’m Taki 183. I’m sure that will be enough to get me a psychological deferment” (“Taki 183,” 1971). The rhetoric of graffiti-writing as a symbol of a psychological disorder goes back to at least the 1950s (Kinsey, 1953), and “the king” Taki knows this. After being hailed as king and reveling in his exploits, Taki used his imagination to dream about his future, imagining that his child’s play would protect him from growing up. When faced with adulthood, he imagined he had discovered a way to use a youth game to protect him from having to perform his adult duties.

⁹ Graffiti writers are modern day Don Quixotes in the United States of America. Just as Cervantes explained that Don Quixote was inspired by old tales of knights and played at being a knight by living up to the codes in the tales of ancient knights, the graffiti writers have heard tales of kings and queens and the windmills they needed to vanquish were walls and objects all-over the city.

The anxiety caused by the impending draft to Vietnam for soldier-aged boys may have aroused intense fantasies in teenagers about ways to manage the impending pressures of adulthood and perhaps war (as I will discuss later). As Sutton-Smith (1997) said, “Playing is about the ontology of being a player and the dreams that that sustains” (p. 106). The graffiti game for teens in 1970 New York City was open enough to sustain powerful dreams as varied as being a king in a nation that didn’t recognize kings and deceiving and manipulating the American military.

In *The Sociology of Childhood*, Corsaro (2005) described a scene of young children at play. The game the children were playing involved one child being chosen to be “it” (a scary monster). The other children were to get close to her, scream “monster,” run away and, most importantly, not get caught by her. Corsaro labeled this “approach-avoidance play,” explaining that “Approach-avoidance play is a primarily nonverbal pretend play routine in the peer culture of preschool children in which children identify, approach, and then avoid a threatening agent or monster” (p. 135). The stories of graffiti writers are littered with examples of approach-avoidance play. Lee gave a number of these stories to Castleman (1982) in *Getting Up*. As Lachmann (1998) observed, “Even as writers protest that their graffiti are a positive addition to the cityscape and should be legal, they relish the contest to elude police capture” (p. 235). The police, the Transit Authority workers, the dogs, the third rail, gang members, and vigilantes are all “bogeymen” for graffiti writers. There is always a story of getting close to the bogeymen and then getting away from them, or getting caught by them and being forced to quit the game. The only noble reason to quit writing graffiti is because one was caught in the approach-avoidance play.

Approach-avoidance stories reveal more of the inherent play in the graffiti phenomenon, because it is through these stories that writers learn the rules of the graffiti game. To get away from the law or escape injury is exciting, but when the young person does not get away, that experience usually marks the moment they stop playing the game. Taki 183 brought up the approach-avoidance play when he described why Julio 204 didn’t write graffiti anymore, “he was busted and stopped” (“Taki 183,” 1971). Taki 183 may have heard in the street the story that Julio 204 was caught and that is why he stopped writing graffiti, or he may have made it up. Still, the same story is repeated again and again to explain why any writer would stop writing: somehow, it’s always because the writer failed at the approach-avoidance play (that is, s/he “got caught”). Mailer and Naar (1974) pointed to a teen’s death and another teen’s near-death experience on the subway tracks as reasons for teenagers to stop writing (p. 14). Others pointed to the dangers of police and their security dogs (Castleman,

1982; Chalfant & Cooper, 1984; Stewart, 2010). Even Taki's boast that "I'll never retire" was part of the approach-avoidance play, where the bogeyman was not a physical monster but the existential chimera of adult responsibility, and by "never retiring" or "never giving up my marker" ("Taki 183," 1971), Taki could go into old age with the young person's game protecting him from the adult bogeyman.

Another important feature of approach-avoidance play is its universality. As Sutton-Smith (1997) observed, "Approach-avoidance play, a pretend play routine in which children identify, approach, and avoid a threatening agent or monster, is especially interesting because its production has been documented in several cultures which indicates its possible universality" (p. 141). The universality of the graffiti phenomenon led me to closely read and question "Taki 183" (1971), seeking new insight into what makes the graffiti phenomenon so universally appealing. I have found that some of the universal appeal of graffiti could be explained by features that are shared in play, one major feature being the use of imagination, and another being approach-avoidance-play. The universal appeal of graffiti might not be in the act of *writing* on walls and objects at all, but rather in its *playful performance*; walls and objects become a space on which young people can project their imaginations, dreams, and aspirations. The idealistic and subjective rules of the graffiti phenomenon provide a frame within which the imagination can work.

The graffiti phenomenon has always been explained as a phenomenon created by young people (see Austin, 2001, p. 41; Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p.14; Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 5). I have supported and extended this explanation by investigating the name-writing game found in *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972) and the graffiti phenomenon in "Taki 183" (1971) and identifying in them certain features of preadolescent play that are central to the allure of the graffiti phenomenon. The imagination of Taki and his peers was the basis for "Taki 183," and several scholars (Austin, 2001; Castleman, 1982; Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) have said the piece was more influential in recruiting young people to the game than any single teen graffiti writer. This suggests that, to understand the slow birth and growth of the graffiti phenomenon, the amount of adult involvement in the graffiti phenomenon must be examined.

Cult of the Child, Adults in Play

The graffiti phenomenon might not have developed the powerful youth appeal that it has without the constant adult attention that was given to it. Several scholars (Austin, 2001; Castleman, 1982; Cresswell, 1992) pointed to this by discussing the bias found in *The New York Times* Editorial Section against the graffiti phenomenon. The media's attention, for better or worse, forced the graffiti phenomenon to be more than child's play. Now graffiti

writers could enhance and solidify their status in the graffiti community if the media took notice of their work, and city officials had an anonymous, young, and visible culprit to blame for many public problems. Hence, it is useful to consider the adults in child's play. As Harker (2005) noted, "...in thinking and writing about playing, we must realize that even in child-centered studies, there are a great many more bodies playing than just the young people involved" (p. 59). The adult who wrote "Taki 183" (1971), I argue, had considerably more impact on the graffiti phenomenon than the teenager who wrote the name Taki 183 on walls. The decision to write the piece as a Bildungsroman – a classic coming of age story – that is, to accept the imagination of the teenage informants at face value and frame the piece based on their fantasies, and then to place this Bildungsroman in *The New York Times*, exposes and acknowledges the extent of adult influence in the making of the graffiti phenomenon.

Sutton-Smith (1997) argued that:

Children can have their own autonomous play culture that attempts to be independent of adult cultural forms, insofar as the children are the ones who organize and maintain it through their own interactions, metacommunications, and framings, such as play and games. (pp. 114-115)

The autonomous play culture found in the child name-writing in *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972) was shown to be dependent on the imagination of the players; it could exist as a game on its own because adults were not active in the "interactions, metacommunications, and framing" of it. Yet, once the adult actant published "Taki 183" (1971), the autonomous play culture of the name-writing game changed. It was no longer independent of adult cultural forms, which eventually led to the expulsion of preadolescents from the game, by the teenagers and adults who took control of the game. An adult wrote a story about one teenage individual playing what was a preadolescent game and accepted his subjective fantasy about what it meant. The adults behind *The New York Times* published the story and the graffiti phenomenon overtook the meaning making power of WoWO.

After "Taki 183" (1971), it would never be enough to be the king of graffiti without some form of media recognition. Evidence of this claim can be found in Castleman's (1982) focus on the graffiti writer Lee, who starred in the motion picture *Wild Style* (1983) and was featured in numerous books about the graffiti phenomenon (such as *Subway Art* [Chalfant & Cooper, 1984] and *Spray Can Art* [Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987]). Media recognition of a few writers would solidify their place as kings in the history of the graffiti phenomenon. Accordingly, for the graffiti writer, securing photographic or television footage of the graffiti phenomenon in the media, whether as praise or disapproval, became a highly coveted goal.

This understanding of graffiti is often overlooked for a reading that claims the graffiti writers wrote illegible messages so that only other graffiti writers could understand them. On the contrary, “Taki 183” (1971) demonstrates the graffiti phenomenon was born of a collaboration between teenagers and adult actants.

This insight points to a major argument found in *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983), that words captured in print about an event shape the event in memory and can, in turn, create a “thing” out of unplanned and uncoordinated actions. Printed words (and/or other media) about an experience or the lack thereof, shape how the experience is re-viewed and remembered. Anderson, quoting Hobsbawm’s (1983a) description of how the French Revolution became a “thing,” stressed this point: “Like a vast shapeless rock worn to a boulder by countless drops of water, the experience was shaped by millions of printed words into a ‘concept’ on the printed page, and, in due course, into a model” (p.16). The attention given to the name-writing play, captured in print and in photographs in a major newspaper, both made known this experience and serves as a historical marker of the experience.

One major difference between “Taki 183” (1971) and *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972), and perhaps another reason why “Taki 183” (1971) is the first artifact of the graffiti phenomenon and *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972) is not, is that *Golden Boy* is closer to a sociological study of contemporary U.S. WoWO, whereas “Taki 183” (1971) is a picaresque tale focused on the graffiti phenomenon disguised as a newspaper article. Both take as their protagonist a young boy writing his chosen and given nickname on walls and objects in the city, but only in “Taki 183” does the protagonist experience growth.

Golden Boy (Kohl, 1972), as a type of study on children’s writings on walls, is not unfamiliar to sociologists. In *The Cult of Childhood*, Boas (1966) introduced two studies from the 19th century. The first was Toepffer’s (1848) *Reflexions et menus-propos d’un peintre Genevois*. Boas (1966) wrote that Toepffer, “discusses the drawings of children, *les petits bonshommes* which they draw on walls and in the margins of their books. But he also compares them with the *graffiti* in Pompeii and on the barracks walls of soldiers” (p. 80). The second was Ricci’s (1882) *L’Arte dei bambini*. Boas (1966) wrote that Ricci:

began with *les petits bonshommes*, in his case drawings he found on a wall in Bologna under an archway...The whole wall...was covered in *graffiti* and he concluded that those near the bottom had been made by children. They were *di poco valore estetico* but started a chain of thought in him which eventuated in his book. (p. 81)

Boas pointed to these studies on his continuum of the historical emergence of sociological studies of child behavior and the move towards quasi- veneration of the child as an innocent primitive in the 20th century, what Key (1909) referred to as *The Century of the Child*. Both studies referenced the same early links made in the 20th century between ancient instances of graffiti (e.g., Pompeii), soldier graffiti, and child graffiti, assuming and forging a connection.¹⁰ Boas (1966) framed the earlier authors' interest in child graffiti as anomalous for their respective times, but offered Ricci's (1882) study as being influential on later texts focused on children's art that linked it with "the primitive, the lunatic and the unconscious mind" (p. 89), which Boas (1966) then argued led towards the growth of the cult of childhood.

The cult of childhood, which arose in the century of the child, provides one lens for seeing the influence that adult actors have had on recent child's play. That is, by the mere act of studying the children, the adults are influencing the play. It might seem that adults have had a keen interest in children for centuries, based on well-known myths, including "the myth of Meno" (Boas, 1966, p. 12), "Psalm VIII, 2" (Boas, 1966, p. 15), biblical stories such as "the Adoration of the Magi" (Boas, 1966, p. 16), and "statues of the Christ-child as king" (Boas, 1966, p. 17). However, Boas (1966) claimed that it was not until the 20th century that adults began intently theorizing and studying child behavior in hopes of rediscovering a lost understanding of the world. Sutton-Smith (1997) offered a similar observation:

What develops in the twentieth century is a complex of ideas in which the child's play and art are brought together with ideas about the imagination, about the child as a primitive, an innocent, an original, and, in effect, the true romantic, because he or she is untouched by the world and still capable of representing things in terms of an unfettered imagination. (p. 133)

Golden Boy (Kohl, 1972) is therefore part of a rich tradition of exalting child's play to seek a more innocent or naïve understanding of the world. Using the child and childhood as a metaphor for beginnings and early stages of development is common enough and reflects optimism because childhood is a stage when work can be done to affect a future outcome.

¹⁰ This connection might be about loss: time lost, people lost, life lost. There is something about encountering a dead person's writings and personal effects. It doesn't have to be a dead person per se, and can include other forms of loss: youth is fleeting, soldiers die in battle or are profoundly transformed, and ancient cities are a mystery. Maybe these are fascinating WoWO because they are enigmatic and they cannot be truly understood, but only fantasized about, similar to Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and how Keats speaks for the mysterious Urn and invents a story about what is taking place in the pictures on the Urn without having any other information about who created it and for what purpose. Writings about mysterious WoWO might be closer to Odes than academic studies.

Boas (1966) observed that most “admirers of the child-mind” would agree with Mahatma Gandhi that, “Children are innocent, loving and benevolent by nature. Evil comes in only when they become older” (p. 91). Boas added, quoting Clay, that contemporary artists of the 1950s, “in his difficult search for primordial innocence...comes face to face with the spontaneous freshness of the child” (p. 91). Needless to say, many 20th century adults were of the opinion that children had an inherent innocence, reflected in their naïve actions, which led the adults to copy those actions with the intention to be like the child. Kohl’s (1972) stark juxtaposition in *Golden Boy* of taxing and demanding adult U.S. WoWO side by side with child’s play WoWO highlighted how adults viewed child graffiti, namely, that it was apolitical and perhaps even innocent of politics because it did not broach those topics.

Boas (1966) wrote about a change at the turn of the century:

That there did arise a nostalgia for childhood is indubitable and that it appeared not only in the opinions of artists and writers but also in critical essays is equally indubitable. For instance, we find Paul Klee writing in 1906 „Es ist eine grosse Not und eine grosse Notwendigkeit, beim Kleinsten beginnen zu müssen. Wie neugeboren will ich sein, nichts wissen von Europa, gar nichts. Keine Dichter kennen, ganz schwunglos sein, fast Ursprung.” (p. 89)¹¹

Klee was not the only artist who desired a return to an idealized and imagined innocence. Boas noted how modern and surrealist artists strove to be like the child. He wrote that, when Jean Miro “went over to the surrealist group, it was obvious that the unchecked mind of the child had been his ideal” (p. 97). Interestingly enough, later critics would point to the same artists who emulated the child’s creativity in the surrealist movement when describing the pictures of graffiti in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974).

Early observers of pre-adolescent WoWO, as Boas (1966) reported, approached the child’s work with mystery and wonder, never denying or doubting the children’s claims, and even accepting and encouraging their fantastic ways of interpreting the everyday. Boas himself highlighted the stories that children gave about their drawings:

Anyone with experience of children’s paintings will recall how the child will extract from his scrawls and daubs a whole story, identifying in the greatest detail the elements of the narrative. That the visual aspect of these details does not correspond to anything to which the adult is accustomed is a matter of no importance. As dreams

¹¹ “It is a distressing need, yet necessary, to begin from the smallest part. I would like to be newborn, and not know anything about Europe, nothing. Not to know any poet, to not be energized by their ideas, to start from the origin of life.” (All translations from German are my own)

violate all the laws of physics, so the child's drawings violate all the laws of projective geometry. (pp. 95-96)

Similarly, reading "Taki 183" (1971) requires listening to the fantasies of young teens with the same intensity one would afford a child's explanation of her drawing. The picture in "Taki 183" of a door with names all over it could either be a door that needs a paint job or the evidence for a story about a king who inspired hundreds through his exploits and wielded an awesome power with his magic marker against the terror of the American military.

It was not only the sociological focus on children's studies in the 20th century that led Boas (1966) to locate the cult of childhood. The idea of children as the true romantics seemingly seeped into all discourse of the time, as "leading modern artists, such as Picasso, Matisse, Gris, Kandinsky and Klee, [too] avow[ed] that they would like to be able to draw like children, because children draw what they imagine and not what they see" (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 133).

Adult artists of the early 20th century sought out innocence with fervor and rejected more time-honored forms and methods. As Boas (1966) observed, "When cultural primitivism was upheld in the field of art, the moment had come to praise the art of children" (p. 102). In fact, this was some of the impetus for Mailer and Naar (1974) to write the essay *The Faith*, a point I will discuss in the next chapter.

The "innocent", "primitive", "original" and "true romantic" labels can all be seen in the name-writing game in *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972), especially when it is juxtaposed with the U.S. WoWO of the time. The child's name-writing game was thought of as this innocent, primitive, and romantic practice until the teenagers of Taki 183's cohort began to be playful with it. It was through the teenagers' playfulness with the child's game in 1970 that we could observe the slow genesis of the graffiti phenomenon.

Questions of Origin

Although the urge to identify one precise starting point for the graffiti phenomenon, and one precise practitioner to act as the Moses-like figure from whom the subculture emerged is understandable, I believe it is misguided. In my reading, I reject any single writer as "first" and offer instead a more organic genesis story involving the young people of New York City initiating and playing the game featured in "Taki 183" (1971) and also the adult observations and writings on it.

The slow birth of the graffiti phenomenon takes shape in our imagination when "for a couple of years" before Taki 183 began writing, Julio 204 was writing his name locally in his neighborhood "but was busted and stopped" ("Taki 183," 1971). The piece explained that

“Taki 183” covers one year of Taki 183’s graffiti career, starting in the summer of 1970 and ending in the summer of 1971. Taki 183 took inspiration from Julio 204’s “form” and “began sneaking it onto ice cream trucks” at the beginning of the summer of 1970. Taki said, “nobody else was writing similar graffiti.” During that year when Taki 183 was writing “his name and street number everywhere,” the author of “Taki 183” maintained that “hundreds of imitators,” including “Joe 136, BARBARA 62, EEL 159, YANK 135, and LEO 136” began writing their names on walls and objects throughout New York City as well. As they helped spread the playfulness to other places, even more young people would imitate their new intervention in WoWO. “Taki 183,” the piece, spawned more pen pals than Taki 183, the person, did. The article gave the graffiti phenomenon a face, but the graffiti phenomenon was gestating over the years 1970-1971 among many other teens. Some of the teenage originators were mentioned in the piece, but most were not. Nonetheless, they were the first graffiti writers, the young people of New York City in 1970 who were playing the name-writing game, choosing their own names and writing them “all-over,” not yet made famous by *The New York Times*.

The author of “Taki 183” (1971) interviewed “Floyd Holoway, Transit Authority patrolman,” who said he had “caught teen-agers from [sic] all parts of the city, all races and religions and all economic classes.” Patrolman Holoway’s quote reads like a figure of speech, but the intent is clear: the essential characteristic worth noting about the people writing this graffiti, the ones playing this specific game, was that they were teenagers in New York City. This is the slow beginning of the graffiti subculture that I wish to point to—teenagers from all races and from all over the city were taking part in a writing game on walls and objects from the summer of 1970 until the summer of 1971 when “Taki 183” was published. The graffiti phenomenon began in 1970 when the teenagers started writing all-over: writing “all-over” is what separated the local preadolescent game from the graffiti phenomenon.

“Taki 183” (1971), the published piece itself, is often mentioned as the birth of the wider graffiti phenomenon. As Austin (2001) noted, “Most observers of the time...claim that the number of writers increased dramatically after the New York Times took notice in the summer of 1971” (p. 49). The author of “Taki 183” (1971) described how the teenagers organized the game on their own as well as the slow birth of the graffiti phenomenon by the young people who wrote on vehicles that went between different neighborhoods (e.g., ice cream trucks) over the course of a year. During the summer months, the ice cream trucks carried the preadolescent message to other neighborhoods. Young people living by Central Park might have seen names representing Washington Heights. Ice cream trucks gave way to

subways and busses during the colder months and when school was back in session. Students talked about the graffiti name-writing game in many high schools, and new practitioners decided on their own to join in writing their chosen name all-over. Taki 183 said he brought a marker with him “everywhere he goes” and wrote his name. Still others in the cohort were writing in hard to reach places and on and inside subway cars.

It cannot be said that one person truly invented the graffiti phenomenon; it is an open practice, constantly changing and continually expanded by a host of different actors. The slow genesis points to an origin centered in play, which, I argue, is central to the appeal of the graffiti phenomenon to young people living in cities around the world. The graffiti phenomenon, as a rite of passage for teenagers, arose as an agreement in the intersubjective space between Taki 183 and his cohort, *The New York Times*, and readers of both the newspaper and the walls. The graffiti phenomenon was sustained by imagination and belief.

But who were the young people? Many have argued that the graffiti phenomenon was more about a particular ethnicity or race than it was about play (Baudrillard, 1975; Lachmann, 1988; Mailer and Naar, 1974). Were they Black, Puerto Rican, or White? Cresswell (1992) wrote, “Graffiti is not just ‘out-of-place’ because it is misplaced figuration – its ‘otherness’ is also connected to its assumed source – the ethnic minorities of urban New York” (p. 139). The assumption that Black and Puerto Rican youth were the source of the graffiti phenomenon goes along, however, with the long “commercial imperative for the media to focus on...black men in particular, as being the source of crime and a threat to white interests” (Stabile, 2006, p. 244). I argue here that race was not as important to the early writers as scholars have claimed. However, race and class are always already associated with the graffiti phenomenon and cannot be leaped over, either. These topics must be addressed because, if not, inconsistent readings of the graffiti phenomenon can come about. Reading the early graffiti phenomenon as anything but an activity performed by an age group in a particular place, the melting pot of New York City, would exclude some of the biggest producers of the graffiti phenomenon and maintain the scapegoat of “black men in particular” (Stabile, 2006, p. 244) for a practice that was performed by various different youth.

The two texts I discussed in the literature review for this chapter, *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) and *Taking the Train* (Austin, 2001) were books devoted entirely to the graffiti phenomenon. I sought clarity on the genesis story of the phenomenon in these texts, but instead found that neither text explored this concept of origin in particularly detailed ways. Perhaps surprisingly, it was in Cresswell’s (1992) thesis, *In Place/Out of Place*, a study of the link between geography and ideology, where Taki 183 was not just employed as a trope

but his individual Greek-ness was used to open the discussion of the graffiti phenomenon's origin and the ideology of writings out-of-place. In "Taki 183" (1971), we learned that the name "Taki" was the Greek diminutive form of the name Demetrius, connecting an ethnicity to this "first" writer. Cresswell (1992) used the well-known story of Lord Byron carving his name on a column of an ancient Greek temple outside of Athens and juxtaposed it with the Greek/American Taki 183 writing with Magic Marker on subways in New York City. By showing the difference in reception between Lord Byron and Taki 183's public name-writing, Cresswell hinted at the openness of interpretation and signification of WoWO. Cresswell showed that the ideology of place (what is "in place" and what is "out of place") depended on context and the viewer. Lord Byron represented a civilized WoWO, the signature of a great poet and representative of the powerful British Empire, whereas Taki represented crude WoWO, the play-name of a child, and even perhaps the bygone Hellenic period. Cresswell suggested that WoWO acts as a conquering agent, and that WoWO is "in-place" when used on conquered lands by agents of conquest.¹² New York City was supposed to be the center of the world, yet the burned out and dilapidated landscape of The Bronx and Uptown Manhattan in the 1970s looked similar to the Athens of Lord Byron's time, with abandoned temples and demolished ruins, and inhabitants making do amongst them. That Lord Byron's WoWO was revered while Taki's was dismissed in a similar landscape says more about the ideology of space and place than any inherent truths found in the act of WoWO.¹³

Taki's Greek ancestry provides a good segue to the discussion of the origins of the graffiti phenomenon because it calls up the widespread and debunked narrative that Western Civilization began with the Classical Greeks. This position is criticized for its Eurocentric a priori, leaving out the contributions to culture that other cultures, such as the Ancient Egyptians, made. In this argument, though, it is not enough to then simply accept Ancient Egypt as the birthplace of Western Civilization because there were others who also influenced their world, and so the question of origin becomes a matter of punctuation of history. It becomes clear that stories of origin reflect decisions about inclusion and exclusion. Similar to

¹² Interestingly this idea lends itself well to the fantasy of graffiti writers, that they become kings after writing their names all-over. Not only for his WoWO in Sounion, but the legend of Lord Byron in Greece also lends itself well to the fantasies of graffiti writers. After praising the ancient Greek culture, Lord Byron fought for the 19th century Greek state against the Ottoman empire and has since then been considered a national hero to many Greeks, with statues and plaques created in his honor.

¹³ I wonder what Lord Byron's imagination had him believe his carving his name would perform? Was he connecting with Homer, ancient Greek mythology, Poseidon, and the gods and demi-gods? Did Byron imagine himself something like a "king" for carving his name on the temple? Could "Lord" Byron, too, have been engaged in play? A close reading of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage could support that; by merely evaluating the title and the word "Childe" (a medieval term for a young man candidate for knighthood), one can see the fantasy at work in Lord Byron's adventures, deeds, and writings.

features of play discussed earlier, “inclusion...implies exclusion” and “Identity markers like ethnic origin...are used in inclusion and exclusion” (Meire, 2007, p. 4). With this in mind, claiming one person or one people as the creators of a culture inherently must leave out other actants who also may have been important to the final outcome. This can be read as a political move, including or excluding others based on what power dictates, with underlying racial implications.

The response demanded to the long-taught story of Greek genesis for Western Civilization is that the genesis is more complicated than what can be summed up in a simple pronouncement, and that there is no “first,” but rather, gradual change over time, which in retrospect can appear to be major moments of intense change. And that is the same response the graffiti origin story demands. Although New York City has a long history of unofficial segregation practices based on race and class, the graffiti phenomenon reflects that history only insofar as it undermines racial and class segregation by not having an origin based on racial and class solidarity but an origin based on solidarity in being a teenager. After 1971, the graffiti phenomenon excludes preadolescents, names them toys, disclaims any connection to play, and invites adults to participate as angry or praising spectators and theorists. There was a time when adults were interested in preadolescent WoWO. Teenagers saw this, hijacked the game, and made the adults give them their attention, effectively bullying preadolescents and reinforcing a hierarchy of importance by age. The teens will be treated as adults and respected as adults as long as they can keep the adults interested in their special game, a game that little kids are not allowed to play.

When writing about the graffiti phenomenon, two worlds are implicated, similar to the two worlds represented earlier by adult WoWO and child WoWO. That is, there is the world most agree upon, the consensus reality where there are names written on walls and objects that signify teenage nicknames; and there is also the imaginary world of graffiti writers, where the number of times that a name appears, or the beauty of the letters of the name, or the size of the name means that one is a king (or some other fantasy role). The graffiti world has kings and queens, plus toys and approach-avoidance monsters who are always close behind. While most scholars accept this initial induction, they question other aspects of the fantasy (e.g., Lachmann, 1988, p. 233; Stewart, 1994, p. 213). They do not accept everything the practitioners say, especially if it contradicts what they hold to be true in the consensus reality. One example is race. Graffiti writers often deny that there is one race that graffiti is written by or that it represents or signifies (Castleman, 1982, p. 118; Stewart, 1994, p. 225). Yet, the scholarly world constantly attempts to frame graffiti writing in terms of race or class (Austin,

2001; Lachmann, 1988). Perhaps it is not true that graffiti is as racially diverse as graffiti writers like to believe, but then it might also be not true that they are the kings they say they are. Their claims are what make up their idealistic and meritocratic imaginary world, however. The initial acceptance of fantasy by scholarly observers, followed by rejection of many selected fantasies subsumed in the graffiti phenomenon, highlights a fork-in-the-road of realities and fantasies, which observers and practitioners alike often overlooked.

Hugo Martinez was an important adult actant who helped form the first graffiti organization in the early years of the graffiti phenomenon. His story is instructive on the line between realities and fantasies. In 1972, Martinez was “a junior and a sociology major at City College in Manhattan” (Castleman, 1982, p. 117) when he founded the United Graffiti Artists (UGA) organization. Under Martinez’s guidance, UGA members were able to take part in shows where they could display and sell their graffiti work to a larger public. What makes UGA interesting for the discussion of the origin of the graffiti phenomenon, and the racial significations attached to it, is Martinez’s early understanding of the graffiti phenomenon. Castleman wrote of Martinez, “He was convinced that the majority of writers were Puerto Rican teenagers...” (p. 117). This belief led to tensions in the UGA group and one member was quoted as saying, “It got to be a thing where Hugo got it into a Latino or Hispanic type of organization. ...the fact is that Hugo is of a background and he was biased racially in terms of that background” (p. 121). In this same anecdote, it was reported that Martinez did not support female group members either and was responsible for rejecting an artistically talented young woman who was new to the group. As a result of Martinez’s adult meddling in the make-up of the teenage group, he was demoted by the graffiti writers in the group from “director to advisor” (p. 125). I offer Martinez and his consensus reality reading of the graffiti phenomenon as a masculine and Latino identifier, and how the teenagers writing graffiti at the time ultimately rejected him for this stance, to counter the potency of readings that privileged one race over another race in the early years of the graffiti phenomenon. The teenaged writers of the time did not read graffiti as a practice defined by a particular race and their views should be placed alongside adult racial readings that presented “evidence” of race being important to the graffiti phenomenon.

Lachmann (1988) too, in his study “Graffiti as Career and Ideology,” took the fantasies of kings and their followers as truth but then sought to identify racial and economic consensus reality reasons, as well as the breakdown of the family, to explain how a graffiti king gets to be a graffiti king and why he later gives up his crown. Lachmann, having claimed to have six “graffiti artists” (p. 233), as agreed upon by 25 graffiti peers of the moment,

interviewed the artists about their “technique,” “encounters with the police,” and “what plans they had for their futures as graffiti writers” (p. 233). He “also elicited information on each writer’s family and background” (p. 233). Lachmann ended by asserting that it was because graffiti kings couldn’t make enough money in the art world that they stopped writing graffiti. Lachmann’s conclusion is far removed from understanding graffiti as play, which offers the imagination and approach-avoidance play as perhaps less complicated reasons kings become kings and kings later stop writing.

My point, however, is not that race was irrelevant. I propose that we can accept that there were more Black and Puerto Rican writers in New York City for a period, and also accept that the graffiti phenomenon itself was not essentially based on any single race but on an age group. Castleman (1982) showed Martinez’s attempt to link graffiti to Puerto Ricanness and masculinity violated the understandings and commitments of the young practitioners themselves. Lachmann (1988) attempted to seek meaning with firm roots in the consensus reality for a practice that subsisted mostly on fantasy. I maintain that, if graffiti were a game made exclusively for one particular race or ethnicity, then it would not have become so popular around the world. As the principle of universality of play would suggest, graffiti was popular as a youth activity because it is a game created by young people with play at its core.

Austin and the Space Between Julio 204 and Taki 183

Austin (2001) referred always to “Taki 183” (1971) and the 17-year-old Taki 183, to reference the start of the graffiti phenomenon: for example, “Early writers, like Taki 183...” (p. 47), “The article on Taki 183...” (p. 80), and “...the initial 1971 article about Taki 183...” (p. 105). Rather than engage with the specificity of the text of “Taki 183” (1971) however, Austin (2001) sidestepped it and thereby undermined Taki 183’s imagined position as “the first graffiti writer.” Austin admitted that “Taki 183” (1971) was the vehicle that would make Taki 183 the “best known (at least in the public eye) of these early writers” (Austin, 2001, p. 49), but by using the parenthetical, “(at least in the public eye),” Austin subtly chipped away at Taki 183’s claim to originality, implying that Taki 183 was not so well regarded in graffiti circles. By writing in parentheses that Taki 183 was well known in the public eye, Austin privileged the “eye” of the “real” graffiti writers without revealing that that vision was a subjective, teenage, ever-changing fantasy, which itself privileged the “eye” of the public over their own.

Austin (2001) devoted nearly four pages of text to examples of what could have inspired the style of graffiti and the placement of graffiti, including allusions from books to boxing, and from Broadway to Hollywood. Austin even wrote that graffiti may have started in

Philadelphia in 1959, but he then retreated from that story for lack of rigorous exploration of the claim.¹⁴ While I appreciate Austin's "rhizome-like" network, I find Austin's constant diminution of the individual Taki 183, and by connection the written piece "Taki 183" (1971), as an important actant, to be misguided.

On the origin story, Austin (2001) claimed:

Although the title of "first writer" in New York City is contested, the most popular origin-story among writers goes back to the late-sixties youth gang graffitiists who inspired Taki 183. Julio 204, a Puerto Rican youth who wrote within the boundaries of his Manhattan gang turf, is usually credited as being the original New York City writer. (p. 42)

While Austin claimed Julio 204 was Puerto Rican, which I can only assume was an educated guess, Gastman (2010) later quoted a contemporary of Taki's as saying Julio 204 was Colombian (p. 54). Austin (2001) also did not support his claim of the most popular origin story with evidence; in fact, the more popular story was that of Taki 183, who became the trope of graffiti. Austin skipped over Taki 183 to claim Julio 204 as the "original" without explaining that the evidence for this claim came solely from "Taki 183" (1971). Because there is no other writing from before "Taki 183" that mentions Julio 204, and no one has ever come forward as Julio 204, the only connection to that "original" writer is through "Taki 183." It is this small amount of information, gleaned from "Taki 183," which allowed Austin (2001) to connect late 1970s subway art to the late 1960s child's game described in *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972) as the new starting text for the graffiti phenomenon. Austin (2001) did not sympathize with Taki because the media had turned him into a trope, making him seem more important than he actually was. Austin, it would appear, wanted Julio to be first because he was "innocent," that is, untouched by adult actants.

Austin (2001) explained how Taki 183 drew the attention of the media when he wrote: Working as a courier-messenger afforded him the opportunity to write along the routes of his deliveries, in areas where his name was *more visible to the elite of the city but less likely to be seen by other appreciative teenagers.*" (p. 49; italics added)

Austin drew this information from Stewart's (1989, 2009) follow-up interview with Taki 183. This is the controversy I alluded to earlier: different people and media outlets constantly interviewed Taki 183 over the 20 years that followed publication of "Taki 183" (1971) because his name was the trope known to all. All asked for clarification as to how he became

¹⁴ Another claim about the origin of the graffiti phenomenon and the "first" writer has been centered on Philadelphia and "Cornbread," who predated Taki 183 and was also a trope in Philadelphia newspapers for some time.

the go-to trope in the 1970s. His story of how the piece came to be written in *The New York Times* changed ever so slightly over the years. Taki 183 became famous in the public eye and stopped writing graffiti, while other graffiti writers were writing more graffiti and pushing the phenomenon in newer ways. Yet, Taki was still interviewed and always mentioned, and his name was repeated over and over as a trope of the graffiti phenomenon, which led to a backlash against Taki 183 by everyone paying attention in the city at the time.¹⁵

Austin (2001) ended his deprecating assessment of Taki 183 with this comment:

Taki concentrated his work on the Upper East Side and the business districts of Manhattan, the stomping grounds of novelists, journalists, television executives, and other media brokers who might see his tag and mention it in one of the media. (p. 49)

This contradicted what the author of “Taki 183” (1971) reported, which was that Taki wrote “all-over the city on walls along Broadway, at Kennedy International Airport, in New Jersey, Connecticut, upstate New York and other places.” Austin (2001) learned this new information from an interview given by another famous graffiti name of the time, someone who devoted his life to graffiti and probably should be recognized more prominently than Taki 183, namely, Tracy 168. Tracy 168 was also a “king” in the world of graffiti and put forth his own theories for how media functioned. Tracy 168, unaware that the piece was less journalistic writing and more novelistic writing, put forth the idea that Taki 183 was sought after by media because he wrote on walls and objects in the Upper East Side and not because of the initial anonymous piece. Based on Tracy 168’s uncorroborated and teleological theory about how media worked, Austin was able to frame Taki 183 as a media hungry writer, and frame what Taki 183 did mainly in terms of some kind of fame that later novelists, journalists, and media brokers would pick up on, which was not the same fame that the true connoisseurs of taste, the young people, had for graffiti.

The Upper East Side is located next to Harlem, and in a segregated city, names of neighborhoods become euphemisms for race and class. The Upper East Side signified elite White wealth and Harlem signified either Black or Puerto Rican poverty, even though the two neighborhoods bordered on each other. To explain that Taki wrote in wealthy White neighborhoods and *that* brought him fame is an unfounded theory. By placing Taki 183 in the Upper East Side, Austin (2001) knocked down Taki’s street credibility by aligning him with

¹⁵ In *The New York Times* on May 11, 1973, on the page 41 “News Summary and Index,” there is a small anecdote about the Big Apple Ball attended by 150 elite New Yorkers of the time. On a questionnaire given to the attendees, one question “Which three people should be banished from New York?” brought responses of ousting the mayor, the president, the governor, and “Taki 183, the graffiti scribbler.” By this point, graffiti writers and elites alike decided they did not like Taki 183, the difference being graffiti writers saw him as an individual while others regarded his name as a representative of all graffiti and a trope.

wealthy White tastemakers and not with the “real” poor Black and Puerto Rican graffiti writers and appreciators. This seemed like an attack on the person of Taki 183 because Austin did not view Taki 183 as the “every writer” – the way that name became the trope of graffiti and short-hand for the graffiti phenomenon. Rather, he saw it the way maybe a young Tracy 168 would have: Taki 183 represented one name, one person, who was maybe a king for a day while there were many other deserving names that should be remembered.¹⁶ Austin accepted the constantly changing whims of young children playing in a game as the official narrative, without recognizing it as subjective fantasy. He supposed uniformity in thought and agreement upon kings and toys, which was unfounded. Very few graffiti writers agreed on who was king. Although agreement was usually universal when a writer died, that agreement was more about respecting life and death than it was about actual claims of royalty.¹⁷

Austin (2001) implied that the opinion of the elite was less valuable to graffiti writers than the opinion of fellow graffiti writers, but he knew this was not true. He ended the page by making it clear that, in the graffiti subculture after “Taki 183” (1971), “dissemination in almost any form of commercial mass media offered a route to fame” (Austin, 2001, p. 49). Austin did not like mass media. He had greater respect for the teenagers’ opinions, which he did not acknowledge as being immature, and so he did not support Taki 183 as the originator because that is what the children were jealous about throughout the 1970s. Austin wanted to have an authentic opinion and, in graffiti folklore, it was well-known that Taki 183 was not the first writer, even though the article written about him was the first time the media seemed to take interest in the child’s game. Media thereby became important to the dissemination of the graffiti phenomenon and one’s ability to become king. “Taki 183” (1971) put forth the unverifiable claim that Taki 183 spawned pen pals and generated the subsequent trope-fame of Taki 183. Because of that (and a source of Austin’s seeming ire), media fame became the most valuable fame a graffiti writer could hope to earn. When respected media outlets accepted a graffiti writer’s fantasy, the divergent pathways at the aforementioned fork-in-the-road, which could lead to either consensus reality or fantasy, seemed not to veer too far from each other; the two even crisscrossed further down the trails, leaving it unclear whether “kings” are real or merely a fantasy.

For Austin (2001), labeling Julio 204 the originator was a means of righting a wrong (i.e., that the wrong guy got credit all those years ago). While this may have made a few

¹⁶ It should be noted that Tracy 168 continually wrote graffiti for 30-40 years and is very well known in the graffiti subculture because of his talent and longevity. Taki 183 quit writing after “Taki 183” (1971) was published.

¹⁷ This may be what connects young people WoWO with soldier WoWO and ancient city WoWO in consensus reality—a hope to respect life by respecting the dead (or the past).

graffiti-purists happy, it undermined a more inclusive, open, and subversive reading of early graffiti as being created by many teenagers rather than a specific individual. This move gave Julio 204 an agency supported only by a false reading of how the form functioned. Julio 204 was given credit as a player of the graffiti game without having written “all-over.” All-over, as a rule to a game, cannot be played by only a single person; it needs an audience and it begs for players. A game implies the existence of more than one player. All the players mentioned and not mentioned shared one characteristic, being teenagers, and these were the first writers of the graffiti phenomenon.

Austin (2001) ultimately did not accept his own exaltation of Julio 204 to the status of originator of the graffiti phenomenon. He ended the subchapter by writing, “To see Julio’s name, one would have to travel to his neighborhood” (p. 46), which highlighted the line that separated the graffiti phenomenon from the child’s name-writing game. The graffiti phenomenon was name writing on walls and objects all-over, outside of one’s neighborhood, and on ice cream trucks and busses and subways, objects that moved outside of the confines of one neighborhood, an activity that marked the start of the graffiti phenomenon and the expulsion of preadolescents like Julio 204. The divide between what Julio 204 was performing and what Taki 183 was performing was rendered concrete in Austin’s text, when he ended the subchapter with Julio 204, and began the next subchapter with “Early writers, like Taki 183” (p. 47). Austin separated the two writers symbolically with the space in between subchapters, leaving Julio 204 as a child player in a local name-writing game, and introducing Taki 183 as an early teenage player in the new all-over graffiti phenomenon. This move does not seem accidental. With this move, Austin implicitly acknowledged that “Taki 183” (1971) represented the beginning of the graffiti phenomenon, even though Austin (2001) refused to clearly say so.

Perhaps Austin (2001) was aware that the story of how Taki 183 came to be written about in *The New York Times* was not as simple as the anonymous piece put forth. Maybe Austin was repelled by the disingenuousness of the story, and the imagination and fantasy at play that were too abstruse to engage with. Perhaps he knew that the true story of Taki 183 was less heroic than it had been made out to be, and he did not want to propagate that false narrative.¹⁸ But how did we come to see a 17-year-old with a penchant for writing on walls

¹⁸ My graffiti, too, appeared in *The New York Times* (Oct. 27, 2010, “Now Everyone Can Read the Writing on the Wall”) with a full article and big color pictures, occupying both the front and last page of the art section. I became the king of graffiti that day when I reached Taki 183’s level of fame by being covered in *The New York Times*. I, too, wouldn’t give my real name. I used that *New York Times* article to apply for my Ph.D. project as a way of saying that other people, too, found my work interesting, even those high discerners of taste at *The New York Times*. But I know that that is a false narrative implied to make my work seem more important than it is. I know how it feels to have people make that assumption without saying it to them, as they congratulate and celebrate your accomplishment. But, on a personal note, the congratulations are

and objects as heroic in the first place? I argue that it is because “Taki 183” (1971) was written as a Bildungsroman.

Taki 183 as Protagonist of a Bildungsroman

Before I define Bildungsroman specifically, it might be useful to consider how “Taki 183” (1971) was written in a story telling genre, with deep meaning attached to it, by reading a similar article, reporting on similar practices, but which was held to journalistic standards. Prial (1971) published an article four months prior to publication of “Taki 183” (1971). Prial’s (1971) article, titled “Bus and Subway Vandals Cost City 2.6 –Million in ‘70” (hereafter, “Vandals”), mostly described how “youths under 16” were wreaking havoc on subways before and after school. They were reported to be smashing windows with rocks, pulling the emergency cords, and causing “small-scale riots.” The only portion devoted to graffiti reads:

Most subway and bus vandalism involves drawing moustaches or obscenities on advertising posters. But removing graffiti from stations, train cars and buses cost the Transit Authority more than \$250,000 last year. “I’d love to get my hands on the guy who invented the Magic Marker,” said a Transit Authority employee in Manhattan. (Prial, 1971)

Something to notice here, just four months before publication of “Taki 183” (1971) is that this seasoned reporter, Prial, did not mention the graffiti phenomenon. Magic Markers were used for “drawing moustaches and obscenities on advertising posters,” similar to what the author of “Taki 183” distinguished from the graffiti phenomenon. The author of “Taki 183” identified three types of graffiti: the “moustaches drawn on advertising posters and various obscenities” and what Taki was doing. Prial (1971) placed this WoWO in the same

misplaced. My graffiti was not randomly chosen based on where the reporters of *The New York Times* lived, nor did I accidentally meet a reporter from the newspaper. My graffiti was featured because I knew somebody who knew somebody. That bit of information spoils the heroic story of one being recognized solely for their brilliance in a meritocratic society by hardnosed journalists, so it feels better to allow people to assume that you were chosen on merit, rather than because you might know somebody who knows somebody. (The fantasy of living in a meritocracy is the basis for the graffiti phenomenon game, where a king becomes king based on hard work and not nepotism. Sadly the “real” world is not based on meritocracy.) *The New York Times* and most publications do not follow closely the ins and outs of their reader’s lives with an interest to report on what might concern them, as Austin (2001) has proved brilliantly. *The New York Times* sets the agenda and the people follow. I wonder out loud here, who did Taki 183 know? I do not go along with the imaginative story that Taki 183 wrote his name in wealthy White neighborhoods, and the newspapers started taking notice. That is a cause and effect fantasy, which does not hold up under scrutiny. No novelist, writer, or elite put forth the notion that Taki was king. An anonymous youth lounging on a doorstep on 183rd Street proclaimed to the world who was king. To assume wealthy White novelists shared the imagination of children and delighted in King Taki’s exploits, without the children first explaining their fantasies to them, only makes sense in the imaginary graffiti fantasy world. What is strange is that Taki **“Withholds Last Name”** (“Taki 183,” 1971; bold in original) but his exact street address is given. He “lives on 183rd Street between Audubon and Amsterdam Avenues” (“Taki 183,” 1971). It makes sense to withhold one’s last name so that the police can’t find one, but the street address nullifies that. It would be easy to go find Taki 183, knowing where he lives. I assume the answer to who wrote the piece is in Taki’s last name. Perhaps a family member knew somebody who knew somebody. This makes Taki seem less heroic. He wasn’t a free-wheeling teenager who lived by his rules and was reported on; he knew somebody. One cannot become the king of graffiti based on who they know; in the graffiti fantasy, they must work long and grueling hours to get that status.

article devoted to the violent vandalism of smashing windows and stopping subways with emergency cords, putting it in bad company and underscoring the power of WoWO to work as a means of destroying public property. Prail did not follow one of the vandals who kicked out windows, nor any student who pulled the emergency cords. Prail conducted all interviews with unnamed officials in this article about violent and aggressive youth vandalism.

Interestingly, two facts stick out from Prail's article that overlap with "Taki 183" (1971). Prail (1971) stated that "Almost all the vandals are children and the peak mischief hours are in the late afternoon, just after the high schools close." The author of "Taki 183" (1971) also observed that the writers were teenagers and the graffiti appeared "...before and after school..." Prail (1971) also reported, "The Seventh Avenue IRT line occasionally has problems after classes are dismissed at George Washington High School, which is near the 191st Street station." This subway station was eight blocks away from where Taki 183 was said to live. Prail provided the context of where, when, and how the graffiti phenomenon grew.¹⁹ In this light, Taki 183 was not a singular rebel amongst conformists. Many young people were misbehaving at this time. While Taki and cohorts were writing their names on ice cream trucks and subways, teenage peers were smashing windows, stopping trains, and causing chaos and panic amongst the public. By comparison, Taki stands out as performing an act that caused the least damage to public property. To the consensus reality, all teens were poorly behaved and bent on destruction; in the graffiti fantasy, Taki 183 was a king amongst brutes.

Prail (1971) ended the article with some numbers, noting, "Of 56 arrests last year for felonies involving vandalism, 44 of those arrested were youths under 16. There were 2,881 arrests for misdemeanors, of which 2,772 were committed by youths under 16, the authority said." Prail framed youths under 16 years-old from New York City as violent people with no respect for public property or shared space, who no one could control. He portrayed none of the behaviors in this article as worth emulating. None of the perpetrators experienced growth or were even given a voice. The young people who were the subjects of the article did not cut this article out and save it as a keepsake nor use it to boast of their exploits to their friends. Smashing windows and pulling emergency cords did not become a lasting worldwide phenomenon after this article. Notably, Prail did not take the perspective of youth into account, did not mention the draft to the Vietnam war, and did not mention any particular racial group, but only wild New York City youth in general. Prail did not glorify the behavior;

¹⁹ With the overlapping facts, phrases and locations, I wonder here if Frank J. Prail was the anonymous author of "Taki 183"?

if anything, he maintained a steady position that this was bad behavior. There was no way to frame the “little guy” as being picked on here; the little guy *was* the bully.

In contrast to Prial’s (1971) matter of fact, journalistic tone, the anonymous author of “Taki 183” (1971) framed a less accusatory story that would attract young readers. “Taki 183” was not a piece that supported the view of the Transit Authority over the young people the way “Vandals” (Prial, 1971) did; it placed them almost on even footing. The names of both youth and officials were given in “Taki 183” (1971). Never was the vandalism of smashing windows or pulling emergency cords mentioned nor did the author give the impression that the young people in New York City were out of control. One wouldn’t assume that Taki’s vandalism and the vandalism of smashing windows and pulling emergency cords were in anyway related after reading “Taki 183.” “Taki 183” was rooted more in subjective fantasy and the dreams that were sustained in the imagination of graffiti writers than in any consensus reality of official numbers and facts. Juxtaposed with the Prial (1971) article, “Taki 183” (1971) reads more like a story than a newspaper article. The author of “Taki 183” followed the protagonist over the course of a year, trusting his accounts and framing the story and outcome to suit his fantasy. Beginning as a youth in the story, Taki matured into adulthood and experienced what Hardin (1991) called an “...evolutionary change within the self, a teleology of individuality” (p. 41).

With these contrasting reports of graffiti in New York City as context, I now return to my reading of “Taki 183” (1971) as Bildungsroman. Just as I did with play, I will use an open definition of Bildungsroman that most scholars can agree with. The Bildungsroman is classically defined as “the novel of formation” (Boes, 2006, p. 239) or less formally, the coming-of-age story. In “The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism,” Bakhtin (1986) notably wrote that the Bildungsroman displays to the reader “the image of man in the process of becoming” (p. 19). Bakhtin connected personal change with the larger changes taking place in society. He “defined the Bildungsroman as a kind of novel in which ‘man’s individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence’” (Boes, 2009, pp. 648-649).

Moretti (2000), in *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, added to Bakhtin’s (1986) definition by identifying a critical defining attribute of the Bildungsroman as being focused on youth. Moretti (2000) maintained, “Youth is, so to speak, modernity’s ‘essence,’ the sign of a work that seeks its meaning in the future rather than in the past” (p. 5). Hirsch (1979), in *The Novel of Formation as Genre*, noted that the

Bildungsroman concentrates on one main character. Taylor (2000) added even more precisely to the final definition:

In such romane, the author follows the circuitous path of the hero's Bildung— development, education, cultivation, self-formation. The journey usually leads through various educative experiences in the course of which the protagonist progresses from the naivete and illusion of youth to the sobriety of mature selfhood. (p. 77)

The denouement of the Bildungsroman “culminates in a stage of self-coherence and self-recognition” (Taylor, 2000, p. 77). I contend that the author of “Taki 183” (1971) utilized the Bildungsroman framework to reveal the growth of the individual protagonist, Taki 183, alongside the historically pressing issues between teenagers and the demands made upon them by the larger society, namely, the draft to Vietnam, and young people's acts of defiance against that demand.

Taki explained that he “began sneaking his name and street number onto ice cream trucks in the neighborhood early last summer, nobody else was writing similar graffiti” (“Taki 183,” 1971). Official accounts said differently: “Officials said, however, that the problem had mushroomed during the last two years” (“Taki 183,” 1971). Interestingly, it appeared to go unnoticed that this official account refuted Taki's account. This is where the disconnect opens between Taki's fantasy world and the consensus reality of official accounts. Most scholarly and other writings on the graffiti phenomenon are based in the fantasy of the informants (see Castleman, 1982, p. 12; Lachmann, 1988, p. 233). The graffiti imagined world was based on the ideals of a meritocracy and the writers aimed to explain everything in that way. In contrast, the consensus reality was not a meritocracy. When meritocratic explanations clashed with consensus reality, the disconnect between the two realities can be seen. The Bildungsroman of Taki can only take place within the graffiti imaginary.

“Taki 183” (1971) began with a focus on an individual youth and the activity that will lead to his Bildung, the graffiti phenomenon. The author noted, “Taki is a Manhattan teenager who writes his name and street number everywhere he goes. He says it is something he just has to do.” In this first sentence, the youth from Manhattan offered no logical explanation for why he writes his name everywhere he goes. Rather, he began by framing it as an obsessive habit with no intrinsic value or purpose, similar to play.

In the next section, the author explained that Taki 183 could be found written all-over the Greater New York area, a fact that led to “hundreds of imitators” writing their nicknames and street numbers all-over. Thus, all other youth who wrote their graffiti names were framed as following Taki 183's lead, which put the responsibility for the phenomenon on Taki 183.

The anonymous author of the piece informed Taki of the estimated \$300,000 the Transit Authority reportedly spent on cleaning the graffiti. In response, Taki identified the adversary who would be one obstacle to the protagonist's development, namely, hypocritical adult treatment of teenagers. Taki said, "Why do they always go after the little guy? Why not the campaign organizations that put stickers all over the subways at election time?" ("Taki 183," 1971). Adults also utilized common shared space to advertise their messages, just as adults have always utilized WoWO as part of consensus reality, and their antipathy towards the youthful way of intervening in these spaces was where Taki located a grievance and a space to exclaim the grievance, on walls and objects. Taki was on the precipice of adulthood when this piece was written, a "17-year-old recent high school graduate" who was living in the buffer zone of youth that is the summer after graduating high school. He had this time to make a decision about his future. Would he be forced to go to Vietnam? How could he get out of having to go to war? Would he be allowed to stay home and attend university? How would the graffiti phenomenon help in his development?

The previous summer, the author of "Taki 183" (1971) indicated, was the summer before Taki's senior year in high school, and the high schooler began writing on ice cream trucks, trucks usually more closely observed by young people. Taki then went on to explain what he learned while writing graffiti over that year of development, "You don't do it for girls; they don't seem to care. You do it for yourself." This practice did not have the legible goal of finding a mate or the masculine play of conquering a woman, but was more in line with the romantic notion of finding one's self or the self-understanding found in the definition of the Bildungsroman. Taki was not seeking that which is perhaps expected at his age, a partner; his was an unaccompanied existential quest.

After other youth from his block described Taki as the king, the author introduced the reader to the other examples of WoWO that king Taki 183 had to compete with for domination of the meaning making power of WoWO ("Taki 183," 1971). The author stated, "Graffiti have had a long history in the city's subways. Kilroy, who was everywhere in World War II, left his mark along with the mustaches drawn on advertising posters and various obscenities." As discussed before, legibility was a defining characteristic of U.S. WoWO since WWII. Taki 183's intervention played with that characteristic, by still giving a symbol that can be read, but the symbol carrying such open meaning that it widened the former boundaries of legible WoWO from only consisting of legible writings, which are part of consensus reality, to being able to write non-sense (or non-consensus) messages loaded by some viewers with fantasy.

The author of “Taki 183” (1971) described the two times Taki’s graffiti writing brought him trouble, reporting, “He was once suspended from Harran High School for a day for writing on walls, though, and a Secret Service agent once gave him a stern lecture for writing on a Secret Service car during a parade.” The high school suspension and the stern lecture were two educational experiences that did not stop Taki from writing, but may have instead hardened his resolve that this graffiti phenomenon would be valuable for him one day as long as he did not give up. The author revealed that Taki was scheduled to attend a local university in two months, beginning the journey into adulthood. An important feature of the Bildungsroman is that “the protagonist progresses from the naivete and illusion of youth to the sobriety of mature selfhood” (Taylor, 2000, p. 77).

Taki started out unsure of what his ice cream truck name-writing could do for him; it was simply an obsession. His existential quest (and way of escaping adulthood) led him to forego seeking a romantic partner in order to complete his quest on his own terms. His intervention in WoWO changed the unofficially accepted rules of WoWO. He was castigated by adults for it but did not quit writing. At the end of the piece, after all of the educative experiences that he has passed through, Taki had a better idea of the power his magic marker could wield. He realized what his obsession could do for him. This single youthful protagonist “is inseparably linked to [the] historical emergence” (Boes, 2009, pp. 648-649) of his time and his story “culminates in a stage of self-coherence and self-recognition” (Taylor, 2000, p. 77). The Damocles sword of the draft to Vietnam was a major anxiety for an American teenager turning 18 at this moment. Taki gave deep meaning to his graffiti when he was quoted as saying, “Since there are no more student deferments, maybe I’ll go to a psychiatrist and tell him I’m TAKI 183. I’m sure that will be enough to get me a psychological deferment” (“Taki 183,” 1971). Taki, along with American teenager/adult relations, has grown. Taki’s attempt to use what he understands to be his graffiti fame to get out of fulfilling what is legally expected of him as an adult, to be conscribed to fight in the military, is the denouement of “Taki 183.” That is, Taki has realized that his fantasy world is strong enough to manipulate consensus reality. The protagonist has learned how to use his tools and craft to protest against the demands of his rival, the adults who would send him to war, the same hypocritical adults he identified earlier, who placed election stickers on subways. In 1971, the U.S. Congress extended the draft for two years at President Richard Nixon’s request. This decision hung over the heads of all U.S. high school students of the time, especially seniors and juniors. Taki knew that there was a hostile adult world waiting for him beyond the summer. When thinking about the inevitability of going towards that stage of life, he was

armed with the self-coherence and self-recognition that his graffiti fantasy could help him get out of war and he carried with him the tool that brought him to understand the power of his graffiti writing, his Magic Marker. The piece ended with, “I still carry my Magic Marker around with me.” There was something truly magic about that marker after all; it sustained the fantasies of the protagonist in the Bildungsroman.

I take Taki’s self-recognition to be that graffiti can be used as a means of protest and, especially if one can become the king, one might even be able to use it to stay out of war. Psychologists would gladly disqualify a graffiti king from having to fight because he would be seen as mentally unfit. This is the only clue Taki gave that his kingdom existed in the imagination of what members of the consensus reality would agree were mentally unfit people. Taki knew he was not mentally unfit and his attempt would be a ruse, but it was a ruse that might work.

In “Taki 183” (1971), the author mentioned another war, World War II, and a symbol written on walls and objects from that war, “Kilroy Was Here.” This was the first time the graffiti phenomenon was connected to Kilroy, and ever since this piece, Kilroy has been part of discussions on the graffiti phenomenon. This is one of the early questions that led my initial inquiry into this thesis: how is Kilroy related to Taki 183? This is where we can read the Bildungsroman in “Taki 183” as representing the powerful forces of history alongside an individual’s transformation. The graffiti “Kilroy Was Here” represents a closed discussion of the U.S. soldiers who fought in World War II and Korea. In 1940, the same U.S. draft law that would conscribe every generation up until Taki’s generation, *The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940*, went into effect, conscribing American men for World War II. The WoWO icon and trope that was around at the beginning of this law and represented the young men being drafted was the WoWO “Kilroy Was Here.” This same law is what scared Taki, what Taki rejected and claimed control over, and what his generation protested against. His generation eventually forced a change in the law, ending mandatory conscription in the U.S. In 1973, the mandatory draft was outlawed and the U.S. started the retreat from Vietnam. Taki’s individual growth reflects the growth of his generation and their ability to toss off the shackles of the adult world’s rite of passage in to adulthood, forced conscription to fight war.



(Fig. 5. A cartoon from the New York Daily News, January 6, 1972)

With this, it should be understood that Taki 183 is not actually connected with “Kilroy Was Here” by anything other than the fact that both messages were found on walls and objects. They did not share a similar ideology; in fact, the graffiti phenomenon measures itself against what it is not, against the ways WoWO has been utilized in the past. There is no influence from Kilroy to be found in Taki 183. Taki 183 did not want to go to war and was not emulating or copying “Kilroy Was Here.” After a close reading of “Taki 183” (1971), it is apparent that, for Taki, writing graffiti at this precise historical moment is similar in meaning to burning one’s draft card or declaring oneself a conscientious objector. It means one is against being drafted to fight the war in Vietnam.

Conclusion

Through the analysis presented in this chapter, I raised the question of whether the early graffiti phenomenon was an outgrowth of a pre-adolescent local name-writing game. Validation for this premise becomes evident when the first text of the graffiti phenomenon, “Taki 183” (1971) and a text describing U.S. WoWO before the graffiti phenomenon, *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972), are read through the lens of play studies. Imagination, approach-avoidance play, and ever-changing subjective fantasy are common threads in the many stories of individual graffiti writers. By following these threads, one can offer a more nuanced explanation of what was happening in the early graffiti phenomenon than what has been previously assumed and written.

“Taki 183” (1971) marked the first moment that the graffiti phenomenon was located and defined as a phenomenon different from all other WoWO by virtue of being written all-over. The piece made clear that there was no “first” graffiti writer and that the originators of the graffiti phenomenon were many teenagers in New York City over the course of one year, 1970-1971. Neither race nor class defined the original writers; rather, the one common factor they all shared was that they were all teenagers. When adult actants became involved in the graffiti phenomenon with the publication of “Taki 183,” they thrust graffiti into a citywide debate.

“Taki 183” (1971) was written as a Bildungsroman, in which admirers stated (and adults seemingly accepted) that the 17-year-old Taki 183 was a “king.” The protagonist king imagined that he was able to wield his status as a way to avoid the draft to Vietnam. The subjective fantasy of the writer Taki 183 avoiding the draft should not speak for the fantasies of all graffiti writers of the time, but solely for Taki 183. With that said, the subjective fantasies of any graffiti writer should not speak for all graffiti writers or the entire graffiti phenomenon, but instead be understood as personal subjective fantasy filled by imagination at play. Most writing about the graffiti phenomenon confuses and mixes fantasy and consensus reality. Scholars often shy away from looking at the graffiti phenomenon as play because, quickly after the publication of “Taki 183,” notions of play seemed far removed from the physical and visual proliferation of graffiti all-over New York City.

“Taki 183” (1971) offers a moment to see the graffiti phenomenon purely as play. Although the later graffiti phenomenon will retain some aspects of the original play, it will be written about as a much more serious endeavor. Adult actants would push this understanding forward by accepting the fantasies of teenagers as objective truth. Austin’s (2001) use of *Golden Boy* (Kohl, 1972), despite his incorrect understanding of it as the first writing about the graffiti phenomenon, was useful to highlight the work of play in the graffiti phenomenon, and also to frame who the first graffiti writers were and who was excluded from the graffiti phenomenon. Castleman’s (1982) focus on individual writers and their subjective fantasies, particularly Lee’s, also highlighted the very personal, emotional, and subjective fantasies that were essential to interpreting the graffiti phenomenon.

In summary, the graffiti phenomenon is an open practice that shifts in meaning depending on who is looking at it. In “Taki 183” (1971), *The New York Times* promoted the fantasy of the graffiti phenomenon as the official understanding of New York City WoWO. In the next chapter, I examine Norman Mailer’s interpretations, which intensify and heighten readings of the graffiti phenomenon, moving them from readings of crime and disorder to a reading of the next step in the narrative of western art.

Chapter 4: *The Faith of Graffiti*

Elevating Graffiti to “Art”

In this chapter, I offer a close critical reading of the second major defining text of the graffiti phenomenon: *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). *The Faith* is the second of three major texts that advanced the growth and spread of the graffiti phenomenon. Thus, this second of three texts serves as a bridge between “Taki 183” (1971), which located the graffiti phenomenon, and *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), which presented the graffiti phenomenon to new regions and new generations. *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) stabilized the graffiti phenomenon three years into its existence by providing a document of it. But more than just stabilizing it, *The Faith* cast the distinction of “art” onto the graffiti phenomenon and raised the stakes for all participants and observers.

By elevating graffiti to art in *The Faith*, Mailer and Naar (1974) posed a challenge to graffiti writers to produce art. In the early 1970s, the graffiti phenomenon was covered closely in New York newspapers and magazines, while earning increasing repudiation from authorities (Austin, 2001; Castleman, 1982). *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) paired the words of co-author Mailer, a leading intellectual, agitator, and public voice, with large format color photographs of early graffiti (the pictures are from December 1972 and January 1973), which led the graffiti phenomenon away from increasing scorn and ridicule to a dignified space of calm appraisal. Because of Mailer’s celebrity, his interpretation of graffiti, and the presentation of graffiti in large format pictures, *The Faith* stands out from any other text on the subject up until *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Even though Mailer implied early on in his essay, based on interviews with former graffiti writers, that the graffiti phenomenon “...like the Twist...was over” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 8), the presentation of the pictures and Mailer’s implicit approval reinforced the distinction of the phenomenon at this early moment and obliged graffiti writers to confront the idea of being artists and creating art.

In my approach to *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) in this chapter, I will separate Mailer’s *essay*, Naar’s *photos*, and the combination of the two as the *book*, so as to read each contribution in isolation and also consider their combined effect. There is precedent for taking this approach to this material: the essay and the photos have each stood alone as unique and complete works. The essay appeared without the photos in Mailer’s (1982) *Pieces and Pontifications* (hereafter “*Pieces*”) and the same photographs (and many more from the same shoot) were published as a book without the essay in *The Birth of Graffiti* (Naar, 2007). Mailer’s essay alone was insightful for its ideas on the valuation of art and for its linear

reading of progression in the “Great Tradition of art” (Austin, 2001, p. 74), but as far as an in-depth report on the graffiti phenomenon, or even a journalistic account that considered what informants said, the essay fell short. The same is true for the photos when they appeared without the essay; the photos captured graffiti before it was generally connected with art. Although the photos did not represent the greatest graffiti art of the period, nor an embedded rapport with the subject, the photos did set a standard for the graffiti phenomenon going forward. They showed early 1970s graffiti and called it art, setting up a challenge to improve upon what was shown. I maintain that the essay and the photographs work in tandem as the book to elevate and affect approaching the graffiti phenomenon with an eye towards art.

In the previous chapter of this thesis, I described the teenage fantasy of Taki 183 and his cohort as inconsistent with adult consensus reality. For graffiti writers in 1971, writing one’s name all-over was proof of being a king (“Taki 183,” 1971). For others, the same action was evidence of criminal activity and a mass transit system out of control (Austin, 2001; Castleman, 1982). In this chapter, I argue that Mailer translated teenage fantasy into adult consensus reality by never describing the writers as kings, but instead hailing them as artists of the highest caliber and protecting that claim by belittling critics of graffiti (such as Mayor Lindsay) as philistines. I find the images show graffiti in post-modern pose, which could be accepted to be displayed at the Museum of Modern Art (hereafter MoMA) but are not of the best graffiti tags or pieces. Artists paint graffiti and, for Mailer and Naar (1974), those who understand art will appreciate in graffiti the “pleasurable sense of depth to the elusiveness of the meaning” (p. 6).

There are five parts to Mailer’s essay in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) and I will look at each part individually in order to support my thesis about this essay: that the only novelty of it was the vehicle Mailer used, the graffiti phenomenon, and the ideas Mailer presented were mostly re-hashed ideas that he had already explicated in earlier writings. I will also discuss Mailer’s writing style, the goals he had for his writing, and his most important philosophy: Hip. Mailer’s many different takes on the graffiti phenomenon throughout the essay filled graffiti with never before connected understandings and ended as a Pandora’s box of meaning, which both maintained the idea that graffiti is open to many interpretations and also that it was (re)-invented through the various interpretations assigned to it. I begin my close reading of *The Faith* with a look at the layout and the photographs in *The Faith* in order to progress through this chapter to a final synthesis of how the book could have had a profound impact on the actual graffiti phenomenon.

A Shift in Interpretation

In *The Faith*, Mailer and Naar (1974) offered a paradigm shift in interpretation of the graffiti phenomenon, separating the nature of the phenomenon before *The Faith* from that which came after *The Faith*. Mailer hinted at the shift when he brought up the point of contention between Junior 161 and Cay 161's appreciation for the newer graffiti writers: "If Cay likes the work of STAY HIGH, Junior is impressed by none. 'That's just fanciness,' he says of the new. 'How're you gonna get your name around doing all that fancy stuff?'" (p. 8). The paradigm shift for the rules of the graffiti phenomenon was the change from "utilitarian lettering" to "fanc[y]" letters (p. 8), which led to revision of the rubric for judging graffiti from the former all-over (quantity) stance to a more aesthetic (quality) stance. This shift from valuing quantity to quality changed the way graffiti writers approached their work. After this paradigm shift, graffiti kings would not assume psychiatrists would think them mad; on the contrary, graffiti artists would imagine that art galleries and museums would find their work compelling, and might also consider them artists. In fact, I argue that the cover of the second edition of the book (Mailer & Naar, 2009) confirmed the paradigm shift by amending the first cover. The cover of the second edition showed what came to be understood by practitioners as the art of graffiti: a masterpiece on the side of a train. STAY HIGH 149's masterpiece was shown on that cover.

The call to view graffiti as art was already prevalent before *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), as seen in the coverage of Martinez's UGA organization in 1972 (Austin, 2001; Castleman, 1982; Mailer & Naar, 1974). UGA was the first graffiti organization, "the only one that limited membership to master artists" (Castleman, 1982, p. 117), and was responsible for producing graffiti art on canvas, creating exhibitions for graffiti art in 1972, as well as staging a live graffiti performance choreographed with a modern dance troupe in the Twyla Tharp production *Deuce Coupe* in 1973 (Castleman, 1982, p. 119). As discussed in the previous chapter, UGA was restricted to a limited membership and did not promote an open idea of all graffiti being art. Rather, it formed a more exclusive club, which claimed to know what graffiti art was in 1972 and produced it. The acts of performing graffiti art with the modern dance troupe and creating graffiti art on canvas signaled that the art of graffiti, according to Martinez and UGA, would be found on canvas and would behave according to the rules of the established art tradition. But these early attempts to organize graffiti writers to create art were not what produced the real art of graffiti, that is, the masterpieces on subways. It was individual teenagers working from a similar idea and a few of the same rules who would strike out on their own to create, evaluate, and perfect their art. It was visionary

photographers who understood and helped document both the ins and outs of graffiti and what graffiti writers saw (and imagined) with their art. Rather than an organized club uniting a few select graffiti writers around an idea, *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) advanced an underlying and uniting ideology of “creating art” for all who participated in the graffiti phenomenon.

In the early 1970s, the debate over whether graffiti was art or vandalism was being covered in the local press. Popular opinion denigrated the graffiti phenomenon. As Austin (2001) noted, “. . .many New Yorkers at this time were being encouraged by newspaper articles and editorials to see the writing on the walls simply in terms of disruptive and dangerous youths, fears of impending social collapse, and the urban crisis” (p. 71). While many opinion pieces about the graffiti phenomenon found in the *New York Times* during this period were “constantly contextualized within a ‘crisis’ framework” (p. 105), Mailer took a very different approach in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Instead of approaching it with the common a priori of crisis, Mailer saw art and political resistance in the graffiti phenomenon. And rather than dictating what the art was or would be, Mailer probed and questioned graffiti as art (and also art in general). Moreover, by setting the phenomenon up in terms of the Great Tradition of art, Mailer finally left the answer of what the art would be up to the graffiti writers. In *The Faith*, Mailer went beyond ideas of graffiti being just art, finding many interpretations of it, and at the end of his essay he left the reader with a rather violent reading of graffiti, suggesting that perhaps “the unheard echo of graffiti” is “the herald of some oncoming apocalypse less and less far away” (p. 31), as if graffiti were connected somehow to future wars and battles that would be fought between citizens. The graffiti writers would answer that reading by creating, instead of an apocalyptic civil war, a war based on artistic style.

While *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) serves in this thesis as a bridge from “Taki 183” (1971) to *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), it could also be described as a foundational and all-encompassing text of a particular graffiti moment, the early period of New York City graffiti. However, in this thesis, I take the longer view of the graffiti phenomenon, that its major masterpieces came after *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) and graffiti promulgated according to the expression of it given in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) brought intellectual heft and celebrity to graffiti, and boosted the phenomenon at an opportune moment, propelling the phenomenon by encouraging producers and viewers to accept a real connection between graffiti and art.

In 1971, the most important rule of the graffiti phenomenon, as seen in “Taki 183” (1971), was writing one’s name all-over. In 1974, Mailer’s contribution added an openly interpreted dimension to the phenomenon: that writers produce art. *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) served as a veritable time-capsule of graffiti from a time before it was considered art, when the graffiti was less “fanciness” (Junior 161, quoted in Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 8), when writers like Cay 161 and Junior 161 were tagging all-over. As stated, the challenge to create art with graffiti already existed, but it was more widely established with *The Faith*. After its publication, the graffiti on subways in New York became more ornate and bolder, and masterpieces became the most important accomplishment. The quality of one’s work soon became the dominant factor for appraising graffiti. Just one year after publication of *The Faith*, in 1975, the work of Blade, one of the pioneering avant-garde artists of subway graffiti art, was recorded (Baugh, 2009). His whole-car pieces with characters, unique lettering, and psychedelic themes begin *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) and are found throughout the book.

A Text in Limbo (Both Ignored and Echoed)

Mailer scholars have written about and explored extensively most of what Mailer wrote, especially works that were turned into books and reprinted in other works, with one glaring exception: *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). From Mailer biographers to essayists to historians, *The Faith* gets very little mention (see, e.g., Bloom, 1986; Dearborn, 1999; Merrill, 1992). The longest sustained writing focused on *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) is the full-page *New York Times* book review from May 1974. This could be for a number of reasons, one being that Mailer had so many other polemical texts in need of critique. His opinionated writings on such topics as women, race, presidential elections, the moon landing, Vietnam war protests, and important boxing matches, were all so much more urgent at the time to analyze and rebut than a text merely about graffiti. It makes sense that not all of his texts could be responded to or covered extensively by those who wrote about him. But *The Faith* stands out for having never been given much attention by Mailer scholars at all. In contrast, though, *The Faith* received significant attention from graffiti writers and scholars.

(In)attention from Mailer Scholars

The Faith (Mailer & Naar, 1974) is left out of most biographies on Mailer (see, e.g., Bailey, 1979; Rollyson, 1991; Wenke, 1987), and if mentioned at all, it is only for one paragraph (e.g., Dearborn, 2001). It seems no one wanted to touch it. In *Norman Mailer*, Bufithis (1978) gave an extensive chronology of all of Mailer’s works up until 1976, but he left out *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). The book is not mentioned once in Bloom’s (1986)

retrospective collection of essays on Mailer, perhaps because *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) was not a novel, and most Mailer scholars are interested in his novels. Mills (1982), in *Mailer A Biography*, skipped over *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), even while meticulously accounting for all of his other writings from the period, as well as stories about his personal life from the same period. But it wasn't Mailer's choice to leave *The Faith* out of his oeuvre; he was proud of his work and appeared on *The Johnny Carson Show* to promote the book in 1974 (Freshpaintnyc, 2016).

Adams (1976) gave thorough deep readings of many of Mailer's works (certainly all of his books and many of his essays) up until 1975, but when she got to *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), she merely wrote, "*The Faith of Graffiti* is primarily a book of photographs for which Mailer wrote the accompanying essay and is not of enough length or significance to concern us further here" (p. 178). By underlining that the book was mostly a book of photographs, Mailer scholars save themselves from having to get messy sifting through Mailer and graffiti. Adams (1976) wasn't wrong to avoid the responsibility of critiquing the book because, in 1976, the graffiti phenomenon was still not generally understood. Even in the present day, it would be difficult to critique the essay without an understanding of the graffiti phenomenon and *The Faith's* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) place in it.

One brief mention of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) and what Mailer attempted to do in his essay came from the Mailer scholar Cowan (1986), who wrote:

Like the graffiti artists whose dangerous work he so admires, Mailer wants to use the blank wall of his contemporary technological society as a canvas on which to paint a colorful communal jungle of psychological, aesthetic, and religious possibility. But he also likes to see his own name in large letters on that wall. (p. 157)

This short quote sums up the essay rather succinctly; perhaps that is why most Mailer scholars have not written about it closely, finding more profound or newer ideas in other writings. But Cowan's description is telling in that it says two important things about the essay: (a) that Mailer was interested in his own ideas about what the graffiti phenomenon could signify; and (b) that Mailer was more interested in his own name (and fame) than the names of the young graffiti writers who were his subject.

On the subject of Mailer's writing between 1968 and 1976, Merrill (1978) wrote in *Norman Mailer*, "Norman Mailer's most recent literary phase is also his most curious" (p. 445). Merrill proceeded to say the work in this phase was not very good; to emphasize that point, he wrote, "...Mailer has even published a 'book' on the philosophical assumptions underlying graffiti!" (p. 445) with an exclamation point, stressing the low level to which

Mailer had seemingly sunk. Merrill then meticulously dove into all of Mailer's writings of the period mentioned but did not return to *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) again. While it was such a curiosity that it warranted an exclamation point from Merrill (1978), it apparently did not call for any further thought. Merrill ended the opening paragraph by writing that the period "between 1968 and 1976" was "a new Mailer 'period,'" "a period which calls for discreet silence, not critical evaluation" (p. 445).²⁰ Many other Mailer scholars seemed to agree, at least with regard to approaching *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) closely.

Mailer's essay from *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) was reprinted in Mailer's (1982) *Pieces*. Similar to a few of his other books, *Pieces* was a collection of Mailer's writings from the previous decade. Nothing in *Pieces* is major or consequential writing. Maybe Mailer saw it that way, too, because none of the topics are of import and none of his positions are too radical. Thus, *Pieces* may be a collection of his minor writings of the decade. In *Pieces*, as a stand-alone essay presented without the photos, *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) is devoid of meaning and context, which highlights how important the full book with photos and essay was to the overall effect of the book on the graffiti phenomenon.

In a *New York Times* review of *Pieces* (Mailer, 1982), Hoagland (1982) wrote, "this new collection" of Mailer's writings "lacks vitality." In the same review, Hoagland wrote one paragraph about *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), at first glowingly: "The reportage is kindly and intuitive, as he trades stories underground with a bunch of spray-can artists in a manner that as admirable a writer as Saul Bellow would no longer be capable of." But, because Hoagland (like many other citizens of New York City in 1982) was upset that Mailer connected graffiti with the Great Tradition of art, he continued, "But then he begins comparing the kids to Cezanne, Matisse, Gauguin, van Gogh, and unravels the points he had achieved," and then banished the piece from further discussion. At the time, Hoagland (1982) did not recognize or understand how the graffiti phenomenon was about to travel to most cities worldwide nor did he understand *The Faith's* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) influence on the graffiti scene. Thus, Hoagland (1982) easily dismissed what could have been the major story to come from this compilation of minor works.

Graffiti Scholars: The Quotable Mailer

While it appears from reviewing the work of Mailer scholars that *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) was a blip in the career of Norman Mailer, *The Faith* was a major text of the

²⁰ Interestingly, when that essay was reprinted in *Norman Mailer Revisited* (Merrill, 1992), the exclamation point after "graffiti" was left out. Maybe I am reading much into that small adjustment, but did Merrill start to see that there was a graffiti community that grew since 1978 and became an actual presence? If so, he certainly didn't understand Mailer's place in it, or he might have changed more in that essay when he revisited Mailer's work in 1992.

1970s graffiti phenomenon. In writings about graffiti, *The Faith* was the go-to essay for quotable material (see, e.g., Lutz, 2001, p. 109; MacDonald, 2001, p. 70). Nonetheless, few authors have probed the material deeply or pursued discussion beyond the quote; some even misquoted Mailer. Writers who discussed graffiti treated Mailer as a necessary addition to their reference lists, but not as a writer whose thoughts must be dealt with; it was only his celebrity that made citing him so appealing.

McAuliffe and Iveson (2011, p. 131) correctly cited *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) when referring to the 1970s NYC graffiti phenomenon. Deiulo (1978) improperly cited *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) when discussing “latrinalia” or other types of graffiti. Hebdige (1978), in his seminal study *Subcultures*, slightly misquoted Mailer: “Norman Mailer calls graffiti- ‘Your presence on their Presence...hanging your alias on their scene’” (p. 3). The actual quote from Mailer is “Your presence is on their presence, your alias hangs over their scene” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 6). Hebdige (1978) did not have a point to make regarding Mailer’s essay; he merely used Mailer’s name (and fame) to call attention to various writings on walls and he (mis)used a quote from *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) as an aside with no follow up and no real reason. By doing so, Hebdige (1978) lumped all graffiti together as one thing that behaves in one way.

Some who wrote about graffiti liked to write the short version of how Mailer got the title, and in doing so repeated Mailer’s romantic and mystic vision, but added nothing new. Cay 161’s quote “The name is the *faith* of graffiti” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 3; emphasis in original) was usually added to an essay on graffiti but never unpacked (see, e.g., Barnett, 1994, p. 27; Phillips, 1999, p. 43). Or, the title was somehow repeated for emphasis by a person talking about their experience with graffiti, as in a piece about *Wild Style* director Charles Ahearn. Ahearn is quoted as saying about his time filming *Wild Style* (1983): “To go back to Norman Mailer, *I had ‘the faith of graffiti’*” (Jaehne, 1984, p. 3; emphasis added).

While scholars often cited *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) in texts about the graffiti phenomenon (e.g., Gross & Gross, 1993, p. 258; Kramer, 2010, p. 236), they seldom followed up the cite. That is, they offered a throwaway quote or a stand-in phrase, but no deep probing or sustained argument using *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) followed (which might point to *The Faith* lacking strong points about graffiti). Lachmann (1988), in “Graffiti as Career and Ideology,” said Mailer’s writing worked to “champion all graffiti from scrawled obscenities to elaborate murals as art” (p. 231), which is an open interpretation of the text without much substance or nuance and is also factually incorrect. Lachmann did not use a close reading of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) to make a point; it was a footnote for a larger argument. On

the other hand, some have used *The Faith* as a primary source and quoted Mailer at length. For example, Nelli's (1976) "Graffiti A New York," an entire text from the period written in Italian, translated into English in 2012, and meant to explain the budding graffiti phenomenon to an Italian readership in the late 1970s, was based mainly on Mailer's essay.

In *Getting Up*, Castleman's (1982) reference list reads like a graffiti writer's personal archives and he seemed to come to most of his information from newspapers and informants. Notably, the only book on his list is *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). That Castleman (1982) was able to locate and use that book in the late 1970s and early 1980s speaks to the longevity and availability of the book amongst practitioners of graffiti. If the book meant nothing to graffiti writers, Castleman would not have included it in his research. And yet, Castleman did not use the essay for anything more in his thesis than briefly discussing Mayor Lindsay's reaction to graffiti. That Castleman referenced *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), and singled it out as the only book about the graffiti phenomenon in the 1970s in his references section, but did not actually use the essay (or the photos), underscored the book's standing as an object of value in the graffiti subculture, and also the lesser importance of Mailer's essay and Naar's photos in the story of the graffiti phenomenon. That is, it did not matter to graffiti writers that the essay did not say much to them, nor that the photos did not capture the best graffiti of the moment, but just that the book existed and elevated graffiti to art and high culture. This kept the book in circulation amongst graffiti writers for decades. *The Faith* was written off by Mailer's biographers but kept as a prized possession by graffiti writers.

Austin (2001) went against the trend of quoting Mailer haphazardly for emphasis or poetic heft. Austin rather downplayed Mailer's contribution to the graffiti literature by not giving *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) more than one paragraph of mention and bunching it with three other texts that spoke to the popularity of the phenomenon in the early 1970s: the UGA and NOGA organizations, various writings in local newspapers and magazines, and an art magazine titled "Print (May 1973)" (Austin, 2001, p. 74). Yet Austin also offered one of the more thoughtful (albeit brief) descriptions and critiques of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Austin (2001) wrote:

...Mailer contextualized writers' works within the Great Tradition of art and suggested that writers were on the cutting edge, having created a satisfying expression for certain existential problems that other, more Traditional artists had not found. If writers were uncertain about being taken seriously as artists, comparisons to recognized master artists in *The Faith of Graffiti* could easily assuage any doubts. (p. 74)

Austin recognized what the literary critic for the New York Times, Hoagland (1982), had noticed earlier, that Mailer compared “the kids to Cezanne, Matisse, Gauguin, van Gogh,” and was more interested in what that connection did for the confidence of the graffiti writer than any truth claims of the connection. Austin (2001) ended by questioning Naar’s understanding of the phenomenon because his pictures were of “toy” graffiti. As Austin noted, “On the other hand...many of the best writers’ work did not appear in the book” (p. 74). This suggests that the book did not function in the same way *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) later did, as a solidifying agent capturing the best of subway art, but rather served as a platform, a ground on which to stand, a ground that came with the challenge to create art.

As we have just seen, *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) was at once too minor of a text to be critically considered by Mailer scholars and a major go-to text for many who have written about graffiti. That the text was overlooked by most Mailer scholars may actually signal that the text says nothing powerfully new for Mailer and perhaps that it is not a text worthy of mention, especially next to the other important topics that Mailer has covered. On the other hand, because the text is so heavily cited and borrowed from in graffiti studies, and highly quoted by graffiti scholars, it is important to give a close reading of the text in a study of graffiti. Therefore, I will read *The Faith* with an eye on Mailer’s other writings at the time as well as his public persona, asking questions of how *The Faith* relates to Mailer’s larger writing project, viewing the book as another in the long line of Mailer’s culturally relevant and provocative writings and collaborations and less as a definitive text on graffiti. It is my intention to thoroughly explicate and exhaust the text in its entirety to show the potential power of the book and point to its likely influence on the production of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). I begin my close reading of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) by describing a story illustrated on the three covers associated with *The Faith*.

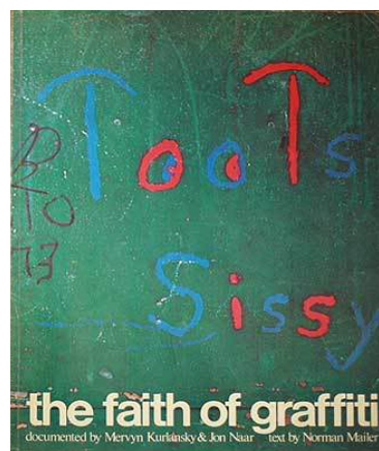
A Story Told in Three Covers

Like much of Mailer’s writing, *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) was released first as an abridged version in *Esquire* magazine and then in its completed version as a large format book (which was later re-released). The covers for the magazine and the two large format books, released 35 years apart, are rather different. Yet, when examined together, the covers speak to the question (and challenge) Mailer and Naar investigated -- “What is the art in graffiti art?” -- and the later definitive answer provided in the proliferation of masterpieces on subways.



(Fig. 6. Cover of Esquire magazine, May 1974)

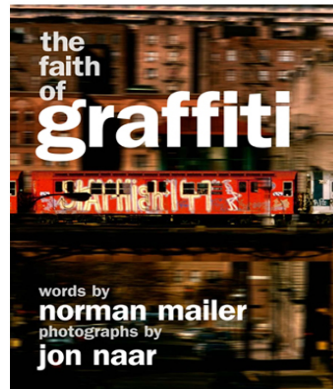
Starting with the cover of the *Esquire* magazine where the essay and the photos were shown nationally, the first part of the story unfolds and a question is posed. On the cover is a painted illustration of a Black teenager holding a painting palette in one hand and applying spray paint to a canvas with the other hand. He is sitting on an artist's stool, wearing glasses and a spitfire hat turned backwards, with his tongue touching his upper lip in a state of concentration and artistic inspiration. In this image, we see an artist at work. The teen is applying spray paint to a canvas that is placed on an easel at an angle just out of sight of the viewer. The whole image is evocative of Norman Rockwell's unique style, giving it an authentic feel of Americana. The main cover line reads "The great art of the 70's", and underneath, "Norman Mailer reports on graffiti." This first cover image and main cover line open the door of the pantheon of Americana and cultural discourse to the graffiti phenomenon. The *Esquire* cover boldly announced that teenagers can be artists by participating in this curious phenomenon. Moreover, by not revealing what the teenager is painting, the cover asks: "What is the art in graffiti art?" The artwork is not shown on this cover; this is the abridged version.



(Fig. 7. The cover of the original book, 1974)

The next cover in this story is that of the first edition of the book (Mailer & Naar, 1974), which was released at the same time as the *Esquire* magazine. If the cover was meant to serve as an answer to the question the *Esquire* cover left open -- what is the art in graffiti art? -- the cover failed. The cover of the book, printed in large format, is a picture of pre-adolescent graffiti and not the graffiti phenomenon that Mailer and Naar in fact discussed. The cover is a closely framed picture of a green surface with the red and blue names “Toots” and “Sissy” naively written on it. Robins (1974) described this cover, in a book review in the *New York Times*, as a “Miro-like cover, a cover that is a painting in itself.” In the re-issued edition of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009), Naar repeated this 35-year-old critical connection between surrealism and graffiti in the afterword: “The vibrant red signatures *Toots, Sissy, Maria, Fanny* on a painted green wood background have been described by several art critics as ‘Miro-like,’” utilizing the high-art relation to applaud the work produced during the early graffiti phenomenon and found in this book.

However, when inspecting the 1974 cover for evidence of the said link, it becomes obvious that leaps were made in order to assign accepted artistic merit to the work of the graffiti writers in the graffiti phenomenon. The names displayed so colorfully and naïvely were not part of the graffiti phenomenon that the text discussed; they were (toy) writings from preadolescents. The link to Miro’s work was not so much in the preadolescent writing on the green surface, but rather in Naar’s close-up framing of the names on the green surface. A certain childishness was captured in the cover picture, which differed from the seriousness that the graffiti writers maintained. Conversely, there was also a certain earnestness in Mailer’s text, which differed from the individual ideas graffiti writers maintained about their own graffiti. The decision to use this picture on the 1974 book cover appears to mirror Mailer and Naar’s awkwardness with and distortion of the graffiti phenomenon by showing what art they seemed to find in the graffiti phenomenon: art that was “Miro-like,” to be discussed in terms of the Great Tradition of art. The cover was inconsistent with the graffiti writers’ ideas and, by having a different graffiti phenomenon on its cover, the book seems to ignore the informants interviewed and mask the graffiti phenomenon in surrealist wrapping, something I will argue actually happens in the book.



(Fig. 8. The cover of the second printing of the book, 2009)

The second book cover (Mailer & Naar, 2009), printed 35 years later, completes this tale of a question posed by a magazine cover and the two answers given by the subsequent book covers. The 2009 cover acts as an amendment to the 1974 cover and book; it recognizes that the story of graffiti unfolded differently than suggested by the book, and even seeks to realign the book with the movement that was spurred on by it. The change in cover represents the long answer to the immediate question in 1974 - “what is the art in graffiti art?” - by featuring on the cover the image of the answer, subway art.

The later book (Mailer & Naar, 2009), true to the original, was a large format book. The cover image was of a moving red subway from 1973 with a very large early masterpiece that read, “Stay High 149.” The yellow and white letters with black flourishes were almost as large as the subway. At the end of the message stood a stick figure character, the same width of the letters, with a halo over its head, smoking a joint. The windows on the subway have been cleaned so the graffiti masterpiece is missing portions of the original design. The message, size, color scheme, character, and placement all say that this is neither the work of a preadolescent nor part of an exercise in surrealism, but the work of a teenager or young adult creating art on the subways. The second book cover says that the art of graffiti was not over in 1974 when Mailer reported on it and said as much, but rather, graffiti was just getting its footing. Aroused by the challenge posed by *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), graffiti writers would create their art, an art that would not line up with modern or post-modern definitions as applied by Mailer, but by aesthetic values closer to advertising, pop, and comic art as found in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984).

The original 1974 *Esquire* magazine cover announced a polarizing and contentious topic of the period in a non-hostile and inviting way. The layout inside the magazine gave the photographs more space than the abridged essay and raised more questions than it answered about the art in the phenomenon. The phenomenon at this moment was still young and was not generally understood or agreed upon. With the first book cover (Mailer & Naar, 1974), a

disorienting cover, a masking cover, Mailer was portrayed as a shaman who could communicate with the strange hieroglyphics on the subway walls, symbols only he could read. Many who have written about graffiti since have trusted in Mailer's authority that he knew what he was writing about and they quoted him without much question. After *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), one narrative would take hold, the one that would lead to *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). With the updated cover in the second edition (Mailer & Naar, 2009), the story is made clearer. Time has passed; stories have solidified; and graffiti has become more universally understood and performed. Mailer's particular interpretation in the first edition of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) has fallen to the side as modern graffiti writers focused more on individual style than they dwelled in/on faith or communal art.

I offer this story of the three covers as a prelude to the close reading of the book. The covers show what I will find in the book (Mailer & Naar, 1974): that Mailer wrote mostly about Mailer and his ideas; that the photos are not of the best graffiti art of the period but of an attempt to find art in the framing of graffiti; and yet, that the two together promoted the growth of graffiti being understood as an art.

Reading the Images

In this section, I present a close reading of the images in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). I compare the original edition of *The Faith* with both the updated version published in 2009 and *The Birth of Graffiti* (Naar, 2007) (hereafter *The Birth*). In *The Birth*, Naar revisited his assignment to photograph graffiti in New York City at the end of 1973 and revealed many of the "outtakes" (p. 17) that were not included in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Naar (2007) did not include in *The Birth* either Mailer's essay or the images of artwork on loan from MoMA that accompanied that essay, but he did include his own short essay, titled "On Becoming a Graffiti Photographer." In that essay, Naar reflected on the importance of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) to the understanding of graffiti and how Naar became well-known among graffiti writers because of his involvement with *The Faith*. I will use *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) as well as Naar's afterword to the later edition of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009) in order to discuss Naar's approach to capturing and displaying graffiti.

Analyzing the Images

From the titles of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974, 2009) and *The Birth* (Naar, 2007), the reader might assume that the authors were focused on capturing images of graffiti. However, I am not convinced of that intention. Therefore, I am interested in reading a number of the images in those texts to identify what Naar was looking for and what he found when he undertook this assignment. I examine three noteworthy differences found between *The Faith*

(Mailer & Naar, 1974, 2009) and *The Birth* (Naar, 2007), which highlight the authors' early approach to graffiti and their later understanding of graffiti. I closely read five images in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) in order to bring out what Naar was looking for and what he found in his photographs of graffiti. I also look closely at one of the more iconic photos from *The Faith* because it was restaged in one photo and updated in many more photos in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). The updating of the photo gives valuable information regarding how graffiti changed over the 10 years after *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) was released. This analysis also serves to set some groundwork for my discussion of later photographers of graffiti, namely Chalfant and Cooper (1984), the authors of *Subway Art*.

For this analysis, I draw on concepts from Mirzoeff's (2009) *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Mitchell's (1994) *Picture Theory*, and Mitchell's (2005) *What Do Pictures Want?* These authors stressed the importance of the close reading of images with an eye on uncovering hidden desires and discarded information. In *Picture Theory*, when discussing style, Mitchell (1994) wrote that "'style' in the graphic arts...suggests, in its connection with the writing tool or stylus, the point of convergence between writing and painting. The style is the signature of the artist or school, the 'characteristic' iterated and re-iterated pattern" (p. 149). I am interested in this section in Naar's style of photography and what may have been his intentions in this project. How did he decide which graffiti to photograph? How did he frame the graffiti? I am also interested in the style of graffiti that Naar captured in his images and how those images suggest Naar's intended photographic project and that which Naar found.

As I look closely at the images in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), I do not necessarily ask the question Mitchell (2005) posed for investigating photographs, "Who or what is the target of the demand/desire/need/ expressed by the picture?" (p. 49). Rather, I am guided by his reframing and elaboration of that same question:

What is its area of erasure? Its blind spot? Its anamorphic blur? What does the frame or boundary exclude? What does its angle of representation prevent us from seeing, and prevent it from showing? What does it need or demand from the beholder to complete its work? (p. 49)

In order to understand the "area[s] of erasure" in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), it is important to look at how these same pictures were displayed years later in the re-released version of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009) and in Naar's (2007) photographic essay *The Birth*.

Naar's Assignment

I bring up what Naar later wrote about this assignment because I believe that his a priori goal to find art in his framings of graffiti overtook many of the images found in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) and points to his direct approach with concerns to capturing photographs of graffiti art. In the afterword to the updated version of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009), Naar wrote:

What impressed me as a self-taught photographer, as it did Mailer, was that these early graffiti writers were able to produce an existentially new form of graphic expression without having had (or perhaps *because* they never had) any formal visual arts training. (Afterword)

Earlier, in his essay in *The Birth*, "On Becoming a Graffiti Photographer," Naar (2007) had asserted that he began taking pictures of images he saw in the streets of New York City because they resembled artworks that he was familiar with:

I photographed a broken window pane bearing a bold white "X" (signifying a building to be demolished) whose empty black space looks like one of the series of bird lithographs by Georges Braque then being shown at New York's Museum of Modern Art (fig. 2). In Washington Square, I shot a section of a *Post No Bills* warning above a silhouette of what could be a human face in profile (someone suggested it looked like James Joyce, my favorite author) (fig. 3). (p. 15)

In the preceding excerpt, Naar shared valuable information about how he was looking at graffiti and taking pictures at the time. He was interested in finding scenes that had an aura of modern or post-modern art to them. He was interested in photographing writings on walls and objects, which, with the proper framing, could resemble art that was being shown at MoMA. Naar's viewpoint aligned well with one of Mailer's theses (Mailer & Naar, 1974), namely, that the young people writing graffiti were somehow in touch with the artworks in MoMA. Naar's (2007) allusions to Braque and Joyce showed that Naar was not fully aware of what the young graffiti writers were doing; like Mailer in his essay (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Naar attempted to frame graffiti through his own worldly and well-read lens.

Naar (2007) told of one of his photographs of which he was particularly proud:

A photograph I shot at Auerdult, a Munich fun fair, titled *Shadows of Children on Swings*, is now in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the International Center of Photography, both in New York (fig. 6). (p. 16)

The image in Naar's figure 6, shown on the next page, is an image of the shadows of children on swings as they appeared on a wall for a split second.

Naar's comments on his vision and what photos he felt most proud of (and why) provide insights on the images in both editions of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974, 2009) and also in *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) because so many images now stand out for their interesting shadow effects and for being captured images of ephemeral moments. This suggests that, for many of these images, perhaps Naar was concentrating more on the shadows (or other effects) and what effect the shadows cast on the images rather than on what the titles say the main subject of the photos are - graffiti. This insight is valuable to keep in mind when discussing the images in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). So many of the images are interesting not because of the graffiti but because of Naar's framing, making it difficult for me to say these images are mainly of graffiti when there are so many other engaging artistic elements found in the photos. Was graffiti the subject of Naar's photos in this assignment or was Naar looking to frame any WoWO he found in a way that resembled art?

Noteworthy Changes from *The Faith* to *The Birth*

Before reading some of Naar's photographs closely, I would like to highlight a couple of noteworthy differences between the two editions of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974, 2009) and *The Birth* (Naar, 2007). In the three books, the authors chose from "the more than three thousand pictures of New York graffiti" (Naar, 2007, p. 17) that Naar shot for that assignment. The authors' choices about which photos to include in each book, and how to display them, reveal the changing vision of graffiti from the original *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) to *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) to the later edition of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009). Through this comparison, I show the initial vision that Naar had for capturing graffiti in photographs and also how Naar amended his idea of what made most sense regarding photographs of graffiti some 33 years later.

In this section, I discuss three choices that the authors made in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), *The Birth* (Naar, 2007), and *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009), which reflect the changing understanding of graffiti over time. The first is the list of graffiti names included in the texts. The second is the use of a picture of a Taki 183 tag in the later editions. The third is the exclusion of images of preadolescents posing with graffiti in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) and the subsequent use of those images in both *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) and *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009).

Graffiti names. *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) includes a list of 760 graffiti names and phrases found on walls and objects in 1973-74, printed once on the first two pages and once again on the last two pages of the book. The list includes names of graffiti writers whose work was not captured in Naar's photos in *The Faith*, some of whom would go on to become

recognized as kings 10 years later in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). In *The Birth* (2007), Naar listed 120 names of graffiti tags that were found in his images. A brief glance at his list and the images found in *The Birth*, however, reveals that he did not list every name found in his images, only some of them. Unlike in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Naar (2007) did not give written recognition to many “toys” of the moment, almost as if their names were no longer legible to him, as if their names were merely background noise and a small part of the artwork that was the photograph.

By listing names in *The Faith*, Mailer and Naar (1974) may have influenced young graffiti writers of the moment to create bigger and better masterpieces, because their names were recognized by a major writer and in a major text. Mailer and Naar recognized even the smallest “toys” in writing in *The Faith*, such as Blockhead, Lightning Larry 97, and The Turtle. None of those names are found in the images in *The Faith*. The inclusion of 760 names in *The Faith* attests to the open interpretation of graffiti at the time; Mailer and Naar included in the list all of the names on the wall, and even names not photographed but spoken about by graffiti informants.

In contrast, Naar (2007) was much more selective in *The Birth*. Naar did not include funny sayings or names that may have only been written once by a preadolescent. The difference in the list of names shows that, 33 years after publication of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Naar (2007) understood a distinctive story about graffiti, with select characters. The names Naar listed in *The Birth* served as more of a list of names of nostalgia, with the section titled “They Were There!” (p. 163). In other words, Naar gave homage to some early graffiti tag-names and yet excluded many more that were recorded in the images, perhaps deciding that they were not so important to list.

The images in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) showed that the tradition of graffiti was still in the process of being created. Many of the images were of “toy” graffiti rather than the early artwork of graffiti of that period, which could later be found in pictures in Baugh’s (2011) *Early New York Subway Graffiti 1973-1975* and in Stewart’s (2009) *Graffiti Kings*. Whereas Naar’s photographs (and Mailer’s essay) in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) pointed to an attempt at saving graffiti from critics by trying to connect it with other misunderstood yet prized artwork in MoMA, by the time *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) was released there was no longer any need to save graffiti from anyone. By 2007, graffiti had already become an art in its own right and an art far from the original vision Naar and Mailer had for it. This understanding of the process of inventing the tradition of graffiti is seen more clearly in the next noteworthy change.

The Taki 183 tag. The second noteworthy change from *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) to both *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) and *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009) is the authors' use of a picture of a Taki 183 tag. In the original version of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), there was no picture of any graffiti that read Taki 183, although Mailer did use Taki's name in the first section of his essay. In the updated version of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009) and in *The Birth* (Naar, 2007), the authors showed the same image of a Taki 183 tag on a pole. This image is found on page 93 in *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) and given the frontispiece of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009).

I suggest that, by giving the frontispiece page to a Taki 183 tag, the authors were attempting to show a chronology of important names in graffiti. Likewise, Mailer and Naar (2009) placed a picture of the stylized tag of Stay High 149 towards the end of the updated version of *The Faith*, showing that the (popular) story of graffiti at the time of the original *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) had covered names from Taki 183 to Stay High 149. The authors presented a selective and popular understanding of the early graffiti phenomenon, which is part of the popular narrative that I follow in this thesis as well. That is, this noteworthy change reflects the most well-known understanding of the growth of graffiti.

It is worth noting that the image of the Taki 183 tag is unlike any other image in the respective books. The tag is written in marker on what seems to be a pole. There were advertisements on the pole; perhaps Naar ripped them off, because in the image remnants of the advertisements still cover the tag and nearby space. It seems that Naar was specifically looking for a Taki 183 tag; maybe an informant told him where he could find one. The image itself is not very artistic. It is a close-up picture of the written tag completely out of context. It is almost out of league with the other images found in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974).

The only value of the image is that it captured the famous name Taki 183. Perhaps that is why it wasn't chosen for the original version of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). It wasn't until 33 years later that the authors took this photo out of Naar's archives and put into a book. I believe they based that decision on the later popularity and acclaim afforded to Taki 183. This is similar to the authors' decision to change the cover on the second edition (Mailer & Naar, 2009) to show Stay High 149's large graffiti on the side of a subway. The story of graffiti was well understood by the 2000's, whereas in 1974 neither Naar nor Mailer could foresee the tradition that would develop around what they were investigating.

Images of pre-adolescents posing with graffiti. The third noteworthy change that took place from *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) to *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) was that *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) included only one image of young people "9 to 12 years old"

(Naar, 2007, p. 17) interacting with the graffiti. In *The Birth* (Naar, 2007), there are many pictures of preadolescents posing with or pointing at the graffiti found on walls and subways. In contrast, in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), the authors eschewed any childish interpretations of graffiti for those that would be found more profound or subversive. Had the original book included more than one image of children playing with graffiti, those images may have detracted from the meaning in Mailer's essay. The authors of *The Faith* wanted images of graffiti that needed interpretation, just as the meanings in the work of Braque, Joyce, and other famous artists are heightened by expert interpretation.

Sentimental pictures of children laughing and pointing at graffiti would not leave much room for Mailer's expert interpretation of graffiti. The impact of Mailer's essay would have been weakened by the images found in *The Birth* (Naar, 2007). The 39 images the authors chose to include in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) from the "more than three thousand" (Naar, 2007, p. 17) that Naar took for that assignment were selected to support Mailer's essay. The authors selected the images because those images allowed for the most open interpretation possible, with an eye towards the art found in museums of the period.

Five Images in *The Faith*

I will now closely read five images that appear in both versions of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974, 2009) and *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) to show how the images work, what they do, and how they connect with, or perhaps even inspired, Mailer's original essay. After all, Mailer wrote in his essay that the photos were shown to him in order to persuade him to write the essay and that he "agreed to do it on the instant...that he has seen it...the splendid photographs and his undiscovered thoughts on the subject leap together" (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 2).

In the original *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), 39 images accompanied Mailer's essay. Six of those images were of graffiti written on subways. The photos in the book were not focused solely on the new graffiti phenomenon that the authors claimed to cover as it was understood by graffiti writers, because many preadolescent "toy" names were shown and highlighted. The next five images I read are worth discussion because each image reveals a meaningful piece of Naar's photographic essay. The five taken together give an exhaustive look at the images in *The Faith*.



(Fig. 9. Jon Naar, “Hex Nixon”, *The Faith of Graffiti*, 1974)

Hex Nixon. In the afterword of the updated version of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009), Naar wrote, “In the photo Hex Nixon, you can see how the graffiti colors, red and black on a white background, pick up on the same colors as the Nixon for President poster they embellish.” Yet, closer examination of this image shows that Naar was mistaken. The graffiti found on that wall was written before the Nixon for President posters were put up, which can be seen from how the tags and the lines coming from the tags go under the posters. Hex and the other tags found in that image were there before the Nixon posters. Therefore, the artistry that Naar claimed to find in that image is an example of Naar looking to fit the square peg that is graffiti into the circular hole that is his understanding of art.

The connection to the poster is noteworthy for another reason. Naar had an ongoing interest in posters. In his essay, Naar (2007) wrote:

In 1962, on a visit to Vera Cruz, Mexico, I found a surreal collage of posters showing: the political *manifesto* of Adolfo Lopez Mateos, who was running for governor of the state; the program for the 156th anniversary celebration of the birth of Benito Juarez, inset with his portrait; and an advertisement, with the headline *Lucha L[ibre]*, a freestyle wrestling performance, with an even larger portrait of one of the contestants (fig. 4). In 1964, I decided to become a professional photographer. Among my first efforts was a torn poster for the Müncher Künstler Fest. (pp. 15-16)

Naar displayed his early photos of torn posters on walls in different countries from the 1960s in this book about the birth of graffiti in New York City. In doing so, he showed what he found to be artistic: broken down and hard to read signage. With this explanation, some of the photographs of graffiti start to stand out because the ripped posters on the walls with the graffiti are more interesting than the graffiti itself; the intention of the photographer comes to the fore. Naar even named photos based on words found on the posters in the images rather than the graffiti tags in the images. For example, he titled one picture “Nov 4” (p. 164). The

words “Nov 4” were not found in the image of a tag-name but were found printed on a ripped poster attached to the wall.

Although Naar was no doubt interested in the graffiti phenomenon, which was a popular subject in New York City in the early 1970s, I argue his purview during this assignment was focused on capturing artistic images with graffiti in them. There is nothing negative about this statement or this finding. In Chapter 5, I will show that Cooper captured graffiti on subways in brilliant context and with her own framing, which in turn brought the graffiti to life. The difference I find between the images of the two photographers is the framing: Naar framed graffiti in poses of post-modern art found in MoMA, whereas Cooper framed graffiti as the subject and allowed the graffiti to express itself as a more original art. With this image, I point to Naar’s post-modern art framing of graffiti in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) and his attempts at finding the art in graffiti in his framings. Some of his attempts paid off because he captured valuable graffiti images, as the next pictures attest.



(Fig. 10. Jon Naar, “Star III,” *The Faith of Graffiti*, 1974)

Star III. Similar to the story told in three covers, above, the cover on *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) told a story about the growth of style in graffiti. The picture is of a subway with many tags on the left side of it and one window-down “Star III” piece on the right side. This image was used in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) as well as Mailer’s 1974 *Esquire* article. When examined for style, the Star III window-down piece is seen as being a Star III tag, made bigger and thicker with spray paint, and outlined in a different color. This was an early masterpiece. When read left to right, this picture told a part of the history of graffiti’s growth from child’s play to art. One can see the progression from crude tags to stylized pieces in this picture. Simple tags were captured on the left side of the subway car. On the right side, however, a Star III tag was blown up by writing the letters thicker and bigger and outlining

them with a different color. Turning the tag into a piece was one major stylistic change in graffiti at this time. What is also shown in this image is what will later become the most important feature of graffiti - writing it on subways.

The cover of *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) is not an image of “Miro-like” art but is one of the few photos Naar captured of an early prototype of graffiti, an early masterpiece on the side of a subway. The same can be said for the cover photo of the later version of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009), with Stay High 149’s tag blown up and outlined in a different color, taking up most of the subway car. For graffiti enthusiasts, the Star III and Stay High 149 pieces on the subways may be the most important graffiti pictures in the book because they capture the actual graffiti art just as it was beginning. They are pictures of prototype masterpieces on subways. Both the covers of *The Birth* (Naar, 2007) and *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009) attest to what became the most important part of artistic graffiti - graffiti masterpieces on subways.



(Fig. 11. Jon Naar, “Evil Eddy,” *The Faith of Graffiti* 1974)

Evil Eddy. The image of the tag “Evil Eddy” is also a change in style for graffiti, this time a change for the tag. Taki 183’s crude tag with a marker on a door was a starting point for tag style in graffiti. In contrast, Evil Eddy used one large “E” for both words and made the letters sharp by giving them edges and outlining the letters. Naar described the effect in the afterword of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009), noting that “Evil Eddy’s use of outlining cleverly gives a trompe l’oeil effect of chiseling into the stone slab of the balustrade,” which attests to the importance of style as the new standard, overtaking the former standard of tag-names being judged on being all-over. That is, Evil Eddy’s tag was a sign that quality, as seen in style, was becoming as important as quantity.

Not only was the change from tag to masterpiece, as seen with Star III, important to the growth and style of graffiti, the change from a crude tag to a stylized and original tag would prove to be important for graffiti writers as well. Having fresh and original style for

one's tag and piece was crucial for being considered a competent graffiti writer. The two pictures (Star III and Evil Eddy) show that Naar captured important moments in the growth of graffiti as understood by graffiti writers. He captured the growth of style in tags and masterpieces on subways.



(Fig. 12. Jon Naar, "Rube(N)," *The Faith of Graffiti*, 1974)

“Rube(N)” and the tic-tac-toe games. There is an image of what seems like a tag written in red bucket paint with a paint brush, which reads “Rube,” along with four tic-tac-toe games scratched onto the black surface. This image is reminiscent of the set pieces in *West Side Story*: old recycled doors and other pieces of wood used to build clubhouses in abandoned lots or to patch up holes on the outside of dilapidated buildings in New York City. It seems as if a child wrote this name. The letters are painted with a paint brush and the addition of a scratched-on “N” after the name suggests the person writing the name was not able to finish writing it. If the name was “Rube” alone, then one might be able to find anonymity in the name because it would seem like a made-up name that would be connected to graffiti. But the barely visible addition of the letter “N” at the end, made by using a rock or a key, tells a different story, one in which a person began to paint the name “Ruben” but could not finish, and the person “Ruben” came back and finished his name with the same tool with which he played tic-tac-toe.

In this piece, there are four tic-tac-toe games drawn on the same surface with a rock or the edge of something sharp. These games add to the story of this wall being used by children. The game of tic-tac-toe on the wall speaks to the child's play in the early graffiti game. Not only did children write their names as part of a game that only they understood, they also wrote games on the wall that many people understood, like tic-tac-toe. This image captured the preadolescent and pre-graffiti game or child's play I discussed in Chapter 3. Naar's photos captured graffiti on the precipice between preadolescents and adolescents. He captured the early game and the process of it changing.



(Fig. 13. Jon Naar, “Kids Holding their Tags,” *The Faith of Graffiti* 1974)

Kids in a group holding their tag-names up on paper. In *The Birth* (Naar, 2007), there are many more beautiful images of young people “9 to 12 years old” (p. 17), who introduced themselves to Naar and who Naar photographed posing in many different situations. These photos were not shown in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). There was only one image in *The Faith* that showed the young graffiti writers, the image of them all holding their graffiti tags on paper in front of them in a group shot found on the last page. In my opinion, this picture has since become the iconic image from *The Faith*. I can imagine that if there were too many pictures of children having fun with the graffiti, then much of what Mailer wrote would seem ridiculous or over the top. Images of preadolescents with graffiti do not support ideas that writing on walls and objects was a protest against the policies of Mayor Lindsay nor do they connect with the artworks found in MoMA. The young people are simply having fun in these images. As I noted earlier, in *The Faith*, Mailer and Naar used pictures that backed up (as much as possible) the ideas Mailer wrote about in his essay. Mailer’s use of images of artwork from MoMA attests to this “show and tell” and his need for images that supported his interpretation.

I call this photo iconic because, jokingly, and pointing to the preadolescent and “toy” roots of graffiti, later graffiti writers would restage this photo as older people. A restaging of this image is found on the Contents Page of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Even more interesting, though, is how the image of graffiti writers and their artwork changed and was updated in *Subway Art*. Besides the restaged image on the Contents Page in *Subway Art*, all other images of graffiti writers posing with their graffiti after *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) showed graffiti writers who were older young adults and individuals who fearlessly posed on the third rail or in other dangerous poses, next to their graffiti on subways, never holding a piece of paper with graffiti on it. Based solely on comparing Mailer and Naar’s

(1974) image of graffiti writers with Chalfant and Cooper's (1984) updated image of graffiti writers, one can deduce that graffiti writers were older and more experienced with the subways when Chalfant and Cooper documented them and their work in *Subway Art*. That graffiti writers went from being 9-12 years old in 1973 to being in their early 20s in 1984 attests to the major influence *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) had on the hermeneutics of graffiti. After *The Faith*, graffiti was no longer a game that children played; it was an art that only serious and devoted artists could undertake.

This iconic photo shows the original game and captured a moment for graffiti when 9-12 year-olds were excited about graffiti, had tag-names and style, and wanted to share it with whoever was interested. After graffiti became understood as an art, the older graffiti writers would fashion themselves differently. This iconic photo captures the group that began graffiti, preadolescents, the same group that was subsequently banished from graffiti as "toys," those who did not take art as seriously as the older teenagers and young adults featured in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984).

Conclusion to Close Reading of the Images

In conclusion, I argue that Mailer and Naar (1974) deliberately chose for *The Faith* 39 images from the more than 3,000 images that Naar captured, which would support Mailer's open interpretation of graffiti. Naar had designs to capture artistic pictures of graffiti. Naar did not know graffiti writers, how they read graffiti, or what they considered good versus "toy" graffiti. Although Naar met young graffiti writers while on this assignment and took numerous photographs of them pointing at and posing with their graffiti tags, Mailer and Naar selected only one picture of the young graffiti writers to put in *The Faith*.

Naar attempted to capture art as he understood it and did so. At the same time, he also captured major changes taking place in style for the tag and the masterpiece on the subway. He showed the early players of the graffiti game in his iconic photo, an image that undermined much of what Mailer wrote about graffiti. Naar also found the child's play in graffiti before the stakes were raised higher for graffiti by *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Of the 39 images displayed in *The Faith*, some captured names that would later be famous in the graffiti subculture and a few captured graffiti on the outside of the subway. Some captured important changes. Yet many seemed to not hold graffiti as their main subject; rather, they were framed with the intention of capturing graffiti in an artistic pose. This is especially evident after reading Naar's thoughts on photography. Something similar will be found in Mailer's essay.

Close Reading of Mailer's Essay

As I pointed out above, *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) has been mostly ignored by Mailer scholars and lionized by graffiti scholars, and yet both groups have neglected to read the essay closely. By that I mean there is not one substantial piece of writing about this book by Mailer scholars or graffiti scholars; there are only a few paragraphs in Mailer and graffiti studies that even mention it. While I acknowledge that not all of Mailer's work must be closely read by Mailer scholars, I would imagine that when a text such as *The Faith* is exalted by a group (graffiti writers and enthusiasts), a close reading of the text is warranted. In this section, I offer my own close reading of *The Faith*, in the context of Mailer's larger writing project, the graffiti phenomenon, and how it has carried forward since *The Faith*. Through this close reading, I demonstrate how Mailer used the graffiti phenomenon as a vehicle to express his more time-tested and lasting philosophy of Hip. Hip, briefly, is a non-conformist position (or side) taken against the totalitarian state apparatus. That is, Mailer located the Hip in the graffiti phenomenon and highlighted those practices that aligned with it; by doing so, he raised graffiti to a higher level of discourse - the discourse of art and subversion.

To engage in a close reading of *The Faith of Graffiti* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), I suggest shifting the emphasis in the title from "graffiti" to "faith." I argue that, to read *The Faith* only with an eye on graffiti, assuming from the start that the essay is only concerned with graffiti, is similar to embarking upon *Zen in the Art of Archery* (Herrigel, 1948) or *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Pirsig, 1974) with the assumption that those books are mainly about archery or motorcycle maintenance. Rather, those two books are more concerned with Zen and the authors use archery and/or motorcycle maintenance as vehicles through which to approach Zen. Similarly, I argue that *The Faith of Graffiti* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) has more to do with faith than it does with graffiti. That is, *The Faith* is an essay that uses the graffiti phenomenon as a vehicle to extend the concept of faith. If we accept that *The Faith* is more about faith than graffiti, the questions we can ask of the text shift along with the shift in focus. The key questions become: "What about 'faith' does Mailer approach in the essay?"; "What is it about 'faith' that Mailer analyzes?"; and, "How should we investigate the 'faith' that Mailer calls forth?"

Because we are dealing with Mailer, someone who produced 25 years of writings before *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), it is fruitful to look at Mailer's previous writings for insight on the meaning of *The Faith*. One piece of writing stands out from all other Mailer writings: his 1957 essay, "The White Negro." Mailer scholars claim that this essay is Mailer's "seminal work" (Wenke, 1987, p. 69), the "most influential writings of his long career"

(Dearborn, 1999, p. 127), and the philosophy that lays the groundwork for most of his later writings (Lennon, 1986, p. 120; Lucid, 1971, p. 41). In “The White Negro,” Mailer (1957) expressed his philosophy of Hip. Therefore, “The White Negro” is central to my close reading of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). In addition, to provide an even deeper understanding of the “hipsters” who were Mailer’s subject, those “psychic outlaw[‘s]” (Mailer, 1959, p. 355) who adhered to the philosophy of Hip, I will use a later work, Part 4 of Mailer’s (1959) *Advertisements for Myself*, entitled “Hipsters” (hereafter *Hipsters*), for this reading.

In Dearborn’s (1999) brief mention of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), she wrote “it is impossible to miss echoes of ‘The White Negro’ in Norman’s paean to these young hipsters” (Dearborn, 1999, p. 328). The “young hipsters” she referred to are the graffiti writers of 1973. Dearborn’s quote is the only quote I have found that connects these two essays, or that connects *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) to any of Mailer’s earlier writings or philosophies. In “The White Negro,” Mailer (1957) wrote: “Hip with its special and intense awareness of the present tense in life, is I believe one of the philosophies of the future” (p. 315). Mailer would spend much of his writing career trying to prove that statement. “The White Negro” and his stance against totalitarianism was the foundation for most of his later writing.

What is important to know about Mailer’s writings on Hip, and those who follow it, is that scholars consider his first attempt to write about “the American Existentialist - the hipster” (Mailer, 1959, p. 339) as the essay that set the stage for all of his later work (Dearborn, 1999; Lennon, 1986; Lucid, 1971). It is also worth noting that Mailer (1959) frequently explained his most important philosophy, the philosophy of Hip, in terms of religion (e.g., “a muted cool religious revival” [p. 342]; “To be a real existentialist...one must be religious” [p. 341]; and “it takes literal faith” [p. 355]). Mailer, in turn, has been described as a Moses-like figure who brought the world the commandments of Hip, as Hip’s “most outstanding and original theologian” (Malaquais, quoted in Mailer, 1959, p. 359). The faith that Mailer brought to the graffiti phenomenon, I believe, was closely connected to his well-established philosophy (cum religion) of Hip. Therefore, in this section, I read *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) in relation to Mailer’s clearest writings on Hip found in *Hipsters* (Mailer, 1959).

Faith Brings Us to Hip

I offer here a very brief introduction to the philosophy of Hip, as Mailer (1957, 1959) defined it, in order to familiarize the reader with the hipsters and put them in their original context. Mailer’s hipsters were people who came of age after World War II and were scarred

by the atrocities created and suffered by humans, mainly in the creation and use of concentration camps and the atomic bomb. Hipsters were marked by their opposition to these acts of state violence and all state violence. Hipsters subverted accepted cultural norms and led the march of non-conformity against those who conformed to the state, people derogatorily known as “squares.” Much more could be said about Mailer’s philosophy of Hip and I will address those points when useful. However, I will also skip over some critical and controversial pieces of Hip that do not help my study, because they are not found repeated in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974).

I focus on the word “faith” in *Hipsters* (Mailer, 1959) not only because it is a key word in the title *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) but also because of the importance of faith in the philosophy of Hip. Mailer (1957) used the word faith three times in the essay “The White Negro” and three more times in the writings surrounding “The White Negro” in *Hipsters* (Mailer, 1959). I examine all of these uses of faith here because I argue that Mailer’s foundational term faith, found in 1950s Hip, is the same foundational term faith found in his investigation of the 1970s graffiti phenomenon.

The first time Mailer (1957) used the word faith in “The White Negro” was at such a pivotal moment in the sentence that the entire sentence deserves to be copied here:

To be a real existentialist (Sartre admittedly to the contrary) one must be religious, one must have one’s sense of the “purpose” --- whatever the purpose may be---but a life which is directed by one’s *faith* in the necessity of action is a life committed to the notion that the substratum of existence is the search, the end meaningful but mysterious; it is impossible to live such a life unless one’s emotions provide their profound conviction. (p. 341; emphasis added)

Mailer described Hip in terms of religion: e.g., “To be a real existentialist...one must be religious;” “sense of the “purpose;” “faith in the necessity of action;” and “profound conviction” (p. 341). Yet Mailer did not prescribe that hipsters follow an organized religion; rather, he observed that they behaved with the same zeal and adherence to doctrine that followers of religion are said to have. The “faith in the necessity of action” (p. 341) in Hip is a major point when Hip is seen in context as a reaction to, and a stand against, the former conformity to the wisdom of the totalitarian states during World War II, which led to the creation and operation of the concentration camps and the atomic bomb. If accepting of Mailer’s dystopic worldview of life in 1950s America, one may view Hip as a radical way to confront totalitarianism.

Mailer (1959) began this foray into using religious terms to describe his philosophy just before differentiating his philosophy of Hip from the “theology of Atheism” (p. 342), aligning Hip more closely to atheism’s opposite, “mysticism,” than to “closely reasoned logic” (p. 342). Hip was not a religion, but Mailer’s use of religious terminology and religious experience to explain Hip created a setting where “closely reasoned logic” did not reign supreme and emotions could be recognized and appreciated for containing insight. In such a setting, “no rational argument, no hypothesis...no skeptical reductions” (p. 342) “can explain away what has become for [the hipster] the reality more real than the reality of closely reasoned logic” (p. 342). Mailer emphasized that it was the “closely reasoned logic” of the state which led to the horrors of World War II and he prescribed a seemingly mystical response, because Mailer believed one line of defense against “closely reasoned logic” was mysticism.

The first use of “faith” in “The White Negro” (Mailer, 1959) might be summed up as “follow your inner-compass.” In this self-help book sounding summation, there was no judgment or defined direction about where one’s inner-compass should be pointing. The faith was simply the trust or belief it took to “follow your inner-compass” and it was draped in a religious mysticism meant to protect it from the “closely reasoned logic” of the totalitarian state. The second and third times Mailer wrote about faith in “The White Negro” were also at crucial points in the understanding of the argument Mailer was making, and also require full exposition here:

...the nihilism of Hip proposes as its final tendency that every social restraint and category be removed, and the affirmation implicit in the proposal is that man would then prove to be more creative than murderous and so would not destroy himself. Which is exactly what separates Hip from the authoritarian philosophies which now appeal to the conservative and liberal temper---what haunts the middle of the twentieth century is that *faith* in man has been lost, and the appeal of authority has been that it would restrain us to ourselves. Hip, which would return us to ourselves, at no matter what price in individual violence, is the affirmation of the barbarian, for it requires a primitive passion about human nature to believe that individual acts of violence are always to be preferred to the collective violence of the State; it takes literal *faith* in the creative possibilities of the human being to envisage acts of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth. (p. 355; emphasis added)

In the above quote, Mailer (1959) first used faith to describe a lost faith, which has been replaced by “the appeal of authority” (p. 355). The “conservative and liberal” (p. 355)

disposition to defer to authority, rather than trusting in the human being, is a square one. The lost faith is found rediscovered in the philosophy of Hip. By the second use of faith, above, Mailer highlighted the particular faith in Hip - a “literal faith in the creative possibilities of the human being to envisage acts of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth” (p. 355). The clearest example of the difference between those people whom Mailer labeled as hip and square can be seen here. The faith that is found in Hip is an optimistic one and acts as the dividing principle between the hip and the hip’s opposite, the square. The square defers to the authority of the state and the hip follow their individualist inner-compass, trusting in the good inherent in humankind. As Mailer said, “. . .[M]an would then prove to be more creative than murderous and so would not destroy himself” (p. 355). Hip has faith in humankind, whereas the square trusts in the “closely reasoned logic” (p. 355) of the state.

Faith, in the philosophy of Hip, is a faith that the collective violence of the state and authoritarian philosophies is wrong, no matter what logic the state tries to implement to convince people otherwise. Hence faith, in Hip, is a mystic and optimistic endeavor, and is always already set up against its opposite, the square ideal of closely reasoned logic that would lead humankind to be atheistic and pessimistic. Hip is against totalitarianism and, in Mailer’s binary, that means squares are pro-totalitarianism. There is not much space for nuance in the philosophy of Hip; one is either hip or square and the consequences for being one or the other are high. In the logic of the binary, hipsters are turned into heroes, fighting totalitarianism with every small rebellious act they perform and squares are enemies of the morally superior and righteous hipsters.

The three times Mailer (1959) wrote (or spoke) the word faith in *Hipsters* are also enlightening with regards to Mailer’s process and the depth of his ideas on Hip. The first time Mailer used faith in *Hipsters* was in the prologue for “The White Negro” titled “Fourth Advertisement for Myself.” In this prologue, Mailer gave the backstory of how he came to write “The White Negro” (1957). In classic Mailer style, he boasted of having had an original idea (writing an essay that would not be published in 1950s American newspapers because of censorship), sending the original writing to one of the most celebrated writers of the period, William Faulkner, getting a few negative words about his thoughts from Faulkner, and then turning those words into a dialogue, which would then be read by other influential cultural observers of the period such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Dr. W. E. B. DuBois. After receiving both scathing and praising commentary on the back and forth between Mailer and Faulkner, Mailer decided that, in the presence of his literary betters, he would have to write something with more meaning than what he had originally written. He said, “I would have to do a great

deal better, because if I did not, I might lose one emotion and gain another, an exchange I was in fever to avoid” (p. 334). Mailer continued, “the first emotion included no less than my *faith* that I was serious, that I was right, that my work would give more to others than it took from them” (p. 334; emphasis added). The emotion that Mailer was “in fever to avoid” changing for his “faith that [he] was serious” was the emotion that comes with being “dismissed by a novelist who was” “a great writer” (p. 335). Here, Mailer used faith the same way he did at the beginning of “The White Negro” (1957), as a trust in his inner-compass, for if Mailer did not have faith in himself and his original idea, if he did not follow his inner-compass and have faith that his “work would give more to others than it took from them” (Mailer, 1959, p. 334), then Mailer would perhaps have given up the thread of thought that eventually led to his most celebrated writing. And so, rather than accept the harsh critique of the great writer of the day, Mailer steeled himself with his faith in his profound conviction and pushed on to write “The White Negro” (1957) in spite of Faulkner’s derision.

Mailer (1959) gave us this story after “The White Negro” (Mailer, 1957) made a large splash in American writing and thought. Mailer (1959) seemed to describe the mystical faith of Hip by providing an anecdote of Mailer following that same faith himself (following his inner-compass), which led him to write “The White Negro” (Mailer, 1957). Here, in a real-life example (using larger than life characters), Faulkner’s public rejection and derision of Mailer’s original and immature sexual and psychological innuendo (as Mailer [1959] wrote, Faulkner may have viewed him as “a noisy pushy middling ape who had been tolerated too long by his literary betters” [p. 335]) is the act of violence needed for the catharsis which prepared growth, the catharsis being self-reflexive humility and the growth being Mailer’s (1957) most important philosophy and writing in “The White Negro.”

The next time Mailer (1959) said or wrote faith in *Hipsters* came in a transcribed interview which served as a postscript and further clarification of some points covered in “The White Negro.” In the interview with Jean Malaquais titled “Reflections on Hip,” positioned in *Hipsters* precisely after “The White Negro,” Mailer (1959) made the ideals and beliefs of Hip into a clearer picture for the interviewer. Again, Mailer placed faith at an important point in the sentence and so the entire sentence, and the sentence before, are transcribed here:

...[T]he hipster, rebel cell in our social body, lives out, acts out, follows the close call of his instinct as far as he dares, and so points to the possibilities and consequences in what have hitherto been chartless jungles of moral nihilism. The essence of his expression, his *faith* if you will, is that the real desire to make a better world exists at

the heart of our instinct (that instinctual vision of a human epic which gave birth to consciousness itself), that man is therefore roughly more good than evil, that beneath his violence there is finally love and the nuances of justice, and that the removal therefore of all social restraints while it would open to us an era of incomparable individual violence would still spare us the collective violence of rational totalitarian liquidations (which we must accept was grossly a psychic index of the buried, voiceless, and ineradicable violences of whole nations of people), and would ---and here is the difference---by expending the violence directly, open the possibility of working with that human creativity which is violence's opposite. (p. 363; emphasis added)

Faith, as Mailer used it here, is similar to what Mailer (1957) already said in "The White Negro," that hipsters "follow their inner-compass," and are on the side of individual violence as opposed to state violence. What Mailer emphasized here is that the faith of the hipster is a wholly optimistic endeavor, especially when juxtaposed with state violence. Hip faith, even when calling for radical changes and behaving in radical ways, is optimistic that creative and all-in-all positive outcomes will come from the faith one has in trusting their inner-compass.

It is difficult to maintain the vision of an optimistic outlook in Hip because Mailer (1959) continually brought up individual violence and state violence. It appeared that "he wanted to preserve a degree of danger and transgressiveness in the culture, even at the cost of a society that continued to be repressive; he valued the frisson of danger that would elevate certain activities, like sex or violence, beyond the everyday" (Dearborn, 1999, p. 179). Hence, it is important to point out that, for Mailer, violence was always-already in a binary (individual-state), which elucidates the binary between hip and square. Hip violence can manifest itself in the extreme of murdering a candy clerk (an example Mailer [1957] gave in "The White Negro") or in the lesser violence (violence nonetheless) of taking drugs, being obscene, not following orders from authority, or being subversive through one's dress, speech, and sexual relations (two important points Mailer put forth via Hip were his belief in miscegenation during Jim Crow as opposed to the square position of "the White Citizen's Councils" [Mailer, 1959, p. 356] and his "inclusion of bisexuality in the hipster's sexual profile" [Whiting, 2005, p. 203]). Often the individual violence that Mailer (1957) stressed in the anecdote of killing the candy clerk is taken out of the context of the binary with state violence in which it is always already situated in "The White Negro." When taken out of context, Hip seems to be calling for irrational violence against vulnerable members of society; but when kept in the original binary against state liquidations, "individual violence" can

certainly be viewed as more desirable and honorable than the “cold murderous liquidations of the totalitarian state” (Mailer, 1959, p. 357). The individual violence Mailer continually referenced is a symptom of and an answer to state violence.

The binary of violence should be understood by now; it is always already what is labeled as individual violence versus state violence. Hip is often critiqued for its preoccupation with violence. When it is not understood as part of the binary with state violence, Hip seems immature and unreasonable. In *Mailer's America*, Wenke (1987) wrote: “The hipster’s program of liberation raises, of course, the controversial question of the ethical implications of the theme of violence that is so prominent in much of Mailer’s work” (p. 82). The hip/square binary does not allow for nuance. Thus, when juxtaposed with state violence, Mailer could consider the individual murderers of a candy clerk to be “not cowardly” (Mailer, 1959, p. 347); but, when taken out of the binary with state violence, the violence stressed in Hip appears erratic and obscene. By the measure of the hip/square binary, almost all individual violence can be described as quasi-heroic or “not cowardly.” Mailer (1957) fetishized individual violence in “The White Negro” and, we will see later, again fetishized individual violence in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) when Mailer described the individual violence of Cay 161.

The sixth and final time Mailer (1959) used the word faith in *Hipsters* is when he wrote about the difference between hipsters and beatniks in a short piece titled “Hipster and Beatnik, a footnote to ‘The White Negro.’” Mailer wrote, “The Beat Generation is probably best used to include hipsters and beatniks” (p. 372) and then showed the smaller differences between the two groups. Mailer described what these two well-known subcultural groups believed in as akin to religion when he wrote that the beatnik “comes along with most hipsters on the first tenet of the *faith*” (p. 373; emphasis added). I will return to this differentiation between beatniks and hipsters a little later; for now, what is worth noting is how Mailer wrapped his writings on the ideology and beliefs of Hip with religious coverings. Whether with the language of religion or the structure of it, Mailer used religion to describe Hip. By doing so, he made the beliefs of Hip as serious and acceptable as religious beliefs and showed that, in Hip, faith was not simply pretty language but a serious code of ethics.

By isolating Mailer’s (1959) use of the word faith in *Hipsters*, I showed how Mailer used religious terminology and connections to describe the philosophy of Hip in the essay that would be “one of the most influential writings of his long career” (Dearborn, 1999, p. 127), and which served as the grounding text for much of his later work (Lucid, 1971, p. 41). I showed Hip to be both mystic and optimistic. In the religion of Hip, followers are to have

faith in their inner-compass, plus a mystical faith in feelings and experiences which can't be explained by "closely reasoned logic," and an optimistic faith that humans are good and to do good is what humankind most wants. I have shown that faith, in Hip, is an important quality and that which separates the hip from the square.

Part 1: A Mystic and Optimistic Belief

In Part 1 of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer opened with what I consider the actual theme of the essay, a mystic and optimistic belief, or faith. He rejected a title for the essay recommended by Naar and some informants in order to find a better title and theme, which he did when he met Cay 161. Mailer focused on Cay 161's hip credentials rather than being too interested in what Cay 161 had to say about the graffiti phenomenon.

Mailer becomes "A-I." Mailer (1957) wrote "The White Negro" 17 years before *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Much had happened in those intervening 17 years, which may have made portions of "The White Negro" less tolerable and less intelligible to later readers. For example, "...Mailer's depiction of the Negro can easily be interpreted as an approximation of the racist stereotype of the black as irresponsible, pleasure seeking, sexual-athlete who wears his subjection lightly" (Wenke, 1987, p. 78), and the essay "advocate[s] the violent overthrow of the American system – social, economic, and political" (Adams, 1976, pp. 53-54). Even though "The White Negro" (Mailer, 1957) was the essay that would "shape all of Mailer's future work in whatever form" (Lucid, 1971, p. 41), it can read as a product of its time and for the sake of some of the ideas found in Hip and what its enemy is, Hip deserves some revision. Perhaps Mailer acknowledged as much in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), when he connected some parts of Hip with the graffiti phenomenon and disregarded other parts. In this section, I show how Mailer used the graffiti phenomenon as a vehicle to return to some of the ideas of Hip that remained relevant over time. I propose that Mailer approached graffiti with Hip on his mind.

In the opening paragraph of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer wrote himself into the story as an investigator. He embraced his journalistic duties by putting forward the standpoint that, even though he could view his assignment pessimistically as a "chore," or even worse as "bondage," Mailer the protagonist optimistically chose to see himself "as a private eye inquiring into the mysteries of a new phenomenon" (p. 4). Being that the new phenomenon he was investigating was the graffiti phenomenon, the protagonist christened himself with what could be a graffiti name, "A-I" "(for Aesthetic-Investigator: 'Make the name A hyphen Roman numeral I;'" p. 4). With this tag-name, Mailer made his protagonist

the alpha for theorizing on graffiti. Designated with first letter A and first number 1, A-I positioned himself as the first to delve deeply into this subject.²¹

It is worth noting that, in this opening paragraph, Mailer demonstrated how he could choose to view the same experience in different ways, and that he would not approach the subject with prejudgments or a preselected viewpoint. With this posture, Mailer aligned with a doctrine of Hip: that Hip “has almost no interest in viewing human nature, or better, in judging human nature, from a set of standards conceived a priori to the experience” (Mailer, 1959, p. 353). That one could look at something as perhaps as facile as children’s names written on the wall and choose to approach it with wide eyes and excitement is an important first step in viewing the world through a Hip lens. Mailer did not approach the graffiti phenomenon with the popular (and square) a priori viewpoint of the time in New York City, that graffiti was a nuisance (see Austin, 2001); instead, by taking a graffiti name himself, he embodied and embraced the phenomenon. At the same time, Mailer protected the graffiti phenomenon from simple put-downs, such as it being an act by “insecure cowards” (Lindsay, quoted in Mailer & Naar, 2009, p. 23), because now Norman Mailer was a part of it. Mailer explicitly wrote, and by example showed, that one could approach a topic pessimistically with one’s mind made up already, as a square might, or be optimistic and open to discovery, as a hipster might. Mailer chose to follow the Hip. He demonstrated how beliefs about the same topic could be shifted and, in a Hip worldview, no interpretation was static. Mailer made himself a graffiti writer and, by doing so, showed that he was still hip.

In the middle of the second paragraph of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer provided the grounding theme of the essay in the word “belief.” To support his original hypothesis that “There is something to find in these pictures” of graffiti (p. 5), Mailer mused on the accomplishments and fame of the graffiti writer Cay 161:

Cay 161 . . . as famous in the world of wall and subway graffiti as Giotto may have been when his name first circulated through the circuits of those workshops which led from Masaccio through Piero della Francesca to Botticelli, Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Raphael. Whew! In such company Cay loses all name, although he will not necessarily see it that way. He has the power of his own *belief*.” (p. 4; emphasis added)

²¹ I wonder if this could also be an allusion to the early 20th century North American Hobo A#1, who was famous for writing his moniker on freight trains across the United States, wrote books about his adventures, and was connected to Jack London. We have seen Mailer’s attempt (and success) in connecting himself with William Faulkner. Similarly, in many of his writings, he connected himself with Hemingway and Fitzgerald. Reaching back to the writers before these “literary betters” of “American letters,” such as Jack London, would no doubt be a Mailer thing to do, but I have no evidence for this, besides the similarity in name.

Belief is the grounding and recurring theme of *The Faith*. Later, the word belief changes to faith, which underpins Mailer's interpretation of the graffiti phenomenon. But before belief becomes faith, Mailer first introduced the word belief by assigning belief to what might be Cay 161's fantasy; that is, Mailer translated Cay 161's fantasy into consensus reality. Cay 161 did not himself claim to be an artist of the caliber of the Renaissance Masters mentioned, nor was he quoted as saying he believed he was so outstanding (or that he even knew who they were). Mailer introduced those Renaissance figures. Mailer then took Cay 161's fantasy (that writing one's name everywhere makes them important); put it into terms that could be read in the consensus reality (a "king" became an important "artist"); claimed it was true based on belief; and bestowed this belief onto Cay 161. Mailer first established belief in Cay 161 at the beginning of part one of the essay and then found that belief in Cay 161's mention of faith at the end of part one, picking up on Cay 161's esoteric comment that "the name is the *faith* of graffiti" (p. 8).²² These moves support my argument that, from the start of this essay, Mailer was more concerned with belief or faith than with the graffiti phenomenon as such.

Protagonist and storyteller. It is important to put *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) and Mailer in context, both to support my approach to reading *The Faith* and to convey how Mailer's fame and style made him a popular and valued voice of dissent in American culture. Even a light acquaintance with Mailer's work and public standing in the 1970s assists in understanding how Mailer's Hip take on the graffiti phenomenon, including his use of the third person personal perspective in his writing, would result in graffiti writers and observers taking the practice more seriously.

In *Norman Mailer: Novelist, Journalist, or Historian?*, Lennon (2006) made the case that Mailer was difficult to pin down as being a writer from one field. He wrote novels, plays, movie scripts, philosophy, journalism, poetry, fiction and nonfiction, essays and articles. A few of Mailer's books (including *Advertisements for Myself* [1959], *The Presidential Papers* [1963], *Cannibals and Christians* [1967], and *Pieces* [1982]) were stitched together with compilations of pieces of his larger works, essays, letters, critiques, responses to critiques about his work, interviews, and lists. Some of his books were first released as serial installments in magazines (e.g., *An American Dream*, *The Armies of the Night*, and *The Prisoner of Sex*). He experimented with the boundaries of the novel, reproducing accepted methods of writing while at the same time producing original work by making works that added to the already open definition of the novel. It was through blending journalism with the

²² Mailer put the word "faith" in italics in the original. I wonder why "name" was not put in italics? And why "the name" was left out of the title? I answer my own question here: perhaps because Mailer was more interested in the concept of "faith" than "the name".

novel in *The Armies of the Night* (hereafter *Armies*) that Mailer (1968) birthed his unique writing style and reaped much acclaim.

Mailer worked as a journalist on many occasions but, for decades, had maintained that he was “a major” novelist and would “hit the longest ball ever to go up in the accelerated hurricane air of our American letters” with a grand novel, one that would rank with the best “Hemingway, Theodore Dreiser and John Dos Passos” (Lennon, 2006, p. 93). Mailer was a novelist first and spoke of his desire to live up to the great writers who wrote in the generation before his. But it was his work as a journalist that financially sustained him over long periods, and his blending of the sensibilities of a fiction writer and a journalist led him to hone his particular style.

Since he called himself a journalist in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), we can take him at his word that he was one, but Mailer did not write or behave like a typical journalist. He inserted his personal life and beliefs into much of his journalism, making himself and his ideas as important as the topics he covered. As much as he wrote columns or assigned articles for popular magazines, “...including *Esquire* (over forty), *Playboy*, *The Village Voice*, *Life*, *Parade*, *Harper’s*, *Commentary* and *Vanity Fair*” (Lennon, 2006, p. 92), his personal life, including both accomplishments and foibles, was often written about in the media. In *Armies*, Mailer (1968) alluded to this: “During the day, while he was helpless, newspapermen and other assorted bravos of the media and the literary world would carve ugly pictures on the living tomb of his legend” (p. 5).

Mailer used his public/personal life as fodder for some of his writings and infused his written fiction with his lived reality. It seemed that Mailer lived according to his Hip philosophy by encouraging his inner psychopath and living on the edge. The recorded events from his personal life are as outrageous as any noir-fiction writer could hope to write. As Adams (1976) noted,

Many of these self-enactments have been sensational, ranging from the stabbing of his second wife to publicly denouncing the President of the United States in ‘obscene’ language to running for mayor of New York. Certain actions carried out in private have become public by their nature, as is the case with the stabbing incident. (p. 33)

Mailer fused his real life with his fictional characters’ lives, and by doing so injected a substantial sense of reality to his writings. As Garvey observed in *Modern Critical Views of Norman Mailer* (1986), “Mailer’s journalism, and much of his fiction, was full of Mailer or Mailer substitutes” (Bloom, 1986, p. 139), which blurred the line between life and art, action and fiction, and forced Mailer the writer to meld with Mailer the protagonist in many of his

works. Mailer wrote about an array of topics and was present for important historical moments, but the one topic during any important moment that seemed to always play center-stage in his writing was Norman Mailer.

In his writings from the 1950s and early 1960s, Mailer utilized various perspectives, although he used the first person perspective in much of his writing, which colored his writing as deeply personal. Mailer even answered critiques to his work in the first person in his books, e.g., “I have little quarrel with Ned Polsky’s remarks” (Mailer, 1959, p. 369). By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Mailer’s writing style changed and he wrote a “hybrid of fiction and reporting” (Bloom, 1986, p. 141). One way he achieved this hybrid was by writing from the “third person personal perspective” (Lennon, 1977, p. 176). Mailer created fictional characters who were barely masked - or not masked at all - versions of himself. By writing from this point of view, Mailer was able to write about himself as both an instigator and investigator of the events he covered at the same time. He found that, “The technics of the point of view...third person personal...proved to be an even more valuable way of presenting his interior life than the first person method” (Lennon, 1977, p. 176).

In the third person personal point of view, the main character tells a story about him/herself and refers to him/herself by a formal name or by the pronouns he/she and him/her, rather than the pronouns I or me. For example, Mailer wrote about “Mailer the journalist” in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), calling the character “A-I”, and using third person pronouns to refer to the character (e.g., “our Aesthetic Investigator,” “He has a match,” “So, yes, he accepts”) (p. 5; emphasis added). Mailer (1968) began using this point of view in *Armies*, writing about Mailer’s actual experience participating in a demonstration against the Vietnam War held at the Pentagon in 1967, naming his character first “the novelist” and maintaining a distance between author and character based on the passage of time and reflection on the events since. There are two Mailers in his third person personal accounts: Mailer-the-protagonist instigating events and Mailer-the-omniscient-storyteller investigating the events (and observing his protagonist) from a reflective distance. Lennon (1977) likened Mailer’s writing style, with the third person personal perspective, to the choice of the perspective of a painter. As Lennon wrote:

The problem is illustrated by the landscape artist who tries to paint a picture of everything he is aware of—including himself painting the scene before him. So he paints a picture which includes himself painting, only to find he needs a more inclusive view which contains himself painting himself in, and so on, to infinity.

Mailer circumvents this difficulty somewhat for his implicit tactic is to reveal Mailer-

now by showing us Mailer-then. The writer Mailer, the subject Mailer, observing and recreating the object-participant Mailer, is changing, growing even as he writes. Yet he tells us about a second constantly changing, self-aware and world-observing self whose growth processes obviously approximate those of his creator. Unlike the painter who paints the landscape before him, Mailer “paints” us a mirror which reveals both object and subject. (p. 179)

In *Advertisements*, Mailer (1959) wrote, “the most powerful leverage in fiction comes from point of view” (p. 221). In the same book, he experimented with various points of view, but his decided use of the third person personal in the late 1960s and early 1970s gave a certain leverage to Mailer’s authority on cultural events and phenomena. In *Mailer’s Radical Bridge*, Lennon (1977) quoted Mailer as saying “...if we cannot perceive an idea for ourselves, we should know the observer through whom we perceive second-hand” (p. 179). This holds true for Mailer’s hypothesis about the graffiti phenomenon, that is, even though most readers of the piece did not approach graffiti with original ideas, they should know, and either trust or distrust, Norman Mailer.

Lennon (1977) wrote that Mailer’s third person personal technique allowed “Mailer to swivel his sights ‘through’ his protagonist without relinquishing any of his subjectivity” (p. 177). By writing about himself in *Armies* and his actions against what he has always hailed as the totalitarian state in the Pentagon, Mailer (1968) not only shaped the narrative from the perspective of a protestor being imprisoned for lawfully disobeying the state, but also endowed his protagonist with a career’s worth of writing, philosophy, and public disruption with which to attack the state by making his character a hybrid of himself and the narrator-hero. Mailer’s 25 years of writing and life in the public eye up until the march on the Pentagon did not have to be explained in *Armies*; they were precisely understood to be the reason Mailer (the writer/protagonist) would be invited by the organizers to give a speech and become a de-facto leader of the march. As Lennon (1977) wrote, “In *Armies* and the works of creative nonfiction that follow it the author of the present is observing, describing, reporting the Mailer, Aquarius, Reporter, Prisoner of Sex of the past, and these former selves, in turn, are aware of the world about them” (p. 179).

Mailer’s use of the third person personal and the recurring character of “Mailer” in many of his texts goes along with Mailer’s idea about his work that “... in a way, I’ve been working on one book most of my writing life” (Lucid, 1971, p. 295). Because of the overlapping of the (same) protagonist in many of his works, his writings come to feel like part of a series, or even, as he said, “one book.” Regarding five of the pieces written in third

person personal perspective in the few years before *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Lennon (1977) went so far as to say that “Mailer’s five works of creative nonfiction, taken collectively” (p. 184), “written between 1968 and 1972” (p. 175),²³ are as “original” as “Moby-Dick” and “The Wasteland” because they give “definition to a moment of a culture’s history and predict and promote its possible futures” (p. 184).

For *Armies*, Mailer (1968) won both The National Book Award and The Pulitzer Prize. Perhaps because of the success of *Armies*, “...Mailer began to incorporate more and more of his personal beliefs and experience in his work. From 1968 to 1975, he published eight nonfiction narratives with himself as narrator-hero” (Lennon, 1982, p. 25).²⁴ By examining the perspective Mailer used in these works, Lennon concluded that Mailer discovered that “art and life could not be separated by fiat” (p. 172), yet the “self” could be divided “by aesthetic fiat” (p. 185) into an acting-self and an observing-self to “perceive a Self who may manage to represent the separate warring selves by a Style” (p. 174), which became Mailer’s “crucial tactic” of “his aesthetic strategy” (p. 185).

Beyond sharing a protagonist, Mailer’s writings from the period 1968 through 1975 also built upon each other and incorporated references to past works and life experiences. For example, in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer devoted Part 4 to an interview and meeting with the Mayor of New York City at the time, John Lindsay. Here Mailer referred to his own running twice for mayor of New York City and failing both times in humiliating fashion. Mayor Lindsay was a vocal opponent of the graffiti phenomenon and, perhaps because Mailer lost and Lindsay won in 1969, Mailer reveled in the prospect that the graffiti phenomenon might be partially to blame for Lindsay’s inability to run for President of the United States in 1972. As Mailer commented:

He must have sensed the Presidency draining away from him as the months went by, the graffiti grew, and the millions of tourists who passed through the city brought the word out to the rest of the nation: ‘Filth is sprouting on the walls.’ (p. 24)

Mailer’s own political ambitions and dashed dreams of leadership came to the fore in this part and are worth examining when reading it (more on this later).

Mailer displayed and grew his notoriety, using the third person personal perspective in the six pieces that led up to *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). The topics he covered in the

²³ The five works of creative nonfiction referred to by Lennon are *Armies* (1968), *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968), *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1971), *Prisoner of Sex* (1972), and *St. George and The Godfather* (1972).

²⁴ The eight books are: *Armies* (1967), *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968), *fn a Fire on the Moon* (1970), *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971), *St. George and The Godfather* (1972), *Marilyn: A Novel Biography* (1973), *The Faith of Graffiti* (1974), and *The Fight* (1975) (Lennon, 1982, note 35).

third person personal were culturally paramount topics for Americans at the moment, which may have made the topic of graffiti stand out for being seemingly less urgent. As already mentioned, Mailer (1968) covered a protest in 1967 against the Vietnam War at the Pentagon in *Armies*, naming his character first “The Novelist,” and then “he becomes in addition ‘Participant,’ ‘Historian,’ ‘Beast’ (a role assigned to him---unlike novelists, participants can be manipulated), ‘Romantic,’ ‘Master of Ceremonies,’ ‘minor poet,’ ‘Citizen,’ ‘Ruminant,’ and ‘Protagonist’” (Adams, 1976, p. 128). He wrote about his experiences at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions in 1968 in *Miami and The Siege of Chicago* (Mailer, 1968), naming his protagonist “the reporter.” In *Of a Fire on the Moon*, Mailer (1970) wrote about the 1969 moon landing and called his third person personal Mailer-character/protagonist “Aquarius.” When he reported on the Presidential election in *St. George and the Godfather* (1972), he continued calling his reporter/protagonist “Aquarius.” The continuity from piece to piece of basically the same protagonist (Norman Mailer) made it easy to read the author and protagonist as one and the same. His writing during this period was ebullient because the same character appeared, Norman Mailer, aged and more the wiser after each text, simultaneously growing in the public eye and using his acumen to deduce the proper written response to the chosen event. The protagonists in his writings were Mailer, and when not, they at least carried Mailer’s theories and previous writings with them when written about in the third person personal perspective.

In 1959, Mailer opened his literary manifesto, *Advertisements for Myself*, with the admission that he was “imprisoned with a perception which will settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of our time” (Adams, 1976, p. 3). Given that statement, scholars typically framed Mailer’s later work as influenced by his activist concerns (e.g., Bloom, 1986; Castronovo, 2003; Lennon, 1986; Lucid, 1971; Wenke, 1987). Mailer “determine(d) that a relationship of cause and effect should exist between writing and acting: ‘there is no communication unless action has resulted, be it immediately or in the unknown and indefinite future’”(Adams, 1976, p. 3, citing Mailer, 1959, p. 266). In this light, creating A-I as narrator-hero was an important move in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) if Mailer was to live up to his own ideal that his writing should influence events, either as outcomes or reactions to outcomes, because he brought a career of intelligent subversion to the topic of graffiti and made himself part of the phenomenon; thereby, he elevated the discussion around the graffiti phenomenon. Mailer as A-I would get to be both an instigator and an investigator of the graffiti phenomenon. It wasn’t enough for Mailer to simply write about a topic; he had to have an impact on the subject.

True to his belief about the power of writing, Mailer extolled evidence of the strength and impact of his own writings. For example, after the 1960 presidential election, Mailer believed he was responsible for John F. Kennedy's win due to the mostly positive article Mailer (1960) wrote about Kennedy in *Esquire*, titled "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" (Adams, 1976, p. 22). On the basis of Mailer's self-regard as a president-maker, he wrote *Presidential Papers* in 1963, in which he gave unsolicited advice directly to President Kennedy and Fidel Castro. Mailer saw himself as, and acted as, someone whose interpretation and recommendations were valuable, worthy of discussion, and potentially revolutionary. Mailer believed "...that if one's art and one's philosophy are important enough, their reverberations, no matter how ephemeral or long delayed, will be felt" (Adams, 1976, p. 3).²⁵

My analysis in this chapter supports this interpretation of Mailer's writings, that is, his writing was influential and did shape (or interfere with) some events. Perhaps not as crucial as electing a President, *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) influenced the interpretation of the graffiti phenomenon. Mailer forever attached graffiti with art and subversion, influenced graffiti practitioners and observers, and elevated the discussion surrounding graffiti. Mailer's contribution was noted and answered by the graffiti writers with the continuation, maturation, and dissemination of the phenomenon over time.

What's in a name. Mailer placed the graffiti phenomenon in high company, given the discerning taste in the projects that Mailer had undertaken leading up to it. Yet, this burgeoning phenomenon alone feels out of place in the context of Mailer's other writings and topics. What gives Mailer the ability to add the seemingly lowly topic of graffiti to the list of his important investigations can be found in the theme of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). His belief, his faith in his inner-compass, and his Hip optimism allow for graffiti to be taken seriously as a topic. The graffiti phenomenon holds its own in the company of Mailer's other urgent topics by the power of Mailer's belief that he saw something as profound in graffiti as he had in other topics.

Although he took the name A-I in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer actually never wrote his tag-name on a wall or object in graffiti fashion, so his conversion into graffiti writer is never completed. However, he did have a major informant in the graffiti writer Cay 161. As Mailer said, "That is the famous Cay from 161st street, there at the beginning with TAKI 183 and JUNIOR 161" (p. 4). Mailer made a valuable move for inventing a tradition

²⁵ Mailer (1973) wrote about the life and death of Marilyn Monroe in *Marilyn*, and in doing so created and inspired a cult of conspiracy theories surrounding her death which, to this day, still remains in the cultural consciousness. Still today, Mailer's ideas about Monroe's death and the involvement of the Kennedy family and CIA in it stay glued to Monroe's public image.

with this introduction to his informant Cay 161, which is highlighted by the lens I cut for this thesis. As I described earlier, an important facet of inventing traditions is to connect one event with a past event, an event that represents a time of change. Mailer aided in the invention of the tradition of graffiti by connecting his informant Cay 161 with an event and a graffiti writer captured in print three years prior in *The New York Times*, namely, the written piece “Taki 183” (1971). By doing so, Mailer reinforced the relevance of the initial article “Taki 183” to the invented tradition of graffiti, setting up the printed article “Taki 183” to be thought of as a moment of historic change for graffiti, which then placed Cay 161 as a successor or even a peer of the first graffiti writer written about, Taki 183.

Mailer invited the reader into the apartment of Junior 161’s parents, where “our Aesthetic Investigator,” A-I, sat in a bedroom on West 161st street talking with “Cay 161 and Junior 161 and L’il Flame and Lurk” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 5). Junior’s parents’ apartment reminded A-I of his relatives from 50 years prior, showing a closeness of experience and a connection to being a poor immigrant New Yorker. By stripping away the obvious differences between him and his informants and showing what similarities they shared, A-I set a tone of comradery and parity with the graffiti writers.

Mailer reported on the discussion between him and his informants: “They talk about the name” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 5). After ingratiating himself and connecting with his hosts via familial experience, Mailer established for the first time his intent to write a piece worthy of “Norman Mailer the writer” and flatly rejected the title proposed by Naar and his informants for the book, “Watching My Name Go By.” Mailer explained why he must reject it: “Certain literary men cannot afford titles like Watching My Name Go By. Norman Mailer may be first in such a category. One should not be able to conceive of one’s bad reviews before writing a word” (p. 5). Here we see Mailer’s use of the third person personal and also how Mailer understands “the name.” In this dilapidated apartment, the group talked about “the name” and what it meant, and the whole time Mailer only thought about his own name and what his name meant to him: his reputation. Mailer recognized for himself (a famous writer) that name could mean reputation. He was worried that his reputation would be sullied if he wrote a pithy piece describing teenage games without interpreting it in his unique way and finding something consequential in it.

In the past, Mailer had on a number of occasions rejected and changed titles for his writings that Mailer did not create himself. In *Hipsters*, in the piece titled “Reflections on Hip,” Mailer (1959) wrote: “I have taken one liberty. The exchange was called ‘Reflections on Hipsterism,’ when it appeared in *Dissent*. I did not choose the title, and so I have altered

the name of the piece” (p. 359). He took that liberty more than once in his career (Dearborn, 1999, p. 177). No one could tell Mailer the title of his work.

Mailer was obsessed with the bad reviews written about his works. In *Advertisements*, Mailer (1959) wrote about his worry over many of his previous bad reviews and discussed how his bad reviews put him in a depression and paralyzed his writing, not allowing him to write all of the work that he would have (pp. 240-241). He meticulously answered many of his bad reviews in the same section (pp. 246-247), showing his vulnerability in obsessing over the potential bad reviews of his work and showing that responding to bad reviews was a major part of his writing practice. The bad review Mailer imagined from the suggested title, “Watching My Name Go By,” could be a critic writing that the reader was watching Mailer’s reputation (name) go bye-bye because Mailer wrote a one-dimensional piece about teenage games, if he allowed for the graffiti writer to frame his interpretation. Therefore, Mailer let the reader (and the graffiti writer) know from the start that this essay was not some charity piece that he was writing for inner-city youth, but that his name and reputation were also at stake with this essay. He was bringing his “A”-game.

Mailer did not recognize that his informants’ names could also have a reputation connected to them and didn’t approach replacing “name” with reputation for the graffiti writers as he did with his own name. Mailer argued that Naar and company had it wrong, for it was not about “MY NAME but THE NAME. Watching The Name Go By. He still does not like it” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 6). He continued obsessively searching for some road in to graffiti by understanding “the name,” but he ended up writing in circles, showing that the graffiti writers were mainly concerned with their names. If he could have understood “Watching My Name Go By” as “Watching My (the) Reputation Grow with Every Masterpiece I Create on the Subway,” his investigation might have been closer to the truth of graffiti writers’ experiences with the graffiti phenomenon and not so obviously connected to his own earlier writings instead.

In the graffiti phenomenon, the “name” is not a regular name. It is not one’s proper name and so one cannot read much into it (race, sex, class) in the same way one often can with proper names (e.g., Jose, Joe, Joseph, Josephine). Similar to Mailer’s name, the graffiti name is closer to reputation than just a nonsense word meant to hide one’s identity. This was true of Taki 183; his reputation grew because of his writing and more so because of the article written about his exploits. Taki 183 achieved incredible fame and solidified his name (reputation) in the graffiti phenomenon and, because of the growth of his reputation, many others wanted to do the same (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984).

After rejecting the suggested title on the basis of anticipated poor reviews, Mailer then explained another reason why he rejected the title: “But then he also does not like *Watching My Name Go By* for its own forthright meaning. It implies a direct and sentimental connection to the world” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 5). This is where Mailer diverged slightly from the graffiti writers and left his most lasting mark on graffiti. The graffiti phenomenon at this moment may well have been “direct and sentimental,” but Mailer/A-I didn’t want to be connected to that. That was not an interesting story, nor did it carry the potential to influence outcomes the way Mailer said his work was designed to. After rejecting the “forthright meaning” of “*Watching My Name Go By*,” Mailer appreciated what that now afforded. Without a forthright meaning, “There is a pleasurable sense of depth to the elusiveness of the meaning” (p. 6). Mailer filled that elusive vacuum of meaning with what he could salvage from his philosophy of Hip. Mailer did not trust his informants to give him all of the information that he needed; he may have even thought that they didn’t know what they were a part of. Mailer would look for and find aspects of Hip throughout the graffiti phenomenon.

Cay 161 is Hip. As I have already mentioned, violence in Hip is always-already set in the binary between individual violence (hip) and state sponsored violence (square). More than simply mystic and optimistic enemies of the totalitarian state, hipsters do what one feels whenever and wherever it is possible and---this is how the war of the Hip and the Square begins---to be engaged in one primal battle: to open the limits of the possible for oneself, for oneself alone, because that is one’s need... The Hip ‘ethic’ is immoderation, childlike approval of the present. Every social restraint should be removed. (Dearborn, 1999, p. 130)

Interpersonal violence, as opposed to state sponsored violence, was preferred and even elevated on a scale of morality and human suffering for Mailer’s hipster. Robbery, assault, and destruction of property were more noble acts than blanket bombing innocent women and children from the sky in state-sanctioned war. In Hip, Mailer emphasized that hipsters’ individual violence could lead to creativity and that hipsters have faith in the positive outcomes of that. The near obsession with individual violence in the philosophy of Hip points to its inherent righteousness based on what it is opposed to: state violence.

Mailer set the hipster up to always be at battle, if not with the overwhelming totalitarian forces of the state, then with the people who prop up the state - the squares. In *Norman Mailer as a Midcentury Advertisement* (2003), Castronovo wrote of this, “his message—the message of the uninhibited hipster waging a ‘noble’ battle with the civilized square...” (p. 186). Mailer called himself a hipster and waged war against “civilized squares”

with his obscene writing. Comparing Mailer with Mark Twain, in *Sounding the Trumpets of Defiance*, Taylor (1972) wrote: “[H]e has delved into the area of obscenity with an enthusiasm that baffles even the most tolerant of censors” (p. 11). By using obscenity in his writing, Taylor argued, Mailer was allowed “to be disturbing...and at the same time it expresses...his identification with the ‘common man’” (p. 11). Taylor continued, “Mailer’s use of obscenity...represents a grotesquely accurate mirror of the lie that is the American myth” (p. 12). On the hypocrisy in the American myth, Mailer (1968) pointed to powerful Americans, and squares, when he wrote:

...the American corporation executive, who was after all the foremost representative of man in the world today, was perfectly capable of burning unseen women and children in Vietnamese jungles, yet felt a large displeasure and fairly final disapproval at the generous use of obscenity in literature and in public. (p. 49)

Mailer, and his hipster, were always already at war with those who supported state sponsored war and fought that war on unassuming battlefields; through speech, dress, relationships and faith.

Members of the “Beat Generation,” represented in literature by the likes of Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, were public figures at the same time as the young Mailer. Even though Mailer credited a notable use of the term hipster to Ginsberg in his poem *Howl* (“Angel-headed hipsters”), Mailer (1959) used the beatniks to further contrast with the ideas and actions of the hipsters in his “footnote to The White Negro” in *Hipsters*, titled “Hipster and Beatnik” (p. 372). Mailer included hipsters under the heading “The Beat Generation” along with the beatniks, and said that the two groups agreed on “the first tenet of the *faith*” (p. 373; emphasis added), “that one’s orgasm is the clue to tell how well one is living” (p. 373). Again, Mailer described subcultural groups in religious terminology, giving a certain exigency to his philosophy. But then Mailer drew a clear and bold line between the two subgroups, stating that “The beatnik, gentle, disembodied from the race, is often a radical pacifist, he has sworn the vow of no violence” (p. 374), whereas “The hipster looks for action” (p. 374). Continuing, Mailer wrote that the beatnik’s “act of violence is to suicide even as the hipster’s is toward murder” (p. 374). Even though the beatnik and the hipster might proceed from the same initial beliefs, they differed in that Hip was more accepting of and even extolled individual violence. Keeping the juxtaposition of hipster and beat, Dearborn (1999) wrote:

Mailer’s hipster hero was jaded, cool, and detached. The Beats, however critical they were of the dominant culture, sought to be accepting to the point of passivity. The

signal point of departure between Mailer's project and that of the Beats was that Mailer's hipster embraced violence and found meaning in it. (p. 139)

The violence with meaning in it, which Mailer romanticized, was acted out for the readers of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). I argue that Mailer found the individual violence that leads to creativity, so fundamental to Hip, in Cay 161's story of individual violence.

Mailer's proclivity towards individual violence surfaced in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) with his retelling of Cay 161's violent escapade. Cay 161 was Mailer's main informant, his being the longest description of any of the informants in the essay. Mailer began by writing that "Cay has the face of a martyr,"²⁶ "He looks as if he has been flung face-first against a wall, as if indeed a mighty hand had picked him up and hurled him through the side of a stone house" (p. 7). After describing how damaged Cay looked, Mailer described the violence that brought Cay to look so beaten. Cay drove a stolen van and was chased by the police. He struck a fire hydrant on his street, turned the car over, and crashed into a furniture store, after which "Cay lay motionless in the driver's seat, and another youth, a passenger in the car, sprawled unconscious outside, hurled from the car by the impact" (p. 7). In the description, Mailer used cartoon effects to surround the words describing Cay's car chase and crash: the words "SOCK!", "ZAM!" and "POW!" (p. 7) all look as if they belong in a comic strip. The description and dwelling in Cay's story were important to Mailer's narrative. The violent escapades of Cay 161 had nothing to do with the graffiti phenomenon; in fact, as Mailer reported, Cay 161 "is not doing it any longer. Nor is Junior. Even before the accident both had lost interest" (p. 8) in graffiti. The only real use of the story of Cay's individual violence was to set Cay up to be an informant with hip credentials. His experience as a former graffiti writer and insight from his car chase and crash fed Mailer what he needed to revisit some of the more lasting doctrines of Hip.

While both Cay and Junior could have made good informants for the graffiti phenomenon (Naar had pictures of their tag-names, after all), Mailer's focus on Cay's individual violence did not reveal anything about the graffiti phenomenon. It did, however, give context for the world that young people in New York City in 1973 found themselves in. In "The White Negro," Mailer (1957) wrote:

Hip sees the context as generally dominating the man, dominating him because his character is less significant than the context in which he must function. Since it is arbitrarily five times more demanding of one's energy to accomplish even an

²⁶ A martyr for what? Hip? Graffiti?

inconsequential action in an unfavorable context than the favorable one, man is then not only his character but his context. (p. 353)

The context that Mailer drew out in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) was similar to the context written about in the article from the last chapter, “Vandals” - that young people in New York City in the early 1970s were dangerously out of control. In this context, graffiti “loses all name,” and is relegated to the sidelines as an exciting car chase and subsequent crash take place. Mailer described how Cay was left handicapped and his friends tried to comfort him. Mailer’s reliance on the non-graffiti hip adventures of Cay 161 shows that Mailer couldn’t imagine the actual excitement that was stirred in a graffiti writer when watching their name go by on a subway. Mailer was never invested in reading the names on the subway; he just knew graffiti was a polemical topic taking over the collective consciousness in New York City and beyond. This explains, perhaps, why Naar and his informants couldn’t understand Mailer’s obsession with potential bad reviews and his need to choose his own title. They were never invested in Mailer or what book reviewers wrote about his work; they just knew he was a polemical writer who had a say in the collective consciousness of New York City and beyond.

By focusing on (and perhaps sensationalizing) the individual violence of Cay 161, and highlighting the Hip of Cay (the faith of Cay 161 to follow his inner-compass and drive the stolen van, and his literal faith in the creative possibilities of the human being, working in tandem), Mailer made the connection between Hip and this graffiti writer clear. Cay 161, like a true hipster of Mailer’s creation, “lives out, acts out, follows the close call of his instinct as far as he dares, and so points to the possibilities and consequences in what have hitherto been chartless jungles of moral nihilism” (Mailer, 1959, p. 363) and we will find that “beneath his violence there is finally love and the nuances of justice” (p. 363).

In Mailer’s hands, Cay 161 was an updated hipster in 1973. Although Mailer never used the term hipster, in most of the essay he considered graffiti through the lens of the philosophy of Hip. Interestingly, the young informants Mailer interviewed in 1973 were newborn when Mailer (1957) wrote “The White Negro.” Their lives and his investigation highlight a question about “The White Negro:” how had Mailer’s great philosophy stood up over their short lifetimes? What difference did Mailer find in Hip from the 1950s and Hip in the 1970s, and how did he try to tailor his philosophy to the graffiti phenomenon? Because I believe *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) is full of Mailer’s updated and more time-trusted ideas from his 17-year-old philosophy of Hip, I will point to those descriptions and connections.

The fallout from Cay's act of individual violence was severe: "Cay was left with part of his brain taken out in a seven-hour operation...He might survive as a vegetable. For two months he did not make a move" (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 7). Mailer's interview with Cay took place six months after this destructive act, and Mailer reported, "Cay is able to talk, he can move. His lips are controlled on one side of his face but slack on the other - he speaks as if he has had a stroke" (p. 7). With the detailed description of Cay 161's violent episode, and the six-month recovery period passed, Cay 161, who "speaks as if he had a stroke," is the informant that best resembles a hipster. He "dar[ed] the unknown" (Mailer, 1959, p. 347), and it was from the faith he had in daring the unknown, in following his inner compass and stealing the van, driving it away from the police, and even crashing, that he "entered into a new relation with the police and introduces a dangerous element into one's life" (Mailer, 1959, p. 347) and lost part of his brain. Cay 161's individual violence proved meaningful to *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974).

Cay was a character who had lived on the edge and literally embodied the violence leading to the creativity of the hipster. The detailed violence of Cay 161 was the only detailed violence Mailer included in the essay. The exciting and violent action led Cay to be disabled. Cay moved slowly and spoke slowly and these same stroke-like mannerisms gave emphasis to his words. His friends "surround him" and "offer the whole reverence of their whole alertness to every move he makes...to conceal that he is different from the others" (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 7). After Mailer prodded the informants about "the name," Cay got a chance to speak, and all quieted down so that his words weren't missed and respect was given towards his stroke-like mannerisms:

Cay speaks up on what it is like to watch the name go by. "The name," says Cay, in full voice, Delphic in its unexpected resonance – as if the idol of a temple has just chosen to break into sound – "The name," says Cay "is the *faith* of graffiti." It is quite a remark. He wonders if Cay knows what he said. "The name" repeats Cay, "is the faith." (p. 8; italics in the original)

The theme of the essay (and what would become the title of the book) came from the hipster/graffiti writer's mouth. The same character at the beginning, whom Mailer described as having "the power of his own *belief*" (emphasis added), which is the same faith found in Hip, living on the edge and following one's inner compass, gave us the line "the name is the *faith* of graffiti," which Mailer then edited down for the title (which was still given by the informants), *The Faith of Graffiti*. There was no mention of "the name" in this title and yet Mailer was seeking what "the name" meant to graffiti writers. Without keeping "the name" in

the title, Mailer changed Cay's original line to one more accommodating of Mailer's own ideas. Through the editing of Cay's original remark, in the mystic and optimistic title *The Faith of Graffiti*, Mailer displayed the depth at which he intended to discuss the graffiti phenomenon. Even though the words were Cay 161's, given how the words aligned with Mailer's earlier writings and preferred lens for viewing phenomenon (i.e., his own lens), the title seems to be guided by Mailer toward an idea more accommodating of a less "direct and sentimental connection to the world" (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 5). The mystic and optimistic hipster faith is what Mailer brought to the graffiti phenomenon. He had "literal faith in the creative possibilities" where many others saw irrational vandalism. Rather than align with the authoritarian vision of graffiti as chaos and disorder, which was the popular view of the time, Mailer expressed his faith that from this seeming chaos a creative energy would emerge.

I have shown that Mailer brought his ideas about faith from his philosophy of Hip to the graffiti phenomenon. He found his title and subject in the Hip example of Cay 161. Cay 161 gave the title of the work, and throughout the rest of the essay, being either hip or square would prove to be important to understanding the graffiti phenomenon. With a hip graffiti writer giving the reader an esoteric (and hip) line, "the name is the *faith* of graffiti," the connection between Hip and graffiti was made. In the rest of the essay, Mailer continued along finding the Hip in graffiti and discussing Mailer's favorite topic, himself.

The words of the writers. Throughout Part 1 of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer wrote down what his informants said, but did not allow what they said to influence his essay. For example, the informants explained how *they* understood the graffiti phenomenon. One informant named Japan-I said, "You have to put in the hours to add up the names. You have to get your name around" (p. 6). Japan-I stressed the all-over (quantity) rule that was found in "Taki 183" (1971). Junior said, "You want to get your name in a place where people don't know how you could do it, how you could get up there. You got to make them think" (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 8). With this, Junior pointed to the importance of placement and how he imagined his graffiti was received by viewers. And Cay 161 said, "everybody tries to catch up to us" (p. 8). Cay reflected on the competition aspect of graffiti and how he imagined other writers thought about him and his friends. Together the three informants gave the perspective of many young graffiti writers of the time: One must *do a lot of graffiti*, in *hard to reach spaces*, because *everybody is competing* to be king. There was a certain optimism in this perspective. The graffiti writers did not view what they did as destructive but as part of a seemingly open game played by many, just as Mailer approached the graffiti phenomenon - without square prejudice.

The writers were consumed by their imaginations: Japan-I with the rule that guided his praxis (“all-over”), Junior imagining that others followed his work as closely as he did (“make them think”), and Cay imagining that he was famous and admired because of his graffiti (“catch up to us”). However, Mailer, even as he wrote their comments into his narrative, was consumed by his own imagination which he had to follow; he would take the reader on a journey through his own life and beliefs. In this way, A-I proved to be like one of the graffiti writers.

One more connection to Hip deserves mention in this section, and will be discussed further in the next part: Mailer’s interest in hip argot. In “The White Negro,” Mailer (1957) was taken with the nuances of language as expressed by hipsters:

I have jotted down perhaps a dozen words.... The words are man, go, put down, make, beat, cool, swing, with it, crazy, dig, flip, creep, hip, square. They serve a variety of purposes and the nuance of the voice uses the nuance of the situation to convey the subtle contextual difference. (p. 349)

Mailer spent most of two sections in “The White Negro” discussing the language of Hip and sprinkled hip slang throughout. The slang words were so open to interpretation that meaning truly did depend on “nuance of voice” and “nuance of the situation” (Mailer, 1957, p. 349). Meanings could swing and “the notion that the substratum of existence is the search, the end meaningful but mysterious” (p. 341) was on full display.

While Mailer did give credence in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) to the paradigm shift taking place at that moment in the graffiti phenomenon, he kept its description in hip argot: “fanciness.” The point of contention between Cay and Junior, which marked a paradigm shift in approaching graffiti, was whether fanciness (or aesthetics) was worthwhile if the goal was to be all-over. Junior was not yet convinced that graffiti should be judged more heavily on artistic merit than on all-over grounds, but a change in viewing graffiti was taking place at this moment. I argue that this shift is what *The Faith* most strongly supported and influenced, providing an updated rubric for judging a graffiti writer that moved beyond quantity (all-over) to the quality (fanciness) of skill and art.

I could say that the title *The Faith of Graffiti* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) itself could be considered “just fanciness,” without “respect for utilitarian” and “direct and sentimental connections” to the world that many young graffiti writers may have actually held, especially when compared to the suggested title, “Watching My Name Go By.” But more than just fanciness, I believe, the title and the insight found in *The Faith* reflect some of the updated

and time-tested tenets of Hip. Mailer's well-established ideas mixed with young people's "faith" (fantasies?) sustained the rest of this essay.

In summary, I have shown that Mailer was famous, and he had a unique third person personal writing style that gave him a particular vantage point, which at once invited the reader in and influenced the reader to trust in Mailer's cultural acumen on many different subjects. I have shown in this close reading of Part 1 of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) that Mailer came to the graffiti phenomenon with his mystic and optimistic Hip philosophy in tow and found some of its most important and enduring doctrines lived on in the graffiti phenomenon. I showed that Mailer found his hipster ideal in Cay 161, and that Mailer trusted his own (creative) insights for the title and theme of the essay. I also showed that Mailer was more preoccupied with his own theories than with truly allowing the graffiti writers to speak for themselves. In the next section I will continue to look at *The Faith* with regards to Hip from *Hipsters* (Mailer, 1959).

Part 2: Praxis and Perspective

In Part 2 of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer brought the reader further into his particular worldview by finding more aspects of Hip in the graffiti phenomenon, while keeping the *square* totalitarian state in sight. Of the five parts of this essay, Mailer used this section to discuss most closely the praxis and perspective of the graffiti phenomenon and glamorize its relation to crime.

The overarching narrative. Before beginning with Part 2, it is worth examining the overarching 500-year narrative Mailer referred to throughout the essay, which Mailer built and simultaneously attempted to use to question the place of graffiti in "the Great Tradition of art" (Austin, 2001, p. 74). The 500-year narrative of art Mailer built in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) is a progression which began with the paintings of the early Renaissance, skipped centuries, and wound through the famous names of late 19th century and early 20th century European and American art. Mailer abruptly ended his progressive trajectory of Western art in 1953 with a collaboration between the artists Willem de Kooning and Robert Rauschenberg. By ending his narrative of the Great Tradition of art in 1953 with the de Kooning and Rauschenberg collaborative piece, Mailer framed a question: how did art in the 1970s connect with or continue the narrative of art after their important collaboration? We can perhaps view Mailer's narrative of the Great Tradition of western art as his attempt to put forth an objective consensus reality for the essay, a baseline, which all can roughly agree upon and from which aesthetic and philosophical judgements can be made. We can also view when he ends the narrative, in 1953 with de Kooning and Rauschenberg's collaboration, as indicative of his

subjective vision that art, as it is defined and traded in the art market, tells a chronological or even substantial story about the direction of thought within Western civilization.

In Part 1, Mailer's overarching narrative contained seven names of well-known artists from the early Renaissance period (15th-16th century).²⁷ In Part 3, his overarching narrative contained twelve names of well-known artists from the late 19th century to the early 20th century.²⁸ In Part 5, where the overarching narrative culminates with a view towards the future of art, Mailer suggested he had found the successor to de Kooning and Rauschenberg's collaboration in Chris Burden's work. This overarching story of Western art is obviously teleological; it serves only the purpose of trying to explain how the graffiti phenomenon in 1970s New York City can be considered art from the perspective of a visit to MoMA in New York City. The reader is forced to indulge Mailer's overarching narrative throughout the essay, if anything out of sheer curiosity: can Mailer fit graffiti into his narrative of the Great Tradition of art?

As stated, in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer located an end to his overarching narrative in the de Kooning and Rauschenberg collaboration and used it as a model for art that questions and pushes the boundaries of art. This collaborative piece defined, for Mailer, what art in the 1970s should measure itself against and take cues from. The core anecdote, which Mailer referred to in every part of the essay either by mentioning the story or the artists' names, is an anecdote about two artists and their collaborative piece of art (which Mailer treated as a paradigm shift in the philosophy of art) from 1953. One artist, de Kooning, gave to the other artist, Rauschenberg, a pastel drawing. Rauschenberg (with de Kooning's blessing) erased the pastel, signed his name to it and sold the piece with a small engraving underneath it in the frame, which read "Erased de Kooning drawing, Robert Rauschenberg, 1953." In *The Faith*, Mailer judged artwork that came after this collaboration by its connection to, reference of, or growth from the collaboration.

What Mailer did with this anecdote was define de Kooning and Rauschenberg's collaboration as the last great shift in the Great Tradition of art. Thus, if something was to be considered art after this, it should build from this shift. By focusing on an artistic breakthrough from 1953, Mailer overlooked all art from the 1960s²⁹ and told the reader (and artists) of the 1970s that they could learn a lot from the artists (and writers) of the 1950s. That

²⁷ Those names are, in order of how they appear in the essay: Giotto, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Raphael.

²⁸ Those names are, in order of how they appear in the essay: Cezanne, Frank Stella, Gauguin, Mathieu, Picasso, Pollock, Stuart Davis, Hans Hoffman, Matisse, Siqueiro, Van Gogh, and Miro.

²⁹ Some might say that Andy Warhol came after Rauschenberg, and so ending on Rauschenberg and not Warhol could be problematic.

is, with this anecdote, Mailer made the case that artists in the 1970s could find connections and cues from the artists and important movements in the 1950s.

In Mailer's stance regarding art from the 1950s, I see support for my argument that what Mailer found in the graffiti phenomenon was a connection to Mailer's own writings on Hip. Rauschenberg and de Kooning's collaboration dates to 1953. According to Mailer, this was the exact time he described in "The White Negro" as being "the years of conformity and depression" (Mailer, 1959, p. 338). It was at this time in history that only the "isolated courage of isolated people" (p. 339) dissented against the conformity of the age; those isolated people were known as hipsters. I wonder then if Mailer considered the de Kooning and Rauschenberg collaboration as Hip? I think he did. If so, then Mailer located the last major paradigm shift in art in a Hip collaboration and attempted to fuse it with what he saw as Hip collaborative work in the graffiti phenomenon. But Mailer/A-I followed this thread by finding a connection between the avant-garde of the 1950s and contemporary graffiti based on an outsider-communal perspective, viewing a collective work of art in the many names written on walls and objects in the aesthetics of the graffiti phenomenon, which is problematic (more on this later).

With this story, and his constant reference to it throughout the essay, Mailer pointed to (a limited) interpretation of aesthetics, which may reveal a hypocrisy in the viewing public – that a piece of art (the collaboration), considered to be important to the philosophy of modern art, was being dramatically reproduced on subways by young people, and the graffiti writers were being condemned for it. That is, the image of one graffiti artist's work erased by another graffiti artist (as punishment by the state, graffiti writers who were caught would sometimes be made to clean the subways) with a new name written on top of the erasure (from a different graffiti writer) could be seen on many of the subways. Mailer used this image throughout the essay, wondering if graffiti writers' art shared similarities with post-modern art based on these aesthetic and practical similarities.

By always coming back to this story throughout the essay, and by extension the overarching narrative it is meant to uphold, Mailer, looking to add graffiti to his trajectory of art, asked "How can one continue the narrative of pushing artistic boundaries after de Kooning and Rauschenberg's collaboration?" and "What does it mean if some graffiti shares some aesthetic qualities with post-modern art?" Keeping in mind the overarching narrative Mailer wove throughout the essay and referred to as a baseline for understanding the trajectory of art, we can now return to looking at some of the graffiti praxis he wrote about, and the criminal aspects he glamorized, in Part 2.

The Hip ethic of immoderation. Mailer opened the first paragraph of Part 2 of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) by describing in finer detail the people who wrote graffiti and their struggles. He noted, "...graffiti writers had been...all the ages from twelve to twenty-four. They had written masterpieces in letters six feet high...The Transit Authority cops would beat you if they caught you, or drag you to court, or both" (p. 11). This information was actually about the graffiti phenomenon he was investigating, as opposed to the speculation about graffiti and art that characterized much of the essay. Mailer crowded all of this information into the first four sentences and quickly moved on to what at first seemed like comic-relief material meant to reveal the innocence (and perhaps ignorance) of the young people writing graffiti.

In this opening paragraph where Mailer gave critical information about the graffiti phenomenon, Mailer also offhandedly mentioned a graffiti writer with a dangerous name: "HITLER 2 (reputed to be so innocent of his predecessor that he only knew Hitler 1 had a big rep!)" (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 11). A young person writing such a dangerous name (and adding the number 2 to it, like a movie sequel) could be read ominously, perhaps finding followers of National Socialism in 1970s New York City, but instead Mailer joked about the graffiti writer's innocence. That is an important move, because he didn't come looking at Hitler 2 with a square "set of standards conceived a priori to the experience" (Mailer, 1959, p. 353). Rather, in Hip fashion, Mailer was willing to differentiate Hitler 2 from any other Hitler or people associated with the name Hitler. The graffiti writer Hitler 2 came with a connection to Hip, where just like the hipster, the historically unaware graffiti writer Hitler 2 "...exists in the present, in that enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention..." (Mailer, 1959, p. 339). Hitler 2 was not beholden to the past as read in his chosen name and his supposed ignorance of its signification. As Mailer (1957) wrote emphatically in "The White Negro,"

what makes it radically different from Socratic moderation with its stern conservative respect for the experience of the past is that the Hip ethic is immoderation, childlike in its adoration of the present (and indeed to respect the past means that one must also respect such ugly consequences of the past as the collective murders of the State). It is this adoration of the present which contains the affirmation of the Hip... (p. 354)

In this quote, Mailer positioned the "childlike...adoration of the present" directly against "respect[ing] such ugly consequences of the past as the collective murders of the State." The exact "collective murders of the State" Mailer referred to in "The White Negro" were the concentration camps established by Adolf Hitler. To choose Hitler 2 as one's tag-name in

1973 could be seen as Hip because the graffiti writer did not respect the “ugly consequences of the past” which came with respecting the past, but instead emphasized “complexity rather than simplicity” (p. 353).

This one line about Hitler 2 could just be comic relief and might also point to the significance of “the name,” but its connection to Hip should also not be overlooked. Laughing at the young person who naively wrote Hitler 2 on subways conveyed the Hip irreverence of the act of naming and writing involved. Mailer explained that this same graffiti writer, Hitler 2, was made by the courts to do what Rauschenberg did to de Kooning’s pastel: erase another artist’s work, but on subways. As Mailer said, “All proportions kept, it may in simple pain of heart have been not altogether unequal to condemning Cezanne to wipe out the works of Van Gogh” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 11). Mailer changed Hitler 2’s dangerous name to the elegant “Cezanne” and, “all proportions kept” (p. 11), deemed his fellow graffiti writers “Van Gogh[s],” as one artist erased the other’s art. The desecration of historical names mixed with the state turning the punishment for vandalism into a crime of philistine proportions upholds the “Hip ethic [of] immoderation, childlike in its adoration of the present” (Mailer, 1957, p. 354). A graffiti writer took the name of well-known evil, and Mailer, believing in the art of graffiti, gave the same writer a new name, the name of the famous artist “Cezanne,” and thereby allowed contemporary people to see themselves in a larger historical and artistic narrative.³⁰

Looking for and finding more Hip in graffiti, Mailer introduced a slang term he learned from graffiti writers: “inventing,” which meant “to steal” in 1973. Stealing paint was no doubt important for graffiti writers of the time and Mailer used that aspect to romanticize the graffiti writer as both criminal and artist. First, he enjoyed the argot aspect, making the meaning “swing” enough that he could connect stealing paint to “Plato’s Ideal.” Mailer’s free-flowing and free-association prose allowed Mailer to romanticize the graffiti writer’s individual modern crimes and connect them with ancient philosophy. Mailer wrote,

There was always art in a criminal act – no crime could ever be as automatic as a production process – but graffiti writers were somewhat opposite to criminals since they were living through the stages of the crime in order to commit an artistic act (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 11).

³⁰ I see now that the project I painted, which was written about in the New York Times, the Subway Art History Project, was not the first time graffiti writers’ names were replaced by famous historical names. Mailer saw that the graffiti writers thought of themselves as “rock stars” or even more important as major figures, and he was the first to experiment with interchanging names and the signification of such a move.

Mailer conflated the artistry he saw in crime (perhaps he meant a crime has artistry if it is successfully done, with no witnesses, and was coolly performed?) with the crimes some graffiti writers committed in order to paint graffiti art (e.g., stealing, trespassing, evading police), and by doing so he featured some unnecessary dangerous elements in the description of the act of writing graffiti. He blended what he called the art of crime with the actual crimes committed for the sake of graffiti art and gave graffiti a distinction that no other activity had at the time - an art that needed criminals to make it, making it an art by criminals or criminal art.

Mailer had long held that seeing the artistry in the criminal act was a Hip viewpoint. In *Advertisements*, Mailer (1959) wrote about Hipsters:

To a square, a rapist is a rapist. Punish the rapist...and that is the end of the matter. But a hipster knows that the act of rape is a part of life too, and that even in the most brutal and unforgivable rape, there is *artistry* or the lack of it... (p. 314; emphasis added)

With his career-long foil in the totalitarian state (and a lifetime of misogyny and violence against women),³¹ Mailer may have gone too far in romanticizing individual violence, especially with his ability to find the artistry in rape. Still, what I believe that incendiary example pointed to was Mailer's belief that, "Hip abdicates from any conventional moral responsibility" (p. 353). With his focus on stealing in graffiti, Mailer connected this abdication of moral responsibility to the nonchalance of the graffiti writer stealing paint. For decades after this, stealing paint would become as important to graffiti writers as the actual act of writing graffiti. Mailer's emphasis on stealing paint ensured that stealing paint would become part of the invented tradition of graffiti.

After putting the graffiti phenomenon in a special artistic-crime category shared only with young mythical characters (e.g., Robin Hood, Peter Pan), Mailer then revealed which names were the most well known in graffiti and why:

...the best of the graffiti writers, those mountains of heavy masterpiece production, STAY HIGH, PHASE 2, STAR III get the respect, call it the glory, that they are known, famous and luminous as a rock star. It is their year. (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 12)

The "rock star" graffiti writer was one who painted large masterpieces on subways. He was an unappreciated artist and a smooth criminal. This was the paradigm shift taking place in

³¹ He stabbed his second wife in 1960 and was not punished for it. In his book from 1965, *An American Dream*, a thinly masked Mailer-character murdered his wife at the beginning and was not punished for it, an opposing take on Theodore Dreiser's (1925), *An American Tragedy*.

understanding graffiti at the moment, moving the graffiti phenomenon further away from where we saw it in the last chapter with Taki 183. Mailer explained that the quality of one's masterpieces had become more important than the quantity of one's tags. One's name had to be painted in big letters with style on a subway, for "darting in to squiggle a little toy of a name on twenty cars" (p. 12) was not going to make one a king any longer in the graffiti phenomenon.

Individual graffiti meets narrative. I mentioned earlier that Mailer's trajectory of the Great Tradition of art in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) ended with a collaborative piece by de Kooning and Rauschenberg. This collaborative art piece prompted Mailer to see a collaboration taking place in graffiti (from an outsider's perspective) where others (insiders) saw a competition. When envisioning what the best graffiti writers were doing - "large masterpieces" - and the individual names being recognized - "STAY HIGH, PHASE 2, STAR III" (p. 12) - Mailer acknowledged the insider's individual perspective of graffiti, which was the opposite of the (outsider's) collective vision, which saw a connection between the aesthetics of modern art and 1970s graffiti. Mailer confirmed that the kings of graffiti were not being judged or judging others based on how fascinating the tags all taken together looked. In fact, the goal of the best graffiti writer was to cover as many of the other tags on the subway as possible as they painted their own large individual masterpieces. They added background flourishes that covered any other tags left on the subway so as not to confuse their name with another. The individual view of graffiti focused on reading each name by itself and judging each name by its own merits.

To be clear, the insider's view of graffiti, which most graffiti writers abide by, focuses on one tag-name at a time and judges each individual tag-name on its own. In contrast, the outsider's view of graffiti, which Mailer and Naar (1974) seemed to think was the more refined vision,³² views all of the tag-names on the wall as one creation. I think both visions are fascinating, albeit incongruent with one another. Neither is *more* correct than the other, but the individual insider's view respects the intention of most graffiti writers. Mailer's vision of comparing the collective work of graffiti writers to individual pieces of post-modern artwork was off the mark as far as respecting the intentions of the graffiti writers involved. There may indeed be aesthetic overlap, but it was completely accidental and based on a specific reading of circumstantial and unique graffiti. This is a major difference between

³² Based on the essay, the pictures and Naar's comments in the afterword of the 2009 edition of *The Faith* where his desire to have graffiti connected to the Great Tradition of art is made clear.

Mailer's interpretation and the graffiti writers' intentions, as graffiti would later be defined in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) as individual masterpieces on subways.

Part 2 is the last portion of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) that includes graffiti writers' names, leading Mailer's search for the importance of "the name" away from graffiti writers' names and towards other names like TV stars of the moment, politicians, or accepted artists' names. Mailer folded the graffiti writers' names into one via a plant metaphor, writing that the graffiti writers were "painting the wall over with the giant trees and pretty plants of a tropical rain-forest" and that the city was "covered by foliage of graffiti" (p. 13), which blended into one another like vegetation in the jungle or a forest. Despite this move, one should not conclude that the book contained more non-graffiti names than graffiti names or that Mailer neglected to mention many names found on walls and objects in the period when he wrote the book. As mentioned earlier, the inside of both the front and back covers and the first and last page of the original book had 760 graffiti names of the moment written out two times in alphabetic order. In the later version (Mailer & Naar, 2009), the 760 names were only written one time on the inside covers.

When looking at the list of 760 graffiti names written in 1973-74, so many fly by me without having meaning to me. This leads me to articulate an observation I am starting to see in the graffiti phenomenon, that is, not all graffiti is equal. An individual graffiti name with a narrative is more relevant to the graffiti phenomenon than 10 graffiti names without narrative. While this observation may seem pedantic or elementary to some, I believe it is worth noting because it highlights the individuality of the graffiti phenomenon and shows the two very different ways of looking at a wall or subway full of graffiti. Graffiti writers were not working in tandem to uphold a loose artistic/philosophical narrative that aligned with Mailer's interpretation of art history, but were performing and remembered for their own individual acts of graffiti. Looking at an entire wall with many names on it and judging it as a whole is similar to viewing all works of art in one wing of a museum as one work. The individual view of graffiti holds that each tag name should be viewed and judged on its own merit, just as each individual painting in a wing of a museum is judged on its own, even though many of the paintings share similar themes or come out of the same artistic movement. Narrative-less names from graffiti are not memorable and point to the open meaning Mailer found when he stopped seeing the individual names and began seeing all tag-names as one communal work.

The full wall with many tag-names, which loosely resembles a modern work of art when looked at as one single painting, or the erased works on subways that are gone over and resemble "*Memoria in Aeternum*" by Hans Hofmann or the de Kooning and Rauschenberg

collaboration, are not works that have individual narratives to them; rather, they become anonymous tag-names that are viewed as a piece of a larger narrative that they were not intended for. Graffiti names with a narrative have a fixed meaning and are memorable and important to the growth of and understanding of the graffiti phenomenon for practitioners. When individual graffiti meets narrative, meaningful graffiti arises. Individual narratives about individual graffiti names act as a recruiting lever and invite more individuals to participate in the phenomenon. When Mailer blended all graffiti names, viewing them all as part of a communal project, the individual names were not recognized and an open interpretation – “with a pleasurable sense of depth to the elusiveness of the meaning” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 6) – was made available. Not appreciating every individual tag-name led Mailer to connect past aesthetics in Western art with contemporary graffiti.

Some of the names on the inside covers of the book are recognizable from the pictures in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) and other books I have seen: Black Dice, Clyde, Greek 191, Barbara 62, and Queen Eva 62.³³ Some of the names are funny, including The Turtle, The Old Shits, and Keep it cool 163. Four of the names written on the inside covers of *The Faith* went on to become very big names in the graffiti subculture and Chalfant and Cooper (1984) captured some of their work in *Subway Art*, including Billy, Comet, Dondi, and Lee. Of those four kings, Dondi and Lee went on to have major careers and impacts on graffiti as art. As I already mentioned in the previous chapter, Castleman (1982), in *Getting Up*, devoted his first chapter to an interview with “king” Lee,³⁴ and we will later see that Dondi will be the star of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). By looking at the names that were included in the inside covers of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) and asking what became of those names, we can see an immediate influence from *The Faith* on the writers featured in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). This is the major argument I am making in this chapter: *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) set the conditions for *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) to be made, for the practitioners and the observers alike.

Continuing with the understanding that the individual narrative of each tag-name is an important part of reading graffiti from the graffiti phenomenon (as opposed to what Mailer often did – seeing a communal art project in the many tag-names of graffiti), it is worth noting that the graffiti writer Stay High 149 (who Mailer mentioned three times in the essay and

³³ Barbara 62 was mentioned in “Taki 183” (1971), and both Barbara 62 and Eva 62 were featured in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Greek 191 was interviewed in Gastman and Neelon’s (2010) *The History of American Graffiti*.

³⁴ Castleman’s interview with Lee came four years after *The Faith*. In those four years Lee’s reputation grew immensely. Would Lee have done all he did if his name wasn’t written in *The Faith*? Did *The Faith* give Lee inspiration to work even harder than his graffiti peers?

whose graffiti was shown three times in Naar's pictures), whose work adorned the cover of the 2009 edition of *The Faith*, was also the subject of a book about his graffiti work and life. Former graffiti writer Chris "Freedom" Pape and graffiti enthusiast Sky Farrell published *Stay High 149* in 2007. Taki 183 had an article written about him and was the subject of many other articles and citations. Cay 161 and Junior 161 were made famous when they became part of Mailer's essay, and other graffiti writers were made famous in the graffiti subculture because of the photographs taken of their work and the narratives shared about their individual lives and work. It was not enough to only write graffiti; a story about the name on the wall was necessary to read graffiti and respect the intentionality of the artists. A story was important for building one's legend and the graffiti tradition I point to grew with each individual legend.

Understanding the individual graffiti writer is important to understanding the graffiti phenomenon. Graffiti is an individualist endeavor, not so much a group or community project, although on certain occasions (usually the death of a graffiti writer) many graffiti writers will work together to paint one large piece. Mailer made all individual graffiti writers one by transforming the graffiti phenomenon into plant life. While this made for a nice analogy and showed the difference between the hip and square worldviews in the 1970s, it also viewed graffiti as a collective rather than individual enterprise, which is not how graffiti writers themselves necessarily read the phenomenon.

Graffiti is always already Hip. Throughout Part 2 and the rest of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer treated graffiti as decidedly hip and most arguments against graffiti (especially objections based on aesthetics) as square. This is visible in metaphor, where *square* "bland architectural high-rise horrors" were covered by *hip* "foliage of graffiti which grew seven or eight feet tall" (p. 13). Mailer made graffiti a "natural" part of the environment by discussing it as "plant-life," in contrast to "every modern new school which looked like a brand new factory, every old slum warehouse, every standing billboard, every huckstering poster, and the halls of every high-rise low-rent housing project which looked like a prison (and all did)" (p. 13). By making graffiti "natural" and the objects it was written on "unnatural" or prison-like, Mailer conveyed an inherent rectitude and optimism in the act of graffiti.

For Mailer's interpretation of graffiti, uninspiring architecture was a stand-in for and representative of the state as well as a foil. Graffiti as foliage and plant-life was an optimistic vision against the oppressive forces of bad architecture. If graffiti was made plant-life, then it would return to the walls no matter what was done against it. Perhaps the only way to stop the

hip graffiti vegetation was by atomic fallout and radiation, which pointed to the square enemy who supported state violence. Mailer admitted that the young graffiti writers “painted with less than this in view, no doubt” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 13), but he continued attacking his antithesis in the totalitarian state, and the pollution of images in American culture. Mailer claimed that graffiti was a reaction to the modern popular culture of the United States and named the many American elements that could have spawned this graffiti:

Slum populations chilled on one side by the bleakness of modern design, and brain-cooked on the other side by comic strips and TV ads with zooming letters...big beautiful numbers on the yard markers on football fields...capital letters in the names of the products...coiling like neon letters in the blue satanic light...fluorescent wonderlands of every Las Vegas sign...every assault on the psyche. (p. 14)

Hip graffiti was a product of and a reaction to every square assault on the psyche.

Although the hip and square were at constant battle, it seemed like the authoritative square always squashed the hip rebellion. Mailer described how New York City destroyed the graffiti phenomenon: “...a war had gone on, more and more implacable on the side of the authority with every legal and psychological weed killer on full employ until the graffiti of New York was defoliated, cicatrized, Vietnamized” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 14). Keeping with plant metaphors and graffiti as vegetation, the invented word “Vietnamized” pointed to the use of napalm to burn the people and jungles of Vietnam; hence, Agent Orange was connected to the forces (and perhaps the scouring solution) that would remove graffiti from subways. The square who supported the Vietnam war was here allied with the authorities who called for clean subways and walls. Cleaning graffiti from walls was made equivalent with poisoning the natural world. Mailer described what the subways looked like after the Transit Authority cleaned the trains:

Few masterpieces remained. The windows were gray and smeared. The cars looked dull red or tarnished aluminum – their recent coat of paint remover having also stripped all polish from the manufacturer’s surface. New cars looked like old cars.

Only the ghost-outline of former masterpieces remained. (p. 14)

Graffiti as Hip brought an unassailable faith with it, and by setting it up against the totalitarian state, Mailer made graffiti equal to a righteous rebellion.

With Mailer’s plant metaphor, the end of graffiti came about in a violent way, and it was put side by side with U.S. state violence against the people of Vietnam. The end of graffiti became real for Mailer when “two hideous accidents had occurred” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 14). One was that a boy was killed beneath a subway car while writing graffiti and

another had almost died when a can of spray paint exploded on him on a graffiti excursion. The end of graffiti coming with the real death of a graffiti writer, juxtaposed with the state violence in Vietnam, kept the hip/square binary intact.

Mailer ended Part 2 by showing the blatant hypocrisy of the square state, again connecting with “The White Negro” and the lost “faith in man” (Mailer, 1959, p. 355), and how that was replaced by the “appeal of authority” (p. 355) with the following observation: “As A-I walked the streets with Jon Naar, they passed a sign: DON’T POLLUTE – KEEP THE CITY CLEAN. ‘They don’t see,’ the photographer murmured, ‘that sign is a form of pollution itself’” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 14). Naar pointed to the signs put on walls by the state and highlighted the hypocrisy of condemning the young people for their individualist graffiti while accepting the authoritative visual pollution of the state.

In Part 2, Mailer’s hip/square binary remained intact. Graffiti was undeniably linked to the hip anti-totalitarian side, while the city was linked to the square “Vietnamization” of the subways and walls. Mailer’s glorification of stealing paint would become part of the invented tradition of the graffiti phenomenon. In Part 2, we also saw two differing perspectives for viewing graffiti, the insider-individual perspective and the outsider-communal perspective. I will draw more on these two perspectives in my analysis of the next part of the essay.

Part 3: Art and Optimism

Not letting the plant die completely by the Vietnamization from the square state, Mailer’s graffiti as plant metaphor took root again in Part 3 of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Mailer/A-I rejected what he wrote in Part 2, seeing all of the negative square influences from American culture on graffiti, and opted instead to focus on the optimistic high-art influences on graffiti with a tour of paintings in MoMA in New York City that shared aspects with Mailer’s vision of graffiti. Mailer proposed that the art in MoMA might have been able to communicate telepathically with the graffiti writers of New York City the way plants, he said, were telepathically linked. To back up the claim, Mailer featured in the book masterpieces of modern art that hung in MoMA and shared overlapping aesthetic qualities with some of the pictures of graffiti. Mailer’s desire to connect graffiti with the high-art trajectory he described was on full display and took up most of Part 3.

He wrote, “if subway graffiti had not come into existence, some artist might have found it necessary to invent it for it was in the chain of such evolution” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 17). Again, Mailer naturalized graffiti by saying it was part of a chain of evolution in art. He had faith that there was a connection and for a few lines he was almost convincing, not so much about “the telepathic power of things” (p. 17), but about the images from MoMA that

he chose to place in the text side by side with the pictures of graffiti that shared many overlapping traits.

Mailer's shifting perspective. Two ways of looking at the graffiti in the graffiti phenomenon from Part 2 of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) come to the fore in Part 3, based on the images³⁵ that accompany it. The two competing visions reflect two different audiences, the insider and the outsider. The first vision has already been written about: the tag-name as individual artistic piece, judged on its own merit apart from the other tag-names that are on the same surface. This vision was visible in Mailer's choice of Frank Stella's *Tuftonboro IV*, Georges Mathieu's *Untitled*, and Henri Matisse's *Dance*. In *Tuftonboro IV*, the sharpness of the angles, the boldness of the colors, and the breaking of the square boundary of the classical frame by having the point of the triangle shoot out of the frame, were reminiscent of some of the graffiti tags found in the book, written over various surfaces, and the sharpness, boldness, and loudness that graffiti tag-names sometimes conveyed. One can feel the focus on the artistry of the individual tag-name in Stella's work. Or when looking at Matisse's *Dance* and thinking about Mailer's beautifully crafted quote, "Matisse's limbs wind onto one another like the ivy-creeper calligraphies of New York graffiti" (p. 18), one can see the individual body of each woman holding hands in the *Dance* and reflect on the individual tag-names dancing next to each other on the wall. It's a gorgeous connection.

The second view that Mailer brought to graffiti was the outsider view in which graffiti was cast as a communal project, which I earlier called problematic. In this second view, Mailer judged the aesthetics of graffiti based on a particular perspective of a couple of the unique pictures in the book. Where the individual vision had the individual tag-name on its own canvas, the communal vision for graffiti had all of the tag-names from one surface (a subway car, a wall) serve as one piece of art on one canvas. This vision was illustrated by Mailer's choice of Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles (No. 11)*, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, and/or Joan Miro's *The Family*. Without reference to any narrative that accompanied those paintings (well-known narratives which explained the smallest portions of the work and referred to the larger context of it), one can contrast them with some of the images in the book, which showed entire walls or subways full of tag names that were written around each other, seemingly making one large piece of artwork. This perspective on graffiti glosses over all individual names for a vision of a collective work evocative of modern painting in the 20th century.

³⁵ On loan with permission from MoMA.

Mailer chose modern works from MoMA that came with narratives, not willy-nilly invented narratives merely based on one vision of the piece, but a curated vision that respected both the artist's intention and the context of the painting. By claiming that the aesthetics found in MoMA telepathically communicated with the young people of New York City and were then found on a grand scale on subways and walls throughout New York City, Mailer skipped the individual narratives that made the paintings in MoMA valuable in the first place and took away all context for the art and the graffiti, offering a vision of the world understood only through images with no narrative.

Consider, for example, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. When this painting is presented to students of art, it is always accompanied with the story of Picasso's original intention of capturing the feel of the Nazi bombing of the Spanish town in 1937. Small portions of the painting are examined to highlight parts of the overall story of *Guernica*. The lightbulb/eye of God that hovers at the top, the bull representing Spain, the woman holding her dead infant, and the soldier lying dead on the floor with his broken sword, all these small parts are studied and all make up the larger story behind the work *Guernica*. The woman holding her dead infant and the soldier with the broken sword are not the same; they both have individual stories, and their individual stories together build the larger narrative of the event.³⁶ Mailer did not afford the art of the graffiti phenomenon this luxury – from his view the individual name was lost and a narrative about young people working together to make one piece was formed. He wrote, “No one wrote over another name, no one was obscene – for that would have smashed the harmony. A communion took place over the city” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 13). But this did not respect the intention or context of the graffiti artists. If Mailer respected the intention and context of graffiti, he might have been disappointed in its actual “forthright meaning” (p. 5).

This premise holds true for the piece Mailer used to end his narrative of art. What made the de Kooning and Rauschenberg artwork valuable to the viewer was knowing the story of how it came to be produced. Looking at the work without knowing the narrative behind it is similar to viewing anonymous graffiti that one has never encountered before. It has no backstory and so little or nothing about the intention of the work is understood on the surface.

The major problem with viewing individual graffiti together as a collaboration, and then finding similar aesthetics in modern and post-modern art with that supposed

³⁶ Mailer (1959) wrote about Picasso glowingly in *Advertisements* in a piece titled “An Eye on Picasso” (p. 461) and later, in 1994, wrote an entire book about Picasso, *Pablo Picasso as a Young Man*.

collaboration, is that it disregards the individuality of each tag name, which is important to the graffiti phenomenon. Each individual name comes with its own individual understanding of its meaning. For example, Taki 183 was found to be protesting his draft to the Vietnam War, but that same understanding of what graffiti means does not hold true for all graffiti writers. The context changes over time, and the different individual visions of what graffiti means tell a story about the changing contexts.

In *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer wrote that the piece that is hanging “at the head of the stairs at M.O.M.A.” (p. 18), *Memoria in Aeternum* by Hans Hofmann, may have telepathically communicated with the “subway children” (p. 18), because the subways look like this piece of art. Mailer described the subways at the end of Part 2: “The windows were gray and smeared. The cars looked dull red or tarnished aluminum – their recent coat of paint remover having also stripped all polish from the manufacturer’s surface” (p. 14). But this view of the graffiti art is all unintentional and subject to a particular reading of the graffiti phenomenon. Reading the art of graffiti, not as the art of one individual graffiti writer at one point in time, but as the outcome of a process of many graffiti writers (as well as the Transit Authority removing the graffiti) is a unique perspective on the art of graffiti, but one that does not recognize the intention or context of the graffiti.

Mailer’s efforts to make graffiti metaphoric plant-life and view it all as one single organism, creating art as it grew over the soul crushing structures in the city, moves away from the intentionality of the artists’ work and glosses over the meaning of the individual name. Graffiti without context, without narrative, graffiti that resembles Jackson Pollock’s work, does not adhere to the rules or goals of writers in the graffiti phenomenon and can hardly be said to be part of the graffiti phenomenon.

Linking graffiti to art. Earlier in this paper, I discussed the story of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) told by the three covers that accompanied it. I showed how linking the graffiti phenomenon to high art seemed to be the goal of the project, with less consideration given to any facts that might get in the way of that. I demonstrated that both Mailer and Naar approached the graffiti phenomenon with an outsider’s perspective, lumping all graffiti together and reading communal work where others saw a competition between individual writers. Similar to how Naar did not discriminate between the preadolescent “toy” graffiti and the graffiti of more mature kings in his photographs, Mailer did not differentiate between artistic graffiti and graffiti that didn’t fit the bill, decidedly saying that all graffiti from the graffiti phenomenon was the same.

It seems it was important for both Mailer and Naar (1974) to find the connection between high art and graffiti, and if they couldn't find it they would invent it. However, better than talking about all graffiti as one movement, or one organism, those seeking to link graffiti with high art would be better served by discussing individual artists and individual pieces. Understanding all graffiti as one art movement would be like including all of the paintings created in one art school over the same decade as work from the same movement, when there were many different artists with different views working at the same time experimenting with different ideas. The fact that very few graffiti scholars approached graffiti art from the perspective of individual artists could be based on interviews where graffiti writers themselves generalized and spoke about their imagined community. One's imagined community (or fantasy about the names on the wall) is turned into the consensus reality of all writers and an imagined goal (being artists) is said to be the point behind the phenomenon.

The graffiti writers in the graffiti phenomenon were mostly young people, and in the last chapter we saw that, in play, "The sharing of the intersubjective space of play – being engaged together in the same activity – is a hugely important element of the fun of playing" (Meire, 2007, p. 3). The communal vision of all graffiti as art is at odds with the individual vision of some worthy graffiti as art, especially when writers judged most graffiti as "toy" graffiti. For graffiti writers, it was important to respect the community and all players involved when sharing their perspective with outsiders, but graffiti writers were the toughest critics of what was graffiti and what was "toy," as can be seen in the proliferation of pictures from that period where graffiti writers crossed out and wrote "toy" over other graffiti writers' work. There was a young person morality in graffiti, which was marked by a meritocracy for insiders' understanding and a loyalty to the community for outsiders' understanding.

Even though he admittedly failed to connect the graffiti phenomenon with his personal trajectory of art, in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) Mailer did succeed in tying the graffiti phenomenon to modern art, or "museum art," and the "respectable" trajectories surrounding those works. Lachmann (2002), in his review of Austin's (2001) *Taking the Train*, wrote: "The criticism that will properly place graffiti within art history has yet to be written" (p. 245), which shows that Lachmann did not accept Mailer's attempt to do so in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). But it also shows that Lachmann (2002), perhaps because Mailer failed to "properly place graffiti within art history," downplayed the potential Mailer's essay had for connecting graffiti with art history in the minds of graffiti writers and others in non-academic circles, based solely on Mailer's implication that graffiti was part of the trajectory of Western art.

Austin (2010) took Lachmann's (2002) statement as a challenge. In his essay, "More to See Than a Canvas in a White Cube" (hereafter "White Cube"), Austin (2010) wrote a convincing argument that placed graffiti within art history. Austin first found that "Graffiti art is a radical disruption in the history of graffiti" (p. 35), singling out the graffiti phenomenon. He described how important graffiti was, by stating that it was perhaps "*the most* important" (p. 35; emphasis in original) of "global visual culture movements" "of the last decades" (p. 35). Similar to Mailer's telepathic plant-life theory, Austin wrote, "Graffiti art bears strong family resemblances to the visual forms within the history of modern art that have made New York City famous" (p. 36).³⁷ Austin did a very good job of using collage art, most famously done by Robert Rauschenberg, as a way of writing graffiti art into the history of art, noting that, "...a main commonality between collage and graffiti art is their intimate relationship to the transforming-decaying-destroying-(re)building-expanding-spectacular city of the 20th century. Both art forms rely on the city-in-process to cast up new art materials and artistic opportunities" (p. 38). Austin also showed why connecting graffiti art to pop art was problematic, saying, "graffiti art's relationship to the art object it produces and to the image-world it borrows from is significantly different from pop art" (p. 39). Austin ended by convincingly arguing that graffiti art "is not adequately understood as an extension of the pop art movement" (p. 40). Austin found, similar to Mailer (although Austin never mentioned *The Faith* or Mailer in this essay), that "Graffiti art did not originate in any recognizable way as a response to a prior modern art movement, a key element in establishing the historical lineage needed for inclusion in the modern art narrative" (p. 40). So rather than finding graffiti art to be part of the tradition of modern art, or an art that fit as the next step in the narrative of art, Austin saw its disruptive potential and described the *action* of graffiti (not the art), of "illegally placing work on public walls," as a "significant contribution, even a step forward for, modern art" (p. 42). If ever there were an essay that successfully connected graffiti art to the trajectory of modern art, Austin's "White Cube" is the essay. Yet, I am still not convinced by his conclusion that "Graffiti art is aesthetically credible as art and it bears the marks of connection to widely accepted and valued visual traditions" (p. 44) because he seems to lump all graffiti together rather than focusing on one or two artist/kings and, by doing so, maintains an outsider's non-critical perspective on individual graffiti works.

³⁷ Interestingly, Austin (2010) made similar points that Mailer covered, using the same artist, Rauschenberg, but never once mentioned Mailer's attempt to do this in *The Faith*. Austin also used Robins' (1985) *The Pluralist Era: American Art, 1968-1981* to discuss graffiti in terms of art history and pointed out that Robins could have used graffiti in her study but neglected to do so. Robins wrote the full-page review of *The Faith* that appeared in *The New York Times* on May 5, 1974. Austin failed to mention that Robins' review of *The Faith* may have influenced her decision to keep graffiti out of her book on American Art in the 1970s, because the great Norman Mailer showed that it couldn't be done.

I don't want to spend too much time discussing Austin's (2010) essay, but it is interesting to reflect on the need that graffiti scholars seem to have to "properly place graffiti within art history" (Lachmann, 2002, p. 245) when this need is not so great for most graffiti writers. Austin (2010) even alluded to this outsider view when he wrote, "The intellectual, social and cultural wars over form, substance, influence, canonical qualities and ideologies of art that have inspired modern movements since the early 20th century are irrelevant to most graffiti artists" (p. 40). Graffiti writing insiders know what graffiti means to them, personally, and they do not need an outsider's opinion to justify their work. Many graffiti writers are not impressed by the so-called art of graffiti, and instead approach graffiti as a full contact sport which is played and decided upon in the street by graffiti writers. Austin hinted at this in "White Cube" when he wrote, "Conflicting claims to ownership of a name or style or image in graffiti art are likely to end in fisticuffs: there is a real, personal investment of identity at stake" (pp. 39-40). If the actual intention of many graffiti writers was not towards art but towards competition, then trying to "properly place" *all* "graffiti within art history" (Lachmann, 2002, p. 245) is a fool's errand. Attempts to place graffiti art in a trajectory of art history feel forced at times, because the consensus reality in graffiti is so fluid and changes in different graffiti writers' hands. In contrast, it seems like graffiti scholars accept one graffiti writer's fantasy as the consensus reality of all graffiti writers. Being artists is just not that important to many graffiti writers.

With this dissertation, I am offering a different way to approach the graffiti phenomenon, which might allow for *some* graffiti to be accepted as art while other graffiti can be understood to be something else. I propose studying the individual person, the one graffiti writer who wrote his or her work, and the individual's work in its own context. This is not a novel approach to studying art. When we learn about Van Gogh, we are not taught that he painted in the style of post-impressionism because he was aware of the movements that came before him and he was attempting to go beyond past movements; instead, we learn his personal life story. We learn about his bouts of madness, his time in mental institutions, his cutting his ear off, his suicide, and his brother, Theo. Similar to how graffiti writers paint their name over and over, each time trying to make it better than the last, Van Gogh's numerous self-portraits give the viewer a focus on the most important subject that comes from studying Van Gogh's life, his individual story.

When we listen to Don McLean's *Vincent*, we are not at all aware of Van Gogh's place in the trajectory of art history but we are moved by his work and his personal tragedy. When McLean sings, "Starry, starry night, flaming flowers that brightly blaze, swirling clouds

in violet haze, reflect in Vincent's eyes of china blue," we imagine his paintings, his style, and his personal story. We do not think of all of the other artists who are included in post-impressionism in order to ask whether post-impressionism really deserves to be recognized in the trajectory of art history. In "White Cube," Austin (2010) pointed to this but did not elaborate much when he wrote:

The recent proliferation of histories of individual artists and particular city and national scenes is a welcomed and astoundingly important development in documenting the history of graffiti art. We can create a history of graffiti art (at least a viable working draft) by synthesizing the scholarship and critical writing on the art with the artist's accounts and autobiographies that are currently available. (p. 37)

In a footnote to the next sentence, Austin mentioned Witten's (2001) book, *Dondi White: Style Master General*, which documented the individual life and work of a graffiti writer remembered as one of the greatest, Dondi, whose name I already mentioned was written on the inside cover of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) and who went on to be one of the biggest stars of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). By studying the individual work of Dondi, it is easy to connect his work to a trajectory of art history, because he intentionally painted graffiti with this understanding.³⁸ By lumping all graffiti together, downplaying the individual intentions of each writer, assuming they were all working in concert (when they were not), graffiti scholars make it almost impossible to talk about the art in graffiti without the discussion coming back to vandalism, competition, youth happenings, or any individual ideas projected onto the names on the wall. Pushing a consensus reality onto a game which takes place mostly in the imagination of the players allows for too much resistance to truth claims.

Part 3 was the shortest part in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Mailer's unique interpretive powers were working overtime to find a connection between the graffiti phenomenon and his trajectory of Western art. But even he recognized that he was reaching, and he doubted everything he wrote in this chapter. As he wrote, "But on reflection was old A-I trying to slip in some sauce...? Fell crap!" (p. 18). He closed this part with the "happy thought in his visit to the Modern Art... that some paintings might be, by whatever measure,

³⁸ Without books, the individual life stories of the best graffiti writers are passed down orally through the graffiti community. Dondi, it was said in the community during the 1990s, was the greatest graffiti writer, who brought fine art to subway art. He painted references to the trajectory of art history (painting what looked like parts of the Sistine Chapel on the subway, and characters from graphic novels) and he travelled to Europe and was hailed as a titan of graffiti. He was as large in graffiti art as Haring and Basquiat and respected as their equal (if not their better), but did not make much money during his life. He became a bike messenger after his time as an artist and died of AIDS just as the epidemic was on the decline. His work is found throughout *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) and today is referenced by all graffiti writers. His brother Michael is in charge of the Dondi White Foundation, managing his legacy and selling his work. A close reading of Dondi, his life, and his work, would show the world that he was an artist. The same is not true for every single teenager who wrote their tag-name on the subway in 1978.

on the air” (p. 18). Mailer admitted that what he proposed was a stretch for most people to accept, even for himself, but he was not interested in making a precise and clean interpretation that all could agree upon. After all, his ideas on graffiti were mystic and optimistic, which is to say, Mailer’s interpretation was his own and it was Hip.

Part 4: Binary and Hyperbole

In Part 4 of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer described his meeting with the Mayor of New York City, John V. Lindsay, at the mayor’s residence, Gracie Mansion, in December 1973, during the last weeks of his term. In this part, Mailer both blamed Mayor Lindsay for the proliferation of graffiti (assigning to graffiti the agency of being an answer to poor architecture) and vilified Lindsay for his blunt denigration of the graffiti phenomenon. This left Lindsay trapped in a box, cornered by the graffiti phenomenon as a clueless politician out of touch with ordinary people. Mailer again made the hip and the square visible, with the square being Lindsay (and the state) and the hip being Mailer (and graffiti).

For the rest of the essay, Mailer did not offer any more essential insight into the graffiti phenomenon. The remainder of the essay was Mailer indulging Mailer, revisiting past personal failure (attempting to run for mayor and failing) and declaring (as the old joke goes) that he could do a better job than the people who were in charge of politics and art. Mailer made even clearer in this Mailer-centric writing the strict binary he emphasized in “The White Negro” (1959):

One is Hip or one is Square (the alternative which each new generation coming into American life is beginning to feel), one is a rebel or one conforms, one is a frontiersmen in the Wild West of American night life, or else a Square cell, trapped in the totalitarian tissues of American society, doomed willy-nilly to conform if one is to succeed. (p. 339)

As I stated earlier in this chapter, there was not much nuance in Mailer’s philosophy of Hip. Within such a strict binary, hyperbolic assertions were bound to manifest. In most of Mailer’s writings there was no shortage of hyperbole, but maybe because of the personal/public nature of Mailer’s connection to Lindsay and Mailer’s dashed dreams of being Mayor of New York City in 1969, in this section Mailer depicted Mayor Lindsay as an absolute square.

Mailer visited and inspected Gracie Mansion, observing that, “Gracie Mansion is still one fine Federalist of a house (built in 1799)” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 21), and of the Mayor residing there, “Only a tall lean man could look well-proportioned in so philosophically dominating a set of rooms” (p. 21). Mailer, famously being a short and plump man, conceded with this description that he was not made for this mansion and therefore not made for the

Mayorship. By introducing this idea, Mailer previewed the argument about the graffiti phenomenon that he would make in this part, namely, that architecture and the ideology found in it sets the conditions for the people living amongst it. Or in terms of Hip, “Hip sees the context as generally dominating the man, dominating him because his character is less significant than the context in which he must function” (Mailer, 1959, p. 353).

With his description of Gracie Mansion, Mailer began showing the difference between the hip and the square. He used the Federalist style of Gracie Mansion to discuss the apathy in the people who run the government:

just government here in Federal style without the intervention of Satan or Jehovah (and next to nothing of Christ), just a fundament of Wasp genius in a building style to state that man could live *without faith* if things were calm enough. (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 21; emphasis added)

In this passage, Mailer clearly connected Lindsay (a WASP) with soulless government and faithlessness, the antithesis of the faith-full graffiti writer Mailer created and announced in the title of the book. Mailer noted, “Gracie Mansion never had a Mayor nearly so perfectly suited to itself” (p. 22), suggesting that Mailer did not live in Gracie Mansion because the house was not made for people who look like him, think like him, or behave like him. With this connection of Mayor Lindsay to the architecture of the mayor’s residence, and his depiction of Lindsay as being the perfect faithless person to inhabit it, Mailer opened a new argument about graffiti being a political response to Lindsay’s time in office.

Mailer went on to critique the mayor in a way only a local who followed local politics could. He brought into the discussion his own personal experience of running against Lindsay for mayor in 1969: “Mailer-Breslin running for the Mayorality in 1969 also ran into one argument over and over in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Harlem, and the South Bronx. It was, ‘What do we want with you? Lindsay is our man’” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 22). The three neighborhoods mentioned were predominantly Black and Puerto Rican communities. Mailer ceded that Lindsay built a contingent in the Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods, a contingent which, upon reflection, may have been better served by Mailer but rejected him. With his resentment for Lindsay in full view, Mailer floated the notion that the graffiti phenomenon was a genuine response by Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers to the White-centric society that promised but did not deliver for minority communities, represented by Lindsay. By interpreting the graffiti phenomenon as a response to Lindsay, and describing Lindsay’s disapproval of graffiti, Mailer substantiated what he had always known, that Black and Puerto Rican voters put their faith in the wrong candidate in 1969. Even though the polls

had long closed and Mailer lost the nomination to be the Democratic Party's candidate for Mayor by an embarrassing margin, with this section (and perhaps with the thesis of his essay, that "There is something to find" [p. 5] in graffiti), Mailer made sure he got the last word on Lindsay's time as Mayor and let all New Yorkers know that they made a mistake when they rejected the Mailer-Breslin ticket. This part seems personal for Mailer, like he was settling a personal/public conflict that he didn't feel ended well for him.

Mailer went on to write about what he believed was Lindsay's biggest misstep and perhaps the actual event that prompted the graffiti phenomenon: "he had...worked with the most powerful real estate interests in the city. No question that in his eight years, the ugliest architecture in the history of New York had also gone up" (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 22). Mailer accused Lindsay of putting special interests ahead of the people's interests, and of having created bad art, by allowing "the ugliest architecture" to be built during his tenure. This accusation highlighted Mailer's perception of Lindsay's boorishness, for Lindsay approved of aesthetically unpleasant architecture and, at the same time, harshly criticized graffiti for its aesthetic unpleasantness. But this was not a new argument for Mailer. Wenke (1987) wrote that Mailer believed that, "much of the architecture of contemporary America is a manifestation of the totalitarian mentality that intentionally divorces form from function" (p. 13). And Dearborn (1999) pointed out that, for Mailer, "Modern architecture, in all its blandness, was not only ugly but an evil, in his ethos, because, in breeding homogenization and dullness, it killed the soul. It was imperative to innovate and transgress" (p. 179). Mailer (1963) explicated these thoughts in his *Presidential Papers* when he wrote: "an architectural plague is near upon us" (p.179). With the graffiti phenomenon, Mailer finally found people who possibly thought like he did, and were doing something about that soul killing architecture. His years of writing about the effect of architecture on the citizenry would be emphasized by giving this graffiti an incredible agency, making graffiti a powerful answer to soul crushing architecture. I point here again to Gell's (1998) writing on agency, that "whenever an event is believed to happen because of an 'intention' lodged in the person or thing which initiates the causal sequence, that is an instance of 'agency'" (p. 17). Mailer gave graffiti the agency to serve as an answer to an issue which he had often written about. The agency he gave to graffiti seems to be more self-serving to his former ideas than a more neutral reading of the graffiti. Accordingly, Mailer repackaged old ideas and pointed to a cause and effect relationship that might prove his older writings to be prescient.

Lindsay: A vocal opponent of graffiti. Mailer recognized Lindsay's positive work in underserved communities, and because of that the hatred that many in the segregated White

communities had for Lindsay, and so he couldn't understand Lindsay's "implacable...reaction to graffiti" (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 22). Lindsay had been quoted calling the graffiti writers, "insecure cowards" (p. 22). This is where Mailer's interpretation of graffiti started to change from his original artistic interpretation, because he connected the graffiti phenomenon with "the Ghetto." By connection, then, Mailer imagined that all of the varied issues that plagued the poorer areas of the city were given voice through graffiti. The areas of the city reported to be most highly saturated by graffiti (sidelining the graffiti art found on subways) were Black and Puerto Rican areas. Mailer, even though he admitted that graffiti was mostly performed by adolescents, wanted to find something liberating, hip, and maybe even essentially "Ghetto" (essentially poor Black and Puerto Rican) in it, positing then that all Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers, even those over 24 years old, would take personal offense to Lindsay's antipathy towards graffiti. Mailer wrote, "How could he call the kids cowards? Why the venom? It seemed personal" (p. 23). Mailer projected his personal conflict with Lindsay onto Lindsay's reaction against graffiti. After a close reading of this part, the whole essay feels like a personal reaction to Lindsay from Mailer.

Although Mailer never came out directly and said it, as he so bluntly did in "The White Negro" (1957), Mailer read essential ideas of race in the Hip actions found in the graffiti phenomenon, especially through his political lens. This is another connection to Hip found in "The White Negro," where Mailer (1957) made assumptions about the Black American experience and used those assumptions to ground much of his argument, which proved to be problematic (see Dearborn, 1999, p. 130; Wenke, 1987, p. 78). Since "The White Negro," Mailer (1957) may have come to understand that his racial essentialism was reckless, and so he was not as bold as to claim in so many words that the graffiti phenomenon was an essentially Black or Puerto Rican activity, but the premise came through in his take on Lindsay's work in those communities.

In this part, Mailer appeared to be playing chess against Lindsay, using different ethnicities as pawns and the graffiti phenomenon as his queen. With all of Lindsay's defenders vanquished and his king vulnerable to attack (it was the end of his administration), Mailer could put Lindsay in checkmate with his queen. Mailer made Lindsay out to be a career politician with the ultimate goal of a shot at the presidency. This was a common refrain about Lindsay at the time. Lindsay (1970) acknowledged as much in his book, *The City*:

Among many New Yorkers early in 1969 you were likely to hear something like this about my administration: 'John Lindsay doesn't care about the typical, hardworking

man...All he cares about is his national image because he wants to run for President.’
(p. 23)

Lindsay defended himself against this criticism by pointing out that he was offered “the Senate seat of the late Robert Kennedy” (p. 25) in 1968, but turned it down in order to fulfill his duty as Mayor of New York City.

Mailer continued the criticism of Lindsay’s political aspirations that followed him into his second term. Mailer also gave a rough idea of when the graffiti phenomenon first exploded in New York City when he wrote, “...in the framework of that time in the Summer of ’71 and the Winter and Spring of ’72 when Lindsay was looking to get the Democratic nomination for President...these writings had sprouted like weeds all over” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 24). The timing of Lindsay’s graffiti (and political) troubles corresponded with graffiti writers being inspired by Taki 183 in “the summer of 71 and spring of 72” (p. 24). According to Mailer, the graffiti phenomenon sunk Lindsay’s presidential dreams. As Mailer observed:

[H]e must have sensed the presidency draining away from him as the months went by, the graffiti grew, and the millions of tourists who passed through the city brought the word out to the rest of the nation: ‘Filth is sprouting on the walls.’ (p. 24)

“Taki 183” (1971) and other newspaper articles explained that the graffiti phenomenon was a youth trend, which took place “before and after school let out.” Mailer, on the other hand, wanted to read the graffiti phenomenon for a meaning more accommodating of how he read the world and find a subversive cause and effect behind it. By doing so he activated an agency upon graffiti which it had never before had. Graffiti was now a political tool which “the people” could use against corrupt politicians.³⁹

If Mailer couldn’t make the case that the graffiti phenomenon lined up with his trajectory of Western art, then it must be political, a direct response to what Mailer saw as Lindsay’s bad decisions, corruption, and his time as Mayor in general. But if graffiti was an angry answer, or protest, against Lindsay’s architecture, then Mailer’s earlier case for connections to modern art was mere “fanciness,” without respect for the utilitarian use of graffiti as protest. What is coming to light is that Mailer had no clear idea about what the graffiti phenomenon was. *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) was actually his various attempts to contextualize graffiti and to frame it in higher terms than mere child’s play. By doing just that, Mailer aided in the invention of the tradition of graffiti.

³⁹ We saw “agency” given to graffiti in the last chapter with “Taki 183.” Now we notice the agency changes from being something which caused others to imitate it to being an answer to citywide corruption.

With all of the different ways Mailer interpreted graffiti throughout *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), a particular personal projection of meaning appears most prevalent. But in this part, with the focus on Lindsay and the architecture that went up during his tenure, Mailer pointed to his already expressed notion that “Our modern architecture reminds me a little of cancer cells” (Mailer, 1963, p. 179). Ironically, with this point, Mailer made graffiti out to be perhaps purposefully ugly, which seems to contradict his earlier elevation of graffiti as a purposeful art closely connected through telepathy to the works in MoMA. If the graffiti phenomenon was a purposefully ugly response to bad architecture, like the “art of karma” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 31) he described, then Mailer saw the graffiti as being as ugly as the architecture. In this light, Mailer either continually contradicted himself to show “the elusiveness of the meaning” that he found so pleasurable or demonstrated he was hell-bent on creating a better reason for the graffiti phenomenon than what the graffiti practitioners and Naar proposed, namely, watching their names go by.

On his way out of Gracie Mansion, Mailer noticed a painting hanging on the wall: “On the way out, A-I noticed there was a Rauschenberg on the wall” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 25). Mailer didn’t explain what that meant, nor did he specify which Rauschenberg piece. But he did establish that Rauschenberg was one of the last great artists to push the boundaries of art, and so his offhand comment could mean that Lindsay was a hypocrite for not seeing the similarity of aesthetics and philosophy in Rauschenberg’s collages and the graffiti phenomenon. With a Rauschenberg hanging in his residence, and Lindsay’s disapproval of graffiti, Lindsay was cast as a clueless square who went along with the other squares, without an original idea and always conforming to the expectations set for his office.

Mailer ended this part by reflecting on himself in Lindsay’s position and what he would do as Mayor. Mailer asked himself if he would condemn graffiti. He was not sure, but that didn’t matter for now. Of one thing he was certain; bad architecture would not have gone up under a Mailer administration. He commented, “...nobody like himself would ever be elected Mayor until the people agreed bad architecture was as poisonous as bad food” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 25). Perhaps this meant that, if the architecture had been better, no graffiti would ever grow on it. Mailer would not have let ugly buildings be built, so by the logic in this part, if Mailer were mayor, there might not have been any graffiti because the people would not have been protesting him. Following this line of thinking, Mailer truly set himself up to be the gatekeeper of the graffiti phenomenon. If he were in charge there would be no graffiti phenomenon, but since he is not in charge he will instigate and assess the graffiti phenomenon in high terms. In the end, Mailer proposed that bad architecture killed the spirits

of the city and invited a chaotic response. The squares brought this upon themselves. In this light, graffiti seems like a punishment, almost pay-back, to city leaders. By making this argument, Mailer dismissed graffiti as an art worth appreciating and instead framed it as something of a rebellion against the square state.

In Part 4 of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer suggested that graffiti was more than just art, more than a crime, and could be read as a form of protest, or even more powerfully, as a way to critique and maybe effect change in the architecture of the city. Mailer met with the enemy of hip graffiti, the square mayor in charge of the city, and found fault with government administration. In Part 4, we also see the personal investment Mailer had in the graffiti phenomenon, which might spring from his humiliating defeat in the public sphere to Mayor Lindsay. Mailer used the graffiti phenomenon as a way to settle old scores. A lasting feature from this part is that, in the future, graffiti would again be framed as having the agentic qualities of being against the mayor of New York City (Koch) and used to prove how well a different mayor could control New York City (Giuliani). Mailer suggested he would have been a better mayor than Lindsay, and in the next part he provided an anecdote to show that he might just have been a better artist than anyone since Rauschenberg.

Part 5: Mailer the Artist

After explaining what the theoretical Mayor Mailer would have done in Part 4 of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), the hypothetical Artist Mailer made his appearance in Part 5. He offered a “valid” work of art that went beyond abstract expressionism and another piece that might actually have been what the art world needed in order to go beyond the de Kooning and Rauschenberg collaboration. He found the next step in his high-art trajectory after the de Kooning and Rauschenberg collaboration in one name, Chris Burden. As his final thoughts on the graffiti phenomenon, he took all name(s) from the graffiti writers and lumped them together as one unit, having them work in unison as partners. In this last part of the essay, Mailer added yet another interpretation of the writings on the walls and read the warning of an oncoming apocalypse in the names written on subway doors.

The story he never wrote. Mailer opened Part 5 with, “Years ago, so much as twenty years ago, A-I had conceived of a story...” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 27). With this opening line, he pointed us to a story that he didn’t write, and at the same time he pointed us towards his earlier writings from 20 years ago. We could suppose that Mailer was pointing to “The White Negro” (Mailer, 1957) or a story that could have been included in *Advertisements* (Mailer, 1959), since that book had many short pieces from the 1950s. At the very least, Mailer pointed the reader to ideas he had when *Advertisements* was being written. This

strengthens my claim that *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) is full of ideas Mailer already discussed in *Hipsters* (Mailer, 1959).

Mailer went on to describe the story that he never wrote: “A rich young artist in New York in the early Fifties, bursting to go beyond Abstract Expressionism...” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 27), created “ill-defined” (p. 27) work on rented billboards, and allowed for the natural elements (rain, wind, cold) over a year to create their final look. In order to bring the 50 billboards into the gallery, the front wall of the gallery must be torn down, but “It was the biggest one-man exhibition in New York that year” (p. 27). Mailer proposed the story in joking terms, but said that an abstract expressionist artist of the period took his proposal seriously and thought it was a good idea. Even with throwaway joking ideas about art, in Mailer’s estimation he somehow had his finger on the pulse of art.

Before posing his next artistic idea, Mailer revisited the de Kooning and Rauschenberg collaboration once again. Mailer wrote that the change in viewing art that this collaboration reflected was that, “An aesthetic artifact has been converted into a sociological artifact – it is not the painting which intrigues us now but the ironies and lividities of art fashion which made the transaction possible in the first place” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 28). With this Mailer surrendered the importance of aesthetics and emphasized the story and the context the artwork tells.

The conceptual art he never performed. The de Kooning and Rauschenberg collaboration led into another conceptual art piece that Mailer dreamed up but never performed, created specifically for the Guggenheim in New York City, which might break the rules of art and display a piece “whose relation to art is as complex as Finnegans Wake’s to literature” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 28). Mailer wrote himself again into the story. Here, instead of being A-I, Mailer was a conceptual artist (on a Joycean level) whose works had not yet been realized. This was Mailer inhabiting the famous joke about the museum visitor who viewed modern and postmodern work for the first time and declared, “I could do that!” The art work that Mailer described in this second anecdote was set in a specific building with a unique architecture, the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, suggesting again that good architecture will inspire good art, which goes back to context, and implies that, with the proper context, all people can be productive citizens. Graffiti should not be blamed, he seemed to imply, but the structures and architecture of the city where graffiti sprouted should be reimagined for better living. In “The White Negro,” Mailer (1959) wrote, “Hip sees the context as generally dominating the man...man is then not only his character but his context” (p. 353).

Mailer thought he had found the artistic successor to the de Kooning and Rauschenberg collaboration in Chris Burden. He described Burden's happenings and art shows and concluded that they were "'edgy', which is to say they have nothing remotely resembling a boundary until they are done" (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 29). He noted, "Burden is not exploring his technique, but his vibrations" (p. 29). Burden's art, "which offers no art object at all," was the next step "left to take" for art, in Mailer's trajectory.

Mailer mentioned that Burden was "fulfilling the dictum of Jean Malaquais that once there are enough artists in the world, the work of art will become the artist himself" (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 29). Strangely, Mailer didn't see this in the individuality of the graffiti writers. I point to this quote, however, because Mailer mentioned his longtime friend, Malaquais, who was present in *Hipsters* (Mailer, 1959) and who interviewed Mailer in "Reflections on Hip" in *Hipsters*. There are so many overlapping pieces from *Hipsters* found in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), that it should be clear by this point that, with this essay, the graffiti phenomenon has become rooted in Hip. That is no small philosophical connection granted to what was understood as child's play only a couple years before. By rooting the graffiti phenomenon in Hip, Mailer elevated graffiti to be much more than child's play.

The tradition is Hip. By now it should be clear that, for Mailer, graffiti has its own tradition but as an act of defiance it is part of a larger tradition, the tradition of Hip as explained by Mailer (1957, 1959). The only way Mailer could justify bestowing child's play with the grounding philosophy of his life's work was to cast the graffiti phenomenon in general terms and talk about the graffiti writers as one rather than grant them the individuality afforded to famous artists. By doing so, Mailer added to the idea of a(n) (imagined) community of graffiti writers. Mailer wrote "it is Chris Burden we can comprehend more easily than the writers of graffiti. *They* are still somewhat other" (p. 30; emphasis added). He forgot about his search for the name in graffiti, and he forgot all individual graffiti names. He wrote about graffiti as a collective art, no longer recognizing individual names, noting: "the kids work together. The cave painting is now collective" (p. 30); "*They* work with speed, *they* work with cool, *they* paint their masterpieces...before the cameras of a German TV crew. *They* make an hour film for Europe. *They* are elegant in their movements" (p. 30; emphasis added); and "*They* paint the Joffrey Ballet" (p. 30; emphasis added). Cay 161, Junior 161, Hitler 2, and Stay High 149 were no longer individuals, they were part of a phenomenon they themselves didn't even understand. "They" were made one, even though they may in fact have hated one another and worked against one another.

This transformation, via the printed word, of several individuals working on their own writing graffiti, into a collective “they” points again to Anderson’s (1983) description of how imagined communities form with the help of the printed word. After Mailer wrote of individual graffiti writers as one “they” (Mailer & Naar, 1974), the “it-ness” (Anderson, 1983, p. 81) of a community of graffiti writers would no longer be in question. However, the graffiti writers’ intentions here were made secondary to the interpretations of outside observers. As Mailer wrote, “No, it’s not enough to think of the childlike desire to see one’s name ride by in letters large enough to scream your ego across the city” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 31). In the previous chapter of this thesis, we read the graffiti phenomenon in terms of child’s play. With this essay, Mailer rejected any childlike desires and brought a new level of maturity to the phenomenon, encouraging its growth. After *The Faith*, any text about graffiti could bring up the community of graffiti writers and the tradition of graffiti by connecting ideas and descriptions of graffiti to what Mailer wrote.

Conclusion

Mailer believed graffiti needed an adult with knowledge of the art world and its overarching narratives to fold it into that respectable category. He wouldn’t recognize the “childlike desires” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 31) that were apparent in graffiti and expressed by the writers themselves. Instead, he decided an adult-like desire - being accepted by the world of art - would be better for graffiti. The graffiti phenomenon, with adult intervention, became a site where childlike desire mixed with adult-like desires. After the essay, and because of that, those influenced by *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) would no longer understand the word graffiti the same way as those who had never heard of *The Faith*.

This same idea that graffiti needed the support of an adult with knowledge of the art world was found in Naar’s photographs in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Naar’s artistic framing of various WoWO and graffiti encouraged Mailer to accept the assignment. The authors chose 39 images, out of “more than three thousand” (Naar, 2007, p. 17) that Naar took, to support Mailer’s open and changing interpretation of graffiti in the essay.

As Mailer came to the end of his essay, he had one final and violent interpretation of the graffiti found on walls and subways in New York City. He asked whether graffiti signified an “oncoming apocalypse less and less far away” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 31). As he said, Graffiti lingers on our subway door as a memento of what it may well have been, our first art of karma, as if indeed all the lives ever lived are sounding the bugles of gathering armies across the unseen ridge. (p. 31)

Graffiti as an art of karma is yet again another interpretation which bestows on graffiti an agency (Gell, 1998) that spreads the blame for graffiti from the teenagers who wrote on walls and objects to all members of society, to history, all past troubles, “all the lives ever lived” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 31), and all wrongs ever committed. Mailer made graffiti godlike, a spiritual answer in physical form from a fair and just universe. In this interpretation, there is more than a hint of the childlike meritocracy found in the graffiti phenomenon.

Mailer rooted the graffiti phenomenon in a mystic and optimistic faith, attaching it to the already developed rebellious stance of Hip. He refused to accept what might be the actual truth behind the phenomenon, that it was a highly competitive game played by teenagers interested in watching their names go by. In his refusal to acknowledge this, Mailer was similar to the adolescent and teen graffiti writers who called preadolescent graffiti “toy” graffiti and thereby distanced themselves from immature, unexperienced, and frivolous child scribbles and showed themselves as serious kings. Mailer rejected what was in front of him in order to portray graffiti as something more serious than child’s play. By doing this, he elevated the graffiti phenomenon to an analytical position, the effects of which will be visible in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984).

By interpreting graffiti as perhaps an “art of karma” (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 31), Mailer also held graffiti not so much as art but as a response to the ugly square architecture in New York City. By postulating this interpretation along with the other interpretations in the essay, Mailer built the graffiti phenomenon into a Frankenstein’s monster of meaning, with the head of an artist, the legs of a rebel, the arms of a criminal, the torso of a revolutionary, moving with a Hip gait, and centered with a heart full of faith.

Even though I have found that both Mailer and Naar (1974) invented meaning and parts of the tradition of graffiti, and came with a priori ideas about the art, in *The Faith* they did not fail to push graffiti to a higher plateau. They captured in their book the early graffiti phenomenon, as well as other WoWO, and raised the intellectual, artistic, and subversive stakes of graffiti, which would influence graffiti writers and observers alike. By the end of *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer had idealized graffiti as a crime/art, which may be used for protest, may have religious connotations, might be a reaction to poor architecture, could signal an imagined revolution, and was deeply rooted in Hip. Whether Mailer was right or wrong didn’t matter by this point because, for writers and observers alike, graffiti would never be the same after *The Faith*.

Chapter 5: *Subway Art*

Fixity and Spread of Graffiti

In the previous four chapters, I offered an analysis of the invention, growth, and subsequent tradition of graffiti. In Chapters 1 and 2, I laid the groundwork for how I would approach graffiti in this thesis, from presenting the unique lens I cut to re-view graffiti, using Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Communities* and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*, to expanding on the conversation taking place in the 1970s and 1980s about graffiti in media and other texts. In Chapter 3, I focused on "Taki 183" (1971) to examine how the name-writing game began and how the attention in the press helped to invent graffiti. In Chapter 4, I examined *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), and showed how a major writer of the period was able to elevate the discussion around graffiti by trying to connect it with the Great Tradition of art.

In this chapter, I offer a close reading of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), a central text for graffiti, and show just what was so attractive to young people about graffiti after this book. *Subway Art* is the core of this thesis. I have structured my analytic choices, from choosing my corpus to my theoretical approach, on the centrality of *Subway Art* to the understanding and the fixing of the development of graffiti and its spread around the world. *Subway Art* is a "photographic essay" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 94; hereafter "photo essay"), which reflects a specific narrative, invested desires, and competing artistic visions of the graffiti phenomenon, as I will explicate in this chapter.

The crucial premise for this thesis is that *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) was a major actant for the spread of the graffiti phenomenon to many cities throughout the world. To attempt to prove this point with mere numbers of copies of *Subway Art* sold since publication (estimates range from 30,000 [Kate Davies, Thames and Hudson education department, Jan 14, 2019] to 500,000 [M. Cooper, personal communication, Nov 11, 2016]) does not begin to demonstrate the impact the book had on young graffiti writers around the world.⁴⁰ To understand the impact of the book beyond mere units sold, other metrics come to the fore. How many photocopies of the book were made, passed around, and traced over in order for readers to learn graffiti? How many of the original physical books in libraries became de-facto "black-books" which graffiti writers would write in and then later graffiti writers would see (thereby making writing graffiti in the book a way to be seen by other graffiti writers)? How many of those who read the book once but never owned it went into the

⁴⁰ I remember photocopying many of the pages of this book when I found it in the library of my high school in 1994, showing those images to others, and tracing over them with tracing paper to practice how to create graffiti.

street and wrote their tag name? The book was a prized possession that older graffiti writers showed to younger graffiti writers. The graffiti writers featured in *Subway Art* became graffiti ambassadors, travelling to many foreign lands based on the narrative shown in *Subway Art*. The most popular styles found in graffiti in most places in the world share an aesthetic connection to the works found in *Subway Art*. The book *Spray Can Art* (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987), which later documented the spread of graffiti around the world, solidified *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) as a founding text of the worldwide graffiti phenomenon.

My question for this chapter is “How did *this* book inspire young people in other lands to want to follow this art to the letter?” That is, what does this book *do* for the fixity and spread of this graffiti? I do not accept it to be a case that the worldwide proliferation of graffiti is a product of mere copying a performance found in a book. Instead, I believe the photos in this book captured a performance in magical and didactic pose, which produced new understandings of one’s self, one’s creations, and the (imagined) relationship one has with those creations.

I base my analysis on a number of texts. I use Latour’s *Iconoclash* (2002) to look deeply at the first couple of images in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). I use Gell’s (1997) *Art and Agency* to highlight important anthropological aspects of graffiti, namely “agency” and “distributed personhood.” For guidance for how to analyze pictures and the photo essay, I utilize Mirzoeff’s (2009) *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Mitchell’s (1994) *Picture Theory*, and Mitchell’s (2005) *What do Pictures Want?* I compare and contrast the narratives in Castleman’s (1982) *Getting Up* and Stewart’s (1989, 2009) *Graffiti Kings* with Chalfant and Cooper’s (1984) narrative in *Subway Art* because the three texts cover the same phenomenon from different perspectives. I wrap up my argument using Barthes’ (1980) *Camera Lucida* to ponder the punctum of an image. By utilizing these texts, I highlight that which *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) leaves out from its coverage of the graffiti phenomenon and bring out *Subway Art*’s controlled narrative. Based on its controlled narrative, I place the entire text of *Subway Art* in direct conversation with Chapter 5 of Austin’s (2001) *Taking the Train*. I examine three framing choices about the graffiti phenomenon in 1980, which were made in an article used in that chapter, and illustrate how *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) strongly and directly contests these choices. I also point to five underlying storyline-threads that I believe guide the narrative of *Subway Art*, which reappear throughout the text.

I begin by establishing the ways in which *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) was a text that “had legs,” which positioned it to spread graffiti to different lands. I then move to

an examination of the development of graffiti with a close reading of the front, back, and inside of the covers plus the first 19 pages of the book. I follow with a close reading of the largest section of the book, pages 20-97, to analyze Chalfant and Cooper's didactic guide to subway art. In the final section, I focus on the last seven pages of the book for Chalfant and Cooper's framing of the opposition and the end of an era.

Subway Art: A Text That Had Legs

The Photo Essay

I begin my close reading of Chalfant and Cooper's (1984) *Subway Art* by characterizing the photo essay. Mitchell (1994) wrote, "The normal structure of [the photo essay] involves the straightforward discursive or narrative suturing of the verbal and visual: texts explain, narrate, describe, label, speak for (or to) the photographs; photographs illustrate, exemplify, clarify, ground, and document the text" (p. 94). In the photo essay, although some information is presented in the text, the photographs also tell a story and move the story forward. However, readers can overlook nuance or important details in the photo essay; hence, a close reading of images can bring new depth to the understanding of the scene captured in the image.

As Mitchell (2005) explained, "The classic examples of this form give us a literal conjunction of photographs and text---usually united by a documentary purpose, often political, journalistic, sometimes scientific (sociology)" (p. 285). In *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) wove together documentary, political, journalistic, and sometimes scientific (if style can be described as a science) aspects to make the story. In the gentle and respectful handling of the subject, one can discern the photographers' sense of responsibility towards graffiti, those who painted the graffiti, and the larger public discourse surrounding graffiti. The photographs in *Subway Art* showed this controversial art and the young people who painted it in the best possible light. I contend this is in direct contrast with how other media portrayed graffiti writers at the time, as exemplified in Chapter 5 of *Taking the Train* (Austin, 2001). The images in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) are truly one-of-a-kind; to aid in interpretation, "captions, legends, dates, names, locations" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 290) are written close to them. Most of the information in the book came from the graffiti writers. Some graffiti writers were able to say in their own words how they created and saw their graffiti. Chalfant and Cooper (1984) cast the graffiti writers as respectful, and rather ingenious, and gave their best paintings their own multi-page spreads.

Regarding the ethical concerns of the photo essay and how it represents its subject, Mitchell (1994) commented:

The “taking” of human subjects by a photographer (or a writer) is a concrete social encounter, often between a damaged, victimized, and powerless individual and a relatively privileged observer, often acting as the “eye of power,” the agent of some social, political, or journalistic institution. The “use” of this person as instrumental subject matter in a code of photographic messages is exactly what links the political aim with the ethical, creating exchanges and resistances at the level of value that do not concern the photographer alone, but which reflect back on the writer’s (relatively invisible) relation to the subject as well and on the exchanges between writer and photographer. (pp. 287-288)

A particularly creative aspect to *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) is how much of it was written in spray paint on subways, photographed, and then used as “writing” for the book. For example, on page 28, in the subchapter titled “Fame,” there appears an image of a window-down “Fame” painting by Seen on the side of a subway, which acts as a title image for the subsection. In that same subsection, on the same page, half of the page is a picture of a wall with an early rap-rhyme spray painted on it, which ends with the line “the name of the game is graffiti fame.” The two images of graffiti “fame” are accompanied by two paragraphs that describe what “graffiti fame” means. Even though many of the pictures of graffiti writings on subways and walls are further explained by text beneath or to the side of the images in the book, the images without accompanying text tell their own profound stories, which may shed light on to how graffiti was interpreted by graffiti writers in this period. As Mitchell (1994) noted:

The text of the photo-essay typically discloses a certain reserve or modesty in its claims to “speak for” or interpret the images; like the photograph, it admits its inability to appropriate everything that was there to be taken and tries to let the photographs speak for themselves or “look back” at the viewer. (p. 289)

But how can we as readers/viewers actually let the pictures “speak for themselves”? Mitchell (2005) wrote that “Pictures are things that have been marked with all the stigmata of personhood and animation: they exhibit both physical and virtual bodies; they speak to us, sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively” (p. 30).

As Austin (2001) showed in *Taking the Train*, graffiti on subways was read as a blight on society during the 1970s and graffiti writers were seen as “insignificant people” who were trying to “impose their identity onto others” (p. 81). Yet one would be hard pressed to find that reading in the images of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). These images do “speak for themselves,” but not in a vacuum; they are part of a larger dialogue about what graffiti is

and how the greater public could (or perhaps should) interpret it. The pictures *do* something; they answer critics of graffiti with positive images of graffiti and graffiti writers. As Mitchell (2005) recommended, however, readers of photo essays can go further and “shift the question from what pictures *do* to what they *want*, from power to desire, from the model of the dominant power to be opposed, to the model of the subaltern to be interrogated or (better) to be invited to speak” (p. 33). Therefore, I don’t limit my reading to just what the images *do* but also examine what they *desire*. As Mitchell (2005) instructed, I consider:

Who or what is the target of the demand/desire/need expressed by the picture? One can also translate the question: what does the picture lack; what does it leave out?; What is its area of erasure? Its blind spot? Its anamorphic blur? What does the frame or boundary exclude? What does its angle of representation prevent us from seeing, and prevent it from showing? What does it need or demand from the beholder to complete its work? (p. 49)

To identify what *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) left out, its “areas of erasure,” I compare it with the account of the graffiti phenomenon told in Castleman’s (1982) *Getting Up* and Stewart’s (2009) *Graffiti Kings*. Although Castleman (1982) used many of the same informants and images that appear in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), I purposely do not use *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) or *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009) as primary sources because neither was an influential text on the development or spread of graffiti. I agree with Austin (2001), who wrote about *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) that “the more narrow circulation... (through academic outlets) probably means [it] had less impact on the formation of writing cultures in other cities” (p. 262). Similarly, *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009) was also a doctoral thesis (Stewart, 1989). *Graffiti Kings* had only been available through academic channels, until it was re-released with full color images in a hard cover book in 2009. It was not a text that could have influenced anyone outside of New York City during the early 1980s. I use *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) and *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009) as a means to find the blind spots of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) because all three presented accounts of the same phenomenon at overlapping times and places.

This leads me to my main reason for placing *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) at the center of my investigation of the growth of graffiti in text from child’s play to an original art: the graffiti art in *Subway Art* was influential in spreading this story and form to cities around the world. As Mitchell (2005) observed:

Every advertising executive knows that some images, to use the trade jargon, “have legs” --- that is, they seem to have a surprising capacity to generate new directions and

surprising twists in an ad campaign, as if they had an intelligence and purposiveness of their own. (p. 31)

Many pictures in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) “had legs” and are still used today to show what graffiti art is. Even though Chalfant and Cooper ended *Subway Art* by claiming this art to be dead, thereby pronouncing the images all of a dead art, the images proved to be fecund and have a second life when *Subway Art* went on to influence graffiti art in cities around the world for decades after it was released. As Mitchell (2005) stated:

With images, the question of vitality has more to do with reproductive potency or fertility. We can ask if a picture is a good or bad, living or dead specimen, but with an image, the question is, Is it likely to go on and reproduce itself, increasing its population or evolving into surprising new forms? (p. 90)

Graffiti, after *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), was reproduced based on the story, style, and imagination in *Subway Art*, and increased and evolved “into surprising new forms” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 90).

Mirzoeff (2009) wrote that “visual culture is always contested and that no one way of seeing is ever wholly accepted in a particular historical moment” (p. 33). I recognize this feature in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Because it has a baseline dedication to showing this art in a positive light, which can be seen by comparing the story told in *Subway Art* with the stories told in *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) and *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009), the story in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) can be contested on different fronts.

One final instruction I take from Mirzoeff (2009) is how closely he reads and analyzes the images he chooses, how he compares them with other images, and the background information he gives about the images and how they work. Mirzoeff wrote, “The right to look is not voyeurism...it is a claim to a history that is not told from the point of view of the police” (p. 15). Taking guidance from his instruction and his written examples, I offer readings of the images in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) from a perspective that does not uphold one idea or vision but seeks to add to a fuller account.

Different Views of the Same Phenomenon

A few of the same people, whether graffiti writers or photographer-producers, were involved in many of the constructive and collaborative graffiti texts of the 1970s and 1980s, namely the books *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) and *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) and the films *Style Wars* (Chalfant & Silver, 1983), *Wild Style* (Ahearn, 1982) and *Beat Street* (Belafonte & Picker, 1984). For example, the graffiti writer Lee featured prominently in all of the graffiti texts of that moment, as did a few other select graffiti writers. Chalfant’s

photographs, and his skill as a producer of collaborative and constructive graffiti texts, went beyond the early 1980s and were connected to later graffiti texts like *Spray Can Art* (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987), which both connected graffiti to a history in New York City and projected its movement to cities across the world. The immediate influence of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) on Europe, Australia, and the rest of the United States can be read in *Spray Can Art* (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987). In *Graffiti Kings*, Stewart (1989, 2009) used different graffiti informants from an earlier period but his images of early graffiti, especially from Blade, shed light on some years of the development of graffiti that *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) skips over.

Because of the use of the same informants, photographers, and producers, the narrative in three texts, *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982), *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), and *Style Wars* (Chalfant & Silver, 1983) maintains a similar story. The three could be said to be companion texts: the same stories are shared; the same graffiti writers are praised; and many of the same styles are shown. *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) is a mostly ethnographic academic text that relied more on text than images to describe the graffiti phenomenon in New York City at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. It featured photographs of graffiti on subways from a few different photographers, two of whom were the creators of *Subway Art*, namely, Chalfant and Cooper (1984). *Style Wars* (Chalfant & Silver, 1983) is a documentary film, which delves into breakdancing and the in-fighting in graffiti during this period. Graffiti writers Seen, Lee, Min, Skeme, and Kase-2 had major roles in both *Style Wars* and *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) and Chalfant co-produced both. All three texts were released during the same period of graffiti, the early 1980s. The three together made that moment legendary. The three texts could also be seen as answers to the texts Austin (2001) covered in his Chapter 5 because they all were mostly collaborative and constructive framings of graffiti. When giving a close reading of one of these texts, as I am doing now, it is valuable to look at where the narratives of each text deviate. The three texts support each other in most ways and yet they each deviate in their own way from their shared narrative and informants.

Many of Chalfant and Cooper's (1984) pictures from *Subway Art* appeared in *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982). Chalfant and Cooper (1984), in *Subway Art*, told some of the same exact stories that Castleman (1982) told in *Getting Up*: the death of graffiti, the police, even references to the same writers as kings. Both texts gave valuable information about what the writers did, but *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) had more focus on law enforcement and the opposition to graffiti than did *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). There were also some angles of subway graffiti in *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) that were absent from *Subway Art*

(Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), like Fred's "Campbell's Soup whole car" with the doors open and a man in a cowboy hat standing on the subway waiting for it to go (Castleman, 1982, p. 1).

I use Stewart's (2009) *Graffiti Kings* as well to compare the account given in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) to other less closely related studies or documentaries. Stewart (1989, 2009) used some of the same informants and stories, but because his thesis was a much more exhaustive look at the years of the stylistic growth of the graffiti phenomenon in the mid-1970s, his time period was different from that of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Stewart (1989, 2009) did not seem to have an underlying desire to represent this phenomenon in any other light than precisely what his informants expressed to him. In terms of this thesis, *Graffiti Kings* is an example of a collaborative text, which was not in conversation with the newspapers of its time, but was more involved in portraying the stories of early and mid 1970s graffiti that most graffiti writers understood and their unfiltered interpretations of their work, as well as discussing in more detail the immense and intense opposition formed against graffiti in New York City at that time.

Stewart (1989, 2009) called this graffiti by a clunky title: "New York City Mass Transit Art." Chalfant and Cooper (1984) shortened the title, made it a bit more catchy, and allowed for it to travel out of New York City by calling the same phenomenon *Subway Art*. *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 1989) was a thesis that very few people could appreciate in color until it was re-released in 2009. *Graffiti Kings* overlapped with *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) in many ways, but Stewart (1989, 2009) covered the years 1971-1978, which do not align completely with the time period that Chalfant and Cooper (1984) considered in *Subway Art*. In fact, Stewart (1989, 2009) saw the phenomenon rather differently from how Chalfant and Cooper (1984) saw it. In the introduction to *Graffiti Kings*, Stewart (2009) wrote that he "felt that subway graffiti had hit its golden age in 1973" (p. 9). From Stewart's perspective in *Graffiti Kings*, the best graffiti was created before Mailer wrote a word about graffiti in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). In contrast, from the perspective of Chalfant and Cooper (1984) in *Subway Art*, the work produced in 1973 was considered toy, naïve, or beginner graffiti.

In *Graffiti Kings*, Stewart (2009) used photographs of more than 100 different graffiti writers, many of whom did not like each other, and used quotes from more than 50 informants. Stewart was not partial to one group, writer, or narrative. He did have a few core informants, but he used images from many different writers. He showed a lot of work that was not traditionally celebrated later in graffiti circles. His pictures did not show what *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) showed, and they did not inspire the same desire to do the same thing. Stewart (2009) did not convey through his pictures either the imagination found in

Cooper's pictures or the attention to the details of the work found in Chalfant's pictures (more on this later). This is not meant as an insult or harsh critique of Stewart's skill or photographic acumen, but instead it reveals the different aims of the authors. Stewart (1989, 2009) documented graffiti from a relative distance, with the goal of creating a thesis about the phenomenon. Chalfant and Cooper (1984) took the photographs in *Subway Art* up-close and personally with the graffiti writers. Some of their images could be said to be staged; some pieces may have been created with making the book *Subway Art* in mind; and the images were applied towards creating a book about a misunderstood art that was often maligned in the press.

The innocent beauty of the styles found in *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009), photographed for the thesis (Stewart, 1989), provoke a moment of graffiti nostalgia, before Mailer and before art became the objective (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Yet we would never understand the graffiti in *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 1989, 2009) as naïve if graffiti did not progress further, which Chalfant and Cooper (1984) documented in *Subway Art*. In this way *Graffiti Kings* (1989, 2009) supports the idea of graffiti's stylistic and technical growth throughout the 1970s and the improvements to the art as found in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) are recognized as improvements because earlier photos show simple styles on a smaller scale.

Stewart (2009) showed many pictures of writers crossing each other's graffiti. Stewart was not selling this art to anyone or any group; he was documenting it and trying to remain true to what his informants told him without interjecting or translating too much from their individual fantasies to an older consensus reality. Stewart's informants were younger than the artists found in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). At times, Stewart's (2009) images seemed to be influenced by the young people found in some of his images: because so many pictures cut the top of the subway out of the image, they appeared to be taken from a lower vantage point focused only on the graffiti on the side of the subway.

The three major places where Chalfant and Cooper (1984), in *Subway Art*, deviated from *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) and *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009) are: (a) their handling of infighting between graffiti writers; (b) the role of the authorities policing graffiti; and (c) their reliance on a small selection of graffiti writers. The narrative of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) and this thesis is not the only narrative about the graffiti phenomenon. As will be seen, it is a constructed narrative, but it is part of the most well-known narrative about the fixing of graffiti as an original art. In *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper glossed over infighting, the authorities, and the styles of graffiti that fell outside of its purview. By doing

so, the authors stuck to what may have been their goal: to show graffiti in a positive light. I contend the authors crafted this goal as an answer to the negative press about graffiti, as Austin (2001) described in his Chapter 5, with a focus on the art and the friendly young people who painted it.

Subway Art in Conversation with Taking the Train

In this section, I show *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) was in conversation with the same media coverage that Austin (2001) relied on for chapter five of *Taking the Train*. I describe Austin's story about the general consensus about graffiti in the early 1980s based on media coverage of the phenomenon. I examine one extraordinarily harsh article from that chapter, by Stern and Stock (1980), which appeared in the October 19, 1980, Sunday magazine of *The New York Times*. I draw out three of the many claims, framings, and authorial decisions made by the reporters of the article and describe how *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) answered each one.

In *Taking the Train*, Austin (2001) had only good things to say about *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Austin (2001) wrote, "Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper's *Subway Art* (1984) is a basic primer on writing culture, containing hundreds of color photographs of work on the New York City trains, plus some history of writing and other useful information" (p. 262). Austin foreshadowed a major premise of this thesis when he wrote, "Later interviews with writers in other cities revealed that *Subway Art* had a major impact on the spread of writing culture across the globe" (p. 263). This quote supports my claim that *Subway Art* "had legs" and is a central text for the pirating of graffiti.

Austin's (2001) thesis was about "how graffiti art became an urban crisis" (front cover) and he focused mostly on the one-sided texts that appeared in the press, which framed graffiti art as an urban crisis. In Chapter 5 of *Taking the Train*, Austin looked at the negative framings of graffiti in New York newspapers during the period from 1980 to 1984. He claimed, convincingly, that the Mayor's office of Ed Koch and *The New York Times* coordinated their rhetoric about graffiti and worked together towards defaming it. Austin wrote:

The claim that writing symbolized a city "out of control" was recited in almost every public statement about the "graffiti problem" by the MTA, the city council, and the mayor's office during the next decade, becoming the politically correct party line on the "graffiti problem" within city government. The charge was repeated in the Times's news reporting on this issue and appeared again in its editorial pages. (p. 150)

After the failure of a first anti-graffiti alliance to eradicate graffiti in New York City in the early 1970s, Austin (2001) wrote that a “second alliance formed” (p. 149) in 1980, from which *The New York Times* editorial section seemed to take its cues. Austin noted:

Marking the end of the long hiatus that followed the first alliance’s defeat, four editorials condemning writing appeared in the Times during 1980, signaling the willingness of the paper’s editorial staff to join the new alliance. Eight more antigraffiti editorials were published in the Times between the beginning of 1981 and the end of 1984. (p. 153)

Austin continued:

In the newspapers, the MTA, city officials, and other members of the alliance received an uncontested platform to broadcast and reaffirm their view of writing’s place within the city. Such biased support was never acknowledged as a form of favoritism... (p. 156)

Austin (2001) pointed to the October 19, 1980, article in the Sunday magazine of *The New York Times* titled “Graffiti: The Plague Years” (Stern & Stock, 1980) as an example of media coverage that negatively framed graffiti art and the graffiti writers. As Austin (2001) described:

The article presents the most thorough overview of writing culture to appear in the Times at any time before or since, but does so in the name of demonstrating the writers’ psychological, social, and moral dysfunctions. Ultimately, the article must be seen as part of the alliance’s overall attempts to de-romanticize and malign the writers in the eyes of the public. (p. 156)

In this report, Stern and Stock (1980) mostly focused on the graffiti writer NE. They followed NE as he stole paint, painted a subway, and then came back to photograph the subway the next day. At times the article reads like a personal attack against the person of NE. Stern and Stock described personal details about his “wealthy” family’s problems and his moving to a foster home and referred to NE and others who looked like him as “white, middle-class toys” (p. 5). What Stern and Stock did not know was that NE was another tag, or back-up tag, for the graffiti writer Min. Min had a starring role in *Style Wars* (Chalfant & Silver, 1983), had his face and graffiti featured in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), and he would go on to become a legend in the graffiti subculture because of these works.

I suggest that *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) was a collaborative text in which the authors sought to contest the newspaper accounts that framed graffiti in that negative light. I point to three framings in “Graffiti: The Plague Years” (Stern & Stock, 1980) that I

believe *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) challenged directly. The first framing was that graffiti as an activity was an essentially race-based activity, only for Black and Hispanic youth. Stern and Stock (1980) stated that “NE was a rarity, a middle-class white kid making it in a world dominated by ghetto blacks and Hispanics” (p. 1). The second framing in “Graffiti: The Plague Years” was that graffiti was only for boys, and that no girls participated in it. As Stern and Stock stated, “Females, by and large, are not part of the subway graffiti scene” (p. 6). The reporters used NE’s tough words and obvious distrust of the reporters (shown by him giving a different name than Min) to frame graffiti as a boys’ club in which girls were not welcome. The third framing in “Graffiti: The Plague Years” was the disrespectful treatment of the informant NE (nee Min). Stern and Stock took advantage of this young man by sensationalizing his criminal activities and seemingly ridiculing him for his race, his troubled family, and his choice to befriend Black and Hispanic teens, and went so far as to report that White kids who wrote graffiti were “an instance of whites aping black life styles” (p. 1). Stern and Stock did not respect NE enough to portray him as an individual with nuance, but instead as the representation of all “white, middle class toys” who wanted to join this practice. Graffiti writers came across as psychologically damaged, immature teens who were policing race, gender, and class as closely as adult society. Stern and Stock portrayed White graffiti writers as “neophytes, ‘toys,’ caught on the bottom rung of the complex subculture and despised and ripped off by black and Hispanic graffiti writers” (Stern & Stock, 1980, p. 2).

In *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) challenged these three problematic framings in the article “Graffiti: The Plague Years” (Stern & Stock, 1980). Chalfant and Cooper (1984) never claimed graffiti to be essentially an activity performed by one race, but rather forcefully showed it as a phenomenon open to all. The same was true for the idea that graffiti was not for females. By bringing up Eva 62 and Barbara 62 three times in *Subway Art* and using three images of the person of Lady Pink, Chalfant and Cooper pushed the idea that both females and males were writing this graffiti. Finally, the personal connection that Chalfant and Cooper had with the graffiti writers and their framing of them as friendly people, respectable youth, and talented artists answered Stern and Stock’s (1980) disrespectful and obvious outsider perspective on the graffiti writers.

Regarding the articles he used in his Chapter 5, Austin (2001) noted, “As was the case in the 1970s, only rarely were writers used as sources of firsthand information about their lives, artistic practices, or views on the ‘graffiti problem,’ even though journalists could easily make contact with writers” (p. 156). Stern and Stock (1980) contacted NE but did not know him or respect him enough to allow him to have any redeeming qualities in the article. Not

only did the report cast NE in a particularly poor light, the reporters did the same to graffiti on the whole. Chalfant and Cooper's (1984) careful and controlled decision to show graffiti writers in a positive light in *Subway Art* can therefore be seen as being in direct contention with Stern and Stock's (1980) framing of graffiti and the graffiti writers in the article "Graffiti: The Plague Years." The articles in Chapter 5 of *Taking the Train* (Austin, 2001) relied heavily on the opinions of psychologists, the police, and the MTA. *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) almost left them all out. Chalfant and Cooper did not mention the psychological motives behind graffiti in *Subway Art* and they limited the police and the MTA authorities to two two-page spreads at the end of the book, framing both as unappreciative parties who helped put this art on subways in the grave. Thus, they minimized the critics of graffiti and the role of the authorities against graffiti.

Five Storyline Threads

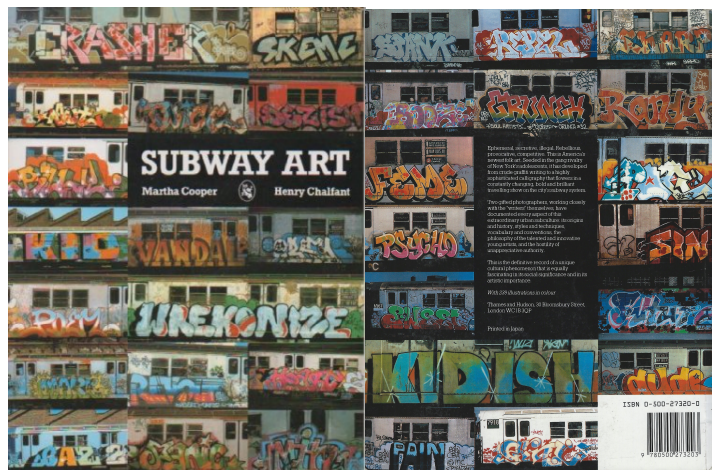
Chalfant and Cooper (1984) wove five narrative storyline threads throughout *Subway Art* to represent graffiti art and create their book. I refer to these storylines as threads to highlight the creative and handmade framing the text follows and how these threads make up the narrative. The first thread is that there is an art found in graffiti *and* this art is found on subways (i.e., subways are central to this art). The second thread is that there are two photographers who took the pictures for this book *and* they have two completely different ways of approaching, photographing, and displaying the graffiti. The third thread is that this graffiti is created by friendly young people *and* graffiti is egalitarian and meritocratic. The fourth thread is that this graffiti is part of a tradition that some have mastered *and* one can learn the best practices of the tradition from this text. The first four threads show up at various points throughout the book, supporting the goal of respectful representation. The fifth and final thread is maybe the most compelling of them all. In the dénouement of *Subway Art*, the authors established this incredible art as existing in a closed off time and space, which rendered it "over" or "dead" by the end of the book *and* at the same time, they posed a challenge to other young people to continue the tradition of graffiti in their own time and space. These threads overlap at various points, revealing the controlled narrative of *Subway Art*. Taken together, the five threads keep the subject of graffiti in a respectable light, not allowing the positive framing to be pulled towards the more negative aspects of this phenomenon.

In conclusion, in this section, I established *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) as a text that "had legs" and was capable of spreading graffiti to different lands. In the rest of this chapter, I read closely the narrative of graffiti as found in *Subway Art*. I discuss the

development of graffiti, and then the didactic parts of the book. Finally, I discuss the last seven pages of the book and the opposition formed against graffiti.

The Development of the Art

In this section, I closely read the first part of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). I consider a close reading of this first part to be necessary to build up to the art found in the next section. On the front and back covers, the insides of the covers, and the first 19 pages of *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper provided valuable information about the fundamentals of graffiti, including a short history of the growth of graffiti as a popular practice in 1970s New York City and the improvement of style in graffiti, starting with the crude all-over tagging of Taki 183, moving on to the development of Blade's psychedelic masterpieces, and up to the picturesque images of Midg's work on the sides of subways. Together, Chalfant and Cooper's different perspectives towards approaching, photographing, and displaying subway graffiti showed both the reality and imagination of graffiti. By reading the images in this part of the book, and comparing them to other accounts and images, I also identify the blind spots of the narrative found in *Subway Art*.



(Fig. 14. Front and back covers of *Subway Art*, 1984)

Front and Back Covers

Crasher, Skeme, Billy, Kid, Poem, Wrekonize, Revolt, Heart, Panic, Min -- these are some of the names on the front cover of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). There is a recognizable difference between the images of these tag-names and the images of tag-names found in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Not only are these pictures all of graffiti on subways, but the style and effort put into name-writing has developed. There is no focus on tags here or naïve doodles. There are no street numbers on the cover (or throughout the book); something has changed in graffiti since “Taki 183” (1971). The main focus on this cover (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) are colorful pieces on sides of subways. The 33 different pictures on the front and back covers are framed as close ups of graffiti on the sides of subways. The

bright graffiti and the dull subways balance each other throughout the layout. Only one painting, on the back cover, is not on a subway: “Futura 2000” is painted on a tiled surface, maybe a schoolyard wall.

Of the 32 pieces pictured on subways, all but one (KID) show graffiti painted below the windows of the subways, all pointing to the presence of the subway in the frame and in the art. The windows are all clean for the most part and subway doors are prominent in the images. With so many images to take in at one time, 17 images alone on the front cover, one becomes overpowered by the sheer number of names to decipher, the chaotic whirlwind of colors, and the confusion of what these large painted words signify. The overall effect forces one’s eyes to the only words that make sense on the cover, the title, *Subway Art*. Under the title are the names of the two photographers who put this book together, Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant.

In the middle of the back cover is a synopsis of this photo essay. Like the title on the front cover, the synopsis on the back cover serves as an oasis for the eyes, because it is set in a sea of 16 colorful pictures of curious names painted in the style of graffiti on the sides of subways. In the first paragraph of the synopsis, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) claimed that “This is America’s newest folk art.” The authors supported this audacious claim in numerous ways throughout the text and, most emphatically, on the first page. The next sentence could almost be mistaken for the intent of this thesis, which is to show the growth of graffiti from child’s play to an original art. It reads, “Seeded in the gang rivalry of New York’s adolescents, it has developed from crude graffiti writing to a highly sophisticated calligraphy that flowers in a constantly changing, bold and brilliant travelling show on the city’s subway system.”

The second paragraph on the back cover describes how the text came to be created and what the narrative of the text is:

Two gifted photographers, working closely with the “writers” themselves, have documented every aspect of this extraordinary urban subculture: its origins and history, styles and techniques, vocabulary and conventions, the philosophy of the talented and innovative young artists, and the hostility of unappreciative authority. (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, back cover)

In this chapter, I examine all that the authors mention in the synopsis and look at “every aspect of this extraordinary urban subculture” as reported by different sources to locate that which *Subway Art* leaves out.

The Photographers

In this section, I discuss the “two gifted photographers, working closely with the ‘writers’ themselves” (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, back cover), to understand the photographers’ approaches to documenting graffiti and how their methods together may have helped elevate graffiti on subways to be seen more clearly as an art. On the inside of the back cover are two separate pictures of the photographers. The images could be seen as telling of each individual photographer’s approach to documenting graffiti. On the left side of the page is Martha Cooper. The picture of her captures her entire body. She is dressed in a one-piece painter’s outfit. She smiles, leaning against a wall with a graffiti painting of a large boom-box radio behind her, while she holds a camera in her hands. The image of her full body opens up the picture to show the context of her surroundings and the action of the subject being photographed. Similarly, Cooper’s pictures will stand out in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) for their inclusion of the context of the city and its inhabitants, along with the movement of graffiti on the subways.

On the right side of the page is Henry Chalfant. The picture of him shows only his head and upper torso. He is posing next to a spray-painted cartoon character, which resembles him and takes up most of the picture. The painted character is of a blond head and upper torso looking through a camera and smiling while the flash goes off. Chalfant, posing next to the character, is smiling and holding his camera with both hands. The close-up detail of the graffiti is emblematic of Chalfant’s photographic approach, in which he takes meticulous close-up pictures of the art work on the side of the subway, without context, and stitches the pictures together to show the detail of the artwork and the entire canvas of the subway. The cutting off of the legs of both Chalfant and the character-Chalfant in the picture suggests the motionlessness of the subways in Chalfant’s photographic weavings, especially when compared with the legs included in the picture of Cooper, whose pictures of graffiti revel in the movement of graffiti on subways. Through his stitching, Chalfant takes the movement away from the graffiti art on subways; by doing so, he highlights the actual work of the graffiti writers -- the colors, lines, and effects that graffiti writers paint.

The two photographers share many commonalities, as described in the mini-biographies found beneath their pictures. They have both travelled outside of the United States; they both have higher education; and they are both accomplished artists in their own rights. But the biographies state that the two each came to graffiti in their own way and began photographing it on their own. It was the graffiti writers who introduced the two photographers to each other.

As much as the photographers had in common, their approaches to photographing graffiti are completely different. As they stated in the Introduction to *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984):

To get the photographs that are in this book, the authors spent thousands of hours stalking trains through the labyrinth of the transit system. For years they worked separately, unknown to one another, photographing these elusive works of art. Their methods were dissimilar, stemming as they did from very different points of view. (p. 6)

Their different perspectives come together in this photo essay and provide for multiple ways of viewing and interpreting graffiti on subways. I will now discuss the photographers' individual methods.

Martha Cooper. Cooper's photographs told stories, showed the art moving and interacting with real and imagined dialogues, and captured the imagination of the graffiti writer. Her bird's eye views and context-filled images offered a view of graffiti which few had seen before. She gave insight into how graffiti writers imagined the "lives" of their creations. In the introduction to *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), the authors noted:

Marty, a photojournalist, took action shots of the writers while they pursued their vocation. She photographed their art on the trains as part of the whole urban environment. She found sites in the vicinity of the elevated tracks, where she could frame the trains as they passed by in a background of her own choosing. (p. 6)

The key to differentiating between Cooper's photos and Chalfant's is that Cooper's captured the "art on the trains as part of the whole urban environment." Further, "She spent many days in rubble-strewn lots or on rooftops of abandoned buildings in the South Bronx, waiting sometimes for three hours for a train to pass by in three seconds" (p. 6). Some of the angles and perches that Cooper chose, like "rooftops of abandoned buildings," gave a rare perspective on how the graffiti could be viewed and contributed to a wider view of not just the beauty of the graffiti art but the beauty of the subway system and what it could inspire.

Cooper took photos of the trains in context, with passengers, in motion, from different vantage points, with buildings and the city surrounding the subways. With her pictures, one gets the feel of living with or even in the graffiti and one can imagine the experience of being an appreciative spectator to this phenomenon. Some of the most impressive pictures in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) are Cooper's pictures of brilliant graffiti art on subway cars driving on the elevated train tracks with the context of life beyond the elevated

tracks and the inhabitants of the city perhaps unaware of the art that passes by them for that brief moment.

Cooper's pictures captured the imagination of graffiti writers. To explain this, I first look at an anecdote from *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982), told by the graffiti writer Lee about one of his greatest feats, painting a whole train,⁴¹ and what he did afterwards, which reveals much about the graffiti imagination. The story began in Brooklyn the day after he and his crew, the Fabulous Five, finished painting a whole train of ten cars. Lee stalked the painted whole train as it moved through Brooklyn. When he finally found it, he "jumped on" (p. 11). He left a couple of girls on the platform when he jumped on and he reported that he looked back at the girls from his whole train masterpiece, "And it was like crazy, like you could see the reflection in their eyes" (p. 11) of the whole train masterpiece. Lee described standing in between the subway cars as they drove. From his vantage point, Lee was able to see people's reactions to his graffiti and at times ask what they thought about it. At the Brooklyn Bridge station, many passengers were waiting for a subway train. Across the platform, Lee's whole train pulled in, and as Lee said, "I know that it was a shock to all these Wall Street Journals with their classy suits and suitcases" (p. 11). Lee reported that everyone at the station was pointing at his artwork and talking about it.

The following extended quote illustrates how Lee became physically a part of his graffiti creation and acted out what many might only imagine about their graffiti:

I was between the cars and people were looking at me but they didn't know who I was, but I said, "How do you like it, people?" And young students and people like us are saying, "Yeah, it's bad, all right!" It was beautiful, it was like a display and they were saying "Oh, shit!" There was a whole bunch of people and there was a perfect crowd to see it and as the train was leaving, we stuck our heads out and we're shouting, "Yeah, Fabulous Five!" There were writers there and they said, "Look at them." We took it 42d. On the way there we were really hauling ass and as we passed through the stations going fast the people were going, "Oh shit, Look at that" and pointing. At every station, it was a train stopper, a show stopper. At 14th street, people were yelling and cheering, but 42d street was the biggest. Everybody was going "Wow, look at that, man!" It was slowing down so they saw it car by car. I know that Mickey Mouse must have blown everybody's mind. I started arguing with this black man. He didn't like it; it was surprising. He was prejudiced or something. I said "How do you like it? It's a whole train." And he said, "Aah, it's disgusting." So I said, "Fuck you. You mother. If

⁴¹ Lee's was the second graffiti whole train recorded, the first being Caine-1's "Freedom Train."

you don't like it it's too bad, because it's here right now." At 59th, the people saw it, at 86th there wasn't a big crowd, but at 125th, wow! It stopped right up to the platform so that you didn't get a long view, you had to walk in right through the pieces. The station was packed and people were walking into the pieces with their eyes open like wow, man. It was bad. It was nice to have it pull up right in front of you and then to get inside of it with all the windows painted. They probably didn't know it was graffiti: they probably thought the city was doing something good for a change. They probably thought they paid some muralist to do it.

When we went into the slums in the Bronx, the train was elevated so people could see the whole train. You could see people blocks away going, "Look at that!" I'm serious. I notice people, I watch people on the street. People only look up once in a while. They look down mostly. But this time, you'd see people looking up and they'd really look. Little kids were going, "Mickey Mouse. Look mommy!" people were going crazy. There's a park at Simon Street where it makes a turn and there's a big avenue there, Westchester Avenue. People were all crowded up there in front of the stores, and they were looking up and going "Wow!" You could see the reflection in the windows of the slums of the cars all painted. Every car was like a TV, and you could see the colors reflected. (Castleman, 1982, pp. 11-13)

Lee's story is a fantastic real-life example of how graffiti writers imagine the impact their work has on the citizens of their city. A graffiti writer rides in between the same subway cars that have his graffiti on the outside of them. He gets to see the reflection of the graffiti in apartment windows, store windows, and in onlookers' eyes. He gets to see passengers' reactions and question them. He laughs with happy people and he curses those who don't appreciate the graffiti. He reports that most people cheer and celebrate when the subway comes to their station. He says that children point to the graffiti on the subway in the Bronx and, for the most part, everybody is excited and very interested in the graffiti. I bring this up here because I believe that Cooper's pictures capture this scene of graffiti going through the city, being seen by all from exclusive angles and interacting with the onlookers. I do not doubt Lee's account; I point to it because that same account is what I dreamed about with my graffiti. Cooper took pictures of graffiti from never-before-seen angles. In Cooper's pictures, it is difficult to find the perspective of graffiti as a nuisance; instead, the graffiti on subways seems magical as it "comes alive." Cooper's photographs captured graffiti as imagined by graffiti writers.

Henry Chalfant. Chalfant's photo-stitchings captured an entirely different aspect of graffiti on subways, one which was interested more in the details of the actual graffiti rather than the imagination of the writers. In the Introduction to *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), the authors wrote that "Henry began to photograph trains as a way of documenting this ephemeral art. An artist himself, he focused his attention on the paintings, isolating them from their environment" (pp. 6-7). Chalfant's photo-stitchings are easy to spot in *Subway Art*. They are close-up photographs of the graffiti on the subway framed from the bottom of the train to the top of the subway. In his images, the subway and the graffiti are "isolate[ed] from their environment" (p. 7).

By taking a series of close-up shots of an entire subway car and stitching those together to show the whole subway car, Chalfant presented a better idea of the design of the graffiti that writers sketched, planned, and completed. In *Getting Up*, Castleman (1982) wrote:

Writers are keen critics of each other's styles. When they judge the merits of a piece, they generally look for originality of design, a smooth integration (called "flow") of letters, brightness of color, smoothness of paint application (black spots and, especially, drips are abhorred), sharpness and accuracy of outlines, and the effective use of details (decorations that are frequently worked into the letters of the name, ranging from simple lines, swirls, arrows, and stars to highly complex caricatures and other drawings). (p. 25)

Chalfant's photo-stitchings of the entire subway car, with attention to the details of the piece, allowed for an isolated appraisal of the letters, colors, and theme of each individual piece.

Viewing Chalfant's photo-stitchings is almost like "'benching' (sitting on the platform and watching the works go by on the trains)" (Austin, 2001, p. 175). In the 1970s, "many writers also spend a great deal of time sitting in subway stations watching and criticizing the pieces that go by" (Castleman, 1982, p. 21). Because Naar understood this, he suggested the title "Watching my name go by" for the work that was eventually titled *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974, p. 5). As Austin (2001) observed, "Writers gathered at the benches of these stations to critique, compare, and count each other's work as the trains passed through" (p. 68). The writers' benches were said to be the angle where graffiti writers were able to judge and learn from each other's work. In fact, the police learned about this optimal angle for critiquing and learning graffiti, and "the Transit Police were able to disrupt the established writers' benches as gathering places during the late 1970s" (p. 132). Graffiti writers had to find different ways to critique and learn graffiti, so the now off-limits benches were replaced

with photography. As Austin wrote, “photographing one’s own and other’s works (which could then be examined and passed around) came to serve some of the same evaluative functions that the writers’ benches had” (p. 133).

Chalfant’s pictures and method are didactic for the study of graffiti. There are no clues suggesting where or when the pictures were taken. There are hardly any signs of passengers in Chalfant’s photo-stitchings. As the authors noted in the introduction to *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984):

A subway car is sixty feet long and it cannot be captured broadside with a normal 50mm lens when standing at a platform. . .he bought a motor drive for the camera, which enabled him to stand in one spot and shoot the series while the train was pulling out. In this way, over a period of seven years, he documented some five hundred paintings that no longer exist. (pp. 6-7)

With Chalfant’s work, only the graffiti art is visible, and his images make it easier to study the art. His angle, his out-of-context pictures, and his method of stitching the pictures together allows for one to “follow to the letter” the graffiti work that was created at this moment, judge it for its skill, and even pirate it.

Chalfant represented the graffiti as the graffiti writers saw it when they sketched it and when they judged their peers. His perspective can be seen as capturing the “real” product of the graffiti writer. His photo-stitchings are similar to the perspective of the young graffiti writers who sat on a bench in a subway station all day long, watching the graffiti go by and taking notes. There is no outdoor context, just the overpowering subway with the images on it. There is not so much imagination in these framings as there is the reality of what the writers painted.

In *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) took the reader on a journey through the story of graffiti, both as an appreciative audience member who could imagine the effect of graffiti as it moved through the city on the sides of subway cars and as a student of graffiti learning how the writers formed, connected, and colored the letters. Cooper’s photos gave context, and showed the moving subway, the twisting train, with passengers, with action, with life, interacting in the city. Her images of the graffiti on subways in context from various perspectives captured the imagination of the graffiti writers. Chalfant’s photo-stitchings focused on the design, skill, and craft of the graffiti. Out of context, the moving train stays still. The work is not necessarily in the city; it is framed with nothingness all around it. With Chalfant’s photo-stitchings, one sits on the bench with graffiti writers and learns from other graffiti writers’ work. With Chalfant, the surface matters and the art is the graffiti. With

Cooper the machine matters and the art is found in the interaction of the graffiti, the machine, and the environment.

Although the two authors of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) had very different approaches to capturing graffiti in photographs, by the end of the introduction they seemed to agree on the brilliance and importance of the graffiti. After listing a few of the difficulties of capturing subway graffiti in photographs, the last sentence reads like they've both acculturated themselves to the perspective of graffiti writers: "All this pales, however, when measured against the exhilaration felt at the successful capture of a 'fresh burner'" (p. 7). *Subway Art* is full of "fresh burners" and the authors' years of dedication to photographing this art pays dividends with this one-of-a-kind and world-shaping photo essay. Knowing that they both held strong to their different points of view for photographing graffiti, it should not then be difficult to imagine that they also held strong ideas about what details they should include and what narrative about graffiti they should tell with their collaborative book.

The First Four Pages

In *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), many of the authors' narrative choices are articulated in images before any written words appear in the Introduction. The first four pages, consisting purely of images, including the inside cover, half-title page, and frontispiece, reveal much of the constructed narrative of *Subway Art*. Within the first four pages of the book, through these images, the authors of *Subway Art* showed that which would *not* be made center of the focus of the text (in-fighting and police); pre-empted all graffiti in the book with a connection to Pop-Art (e.g., Fred's "Campbell's Soup whole car"); showed an agile graffiti writer in Vitruvian pose (Dondi); allowed graffiti writers' written words on the side of a subway to serve as a dedication for the book (Baby 168 and Crime 79); and seemingly devoted the book to a graffiti writer whose work is never shown in the book (Caine-1), giving a clue that other styles and writers existed during the time but that *Subway Art* focused on a small select group of graffiti writers. In the subsections that follow, I explain how I derive these insights from the first four pages of images.



(Fig. 15. The inside cover of *Subway Art*, 1984)

The inside cover. The first two images on the inside cover offer examples of what Latour (2002) labeled “iconoclash” (p. 16). Briefly, Latour defined iconoclash as an image from science, religion, or art that is seemingly being destroyed, but the viewer of the action is unsure of whether the action “is destructive or constructive” (p. 16). Latour differentiated iconoclash from iconoclasm by distinguishing that, with images of iconoclasm, one “know(s) what is happening in the act” (i.e., the image is being vandalized), whereas images of iconoclash give one pause, and make “one hesitate” with concerns to understanding the meaning of the action taking place (p. 16). Latour wrote about the crux of images of iconoclash when he narrowed in on “those sites, objects, and situations where there is an ambiguity, a hesitation, an iconoclash on how to interpret image making and image breaking” (p. 23). Schacter (2008) made the definition of iconoclash even clearer when he wrote that, with iconoclash, “we can not quite be sure if the destruction is a *decent* or *decadent* action” (p. 37; italics in original). What comes about from a close reading of an image of iconoclash is often another image, with even more meanings than the meanings afforded to the original icon.

Both images displayed on the inside cover are images of graffiti on subways which have been disrupted in one way or another and those disruptions against the original or intended graffiti image cause hesitation and evoke questions about the meanings created by that action. I now read these two images of iconoclash more closely.

Merry Christmas 1980. Upon opening the book and looking at the inside of the cover page, the reader sees two examples of graffiti art painted on subway cars, one picture placed above the other. The picture placed above is of a moving subway; the subway and the graffiti that is on it are in focus while the buildings behind it are blurred. The graffiti reads “Merry Christmas 1980,” with a drawing of a Christmas tree, snow at the foreground of a winter landscape, and the cartoon character Smurfette holding a large homemade cigarette. The

“Merry Christmas” is written in Olde-English style letters, readable by most viewers, and the background is completely colored in, making this message of spreading season’s greetings to the (imagined) viewing public of 1980 a “whole-car, top-to-bottom,” because the painting covers the whole car, from top to bottom. The windows have already been cleaned by the time the picture was taken, an action that can also be questioned for its “destructive or constructive” (Latour, 2002, p.16) action. Chalfant and Cooper (1984) credited the painting to “Lyndah and Pjay” (p. 4).

This image, photographed by Cooper, suggests to me the imagination of the artists, including the imagined reception by an imagined audience. Similar to Caine-1’s “Freedom Train,” painted for the Bicentennial celebrations (Chapter 2) or Lee’s description of excited viewers all over the city, Lyndah and Pjay might have imagined that they would be praised for such an inviting message. “Merry Christmas 1980” is not destructive vandalism (at least to the graffiti writers). On the contrary, this is “participating in the civic community” (Austin, 2001, p. 2) by making a gesture of merriment for all to appreciate. Happy and celebratory messages written in graffiti appear throughout *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Yet it is not the Smurfette character or the message of holiday joy which is most curious in this image but rather the long thin black line that is going through this happy message. “Merry Christmas 1980” has been crossed out in black spray paint. It is this black line which makes this an image of iconoclasm.

Why is there a black line going through this masterpiece? Another graffiti writer contested “Merry Christmas 1980;” he did not agree with this message or did not like the people who painted it. The line is signed with the name TEAN. Latour (2002) defined iconoclasm “as what happens when there is uncertainty about the exact role of the hand at work in the production of a mediator” (p. 20). The mediator in this first image is the person (the graffiti writer Tean) who instigated action against the original image. Interestingly, upon further enquiry, this image of iconoclasm reveals a certain feature of the graffiti phenomenon that the narrative of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) tries to downplay - the infighting between graffiti writers, colloquially known as “beef.” This black line going through the painting points to the in-fighting amongst graffiti writers (which was often rather violent) and a view of graffiti that the photographers purposefully and carefully avoided giving much space in *Subway Art*. None of the graffiti in the book are crossed-out besides the half-page devoted to “Going Over” and this “Merry Christmas 1980” piece.

What this black line shows is that there is more to this subway art than just art; personal stories permeate the graffiti. Why did Tean cross this piece out by Lyndah and PJay?

This is not known. Nor are the reasons for personal disputes important to this thesis. I raise this issue to point to a part of graffiti that Chalfant and Cooper (1984) glossed over in *Subway Art*, namely, the in-fighting between graffiti writers. This image of iconoclasm shows the dialogue that was always taking place between graffiti writers, the contestation of certain graffiti, and suggests what one must do in order to get people to not cross their work out—they must fight.

PJay's graffiti is the graffiti tag most crossed out by other graffiti writers in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). In *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982), an image of "PJay cross[ing] Duster in two colors" appears on page 44. On page 45, PJay is crossed by the "Outlaw Art group."⁴² Three images of graffiti have been crossed out in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) in the subsection "Going Over" and PJay's is one of them. In that section, Chalfant and Cooper explained "the competition is very intense, since there are so many writers and limited space on the trains" (p. 29). Then "Some writers go over others precisely to insult and challenge them. Blade says that he and Comet invented blockbuster letters "just to cover people" (p. 29). In *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009), the same Tean who crossed "Merry Christmas 1980" was crossed himself. Stewart described the subway car where Tean's crossed graffiti was found: "IRT car number 7594 was running with Tean crossed out by several obscenities in July 1978" (p. 175).

Austin (2001), too, discussed the infighting in graffiti and used PJay to discuss the beef:

The beginnings of "beef" among writers that had first appeared after the MTA's general repainting in 1973 had grown over time. Fighting and crossout wars became an expected part of the writing experience. PJAY cites the "friction among various writers" as a major drawback to writing during the early 1980s. (p. 176)

PJay appeared four more times after "Merry Christmas 1980" in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Tean did not. On a picture of a young man crossing over PJay's graffiti, the caption reads "Going over PJay" (p. 29) and on page 73 there is a very large "MAD" piece that goes over many smaller PJ pieces. For some reason, whenever there is beef, PJay is referenced.

The black line in "Merry Christmas 1980" represents in-fighting and it also points to the power of images and iconoclastic ideas about graffiti. The iconoclast believes that other people worship images and they believe that those images should be destroyed. As Mitchell

⁴² *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) gives voice to throw-ups over art (p. 64). Where *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) prefers the art, *Getting Up* showing throw-ups points to the competition aspect of graffiti.

(2005) wrote, “The disfiguring, vandalizing, or humiliating of an image (like the mutilation of a living body---cutting off hands or feet, blinding) can be just as potent as its actual destruction...” (p. 18). The destruction of graffiti on subways reaffirms the belief that the name or image is connected to the physical body of the writer and points to what Gell (1998) labeled “distributed personhood” (p. 96; more on this below)

The attractive opening image of a moving subway riding past apartment buildings spreading a happy message is crossed out by a thin black line. This mark on the first image, followed up by Chalfant and Cooper’s (1984) choice not to display images that show infighting, coupled with all of the images of the smiling youth who paint this art (discussed later in this chapter), reveal a desire to display graffiti in a positive light and not allow for the infighting to overpower the narrative.⁴³ I raise this point not as a critique of *Subway Art* but as a means to find the boundaries of the constructed narrative told by the book.

Violence and disputes are rather extreme aspects of any culture and can engulf the narrative of almost any topic if given enough space. By not focusing on the violence in graffiti in *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) decidedly focused on highlighting the art and the friendly-seeming young people who painted this art. This is not an uncommon tactic when describing a little-known (and oft maligned) activity. This is as true for the arts as it is for sports. Sport is not sold to the public by focusing on ancillary parts of the sport, but the main gist of the rules and the way to win. The arts are not described based on the infighting of the artists but by placing their artwork in a satisfying narrative. The preferential framing of the less violent and more awe-inspiring acts of an art/sport/vocation is not uncommon. I am not criticizing *Subway Art*’s framing, but merely pointing it out because I believe the narrative in *Subway Art*, by not focusing on the troubles of graffiti, was able to sell it as a friendly art to budding graffiti writers across the world.

Fred’s Campbell’s Soup whole car. The second picture on the inside cover of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), on the bottom half of the page, is another image of iconoclasm. This image is of an iconoclasm not because it has been vandalized but because it has been interrupted. The graffiti writer Fred had to stop painting in the middle of producing it. Although this artwork is not completed, it is completed enough to recognize the Pop-Art influence of Andy Warhol on the graffiti writer. The subway car has eight large Campbell’s soup cans painted on it, top to bottom, one on an angle, and each soup can has a different message on its label. One reads “Da-Da;” one reads “Pop;” and another reads “Futurist.”

⁴³ In *Style Wars* (Chalfant & Silver, 1983), graffiti art was finally overpowered by Cap and his mission to be the graffiti bully.

These are all references to famous art movements. The famous art movements could be viewed as forerunners of this graffiti or it could be argued that those art movements overlapped with graffiti at certain points. In either case, the references gave graffiti a connection to art. This one image inaugurated “America’s newest folk art” (back cover), the “subway art movement,” to the canon of Western art via Andy Warhol and Pop-art.

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) could have intended this image as a short lesson for the reader, to introduce the narrative of art connecting with graffiti and how subway art is the natural next step in art after the referenced movements on the soup cans. Although the authors did not describe in detail how graffiti was connected to the Western art narrative, this piece, painted by a graffiti writer, says graffiti is connected to Pop, Da-da, and Futurism. The authors offered no explanations for these connections in the text or in another picture, but the reader could fill in those blank spaces with their own knowledge of art. By merely writing the names of previous art movements and referencing one of the more famous Pop-art pieces in graffiti on the subways, subway graffiti is by default connected to the Western art narrative. What does it take after all to be part of the Western art narrative? One must somehow be written into the narrative, and what better way than referencing it and actually writing graffiti into the Western art narrative on the subway?

An outline of the name Fred in graffiti is found in the center of the subway in between the first four Campbell’s soup cans and the second four, over the middle door of the subway, the top part filled in with yellow and the rest left empty; this is what makes this image iconoclash. It seems the artist was not able to finish painting his name in graffiti to complete this masterpiece. This Fred was a well-known artist and actor in many downtown films and films about graffiti. His underground cultural legend status was solidly known; he was most well known as Fab Five Freddy. He was famous in the early 1980s hip-hop scene and mentioned in Blondie’s 1980 hit song “Rapture.”⁴⁴ As famous as Fab Five Freddy was, no other subway art by him is featured in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Having a well-known (and therefore perhaps trusted) figure open *Subway Art* with a quick lesson on where graffiti art fits in the Western art narrative serves as a way to ground this subway graffiti in previous art movements. The painting was not finished. Perhaps Fred had to run or maybe his spray paint clogged, or he fell ill in the middle of painting. Maybe police showed up or other graffiti writers came and made trouble for Fred, or maybe the subway left the station while he

⁴⁴ At the opening of this important pop/early rap crossover song, Debbie Harry sings “Fab-five Freddy says everybody’s high...”

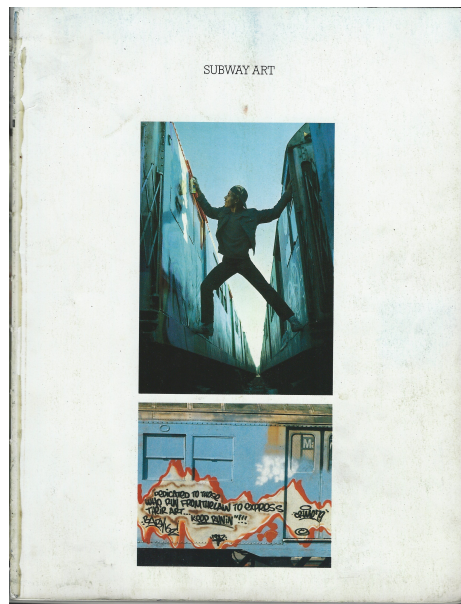
was painting. The unfinished graffiti points to the many obstacles of making the art, an aspect also not covered so closely in the book.

Fred's Campbell Soup whole car is an example of iconoclasm, not because someone else destroyed his work; rather, by him not finishing painting the whole train, the mediator halted the production of the intended art of Fred. An uncertainty as to what the painting's intended final outcome would have been had the creator of it not been interrupted is raised, along with an uncertainty as to whether that mediator's interruption was destructive or constructive. Of course, one could say that by halting Fred's production of the whole-car masterpiece, the mediator was being destructive, but because the image is used on the first page of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), and could be used as a visual guide placing graffiti art in the Western art tradition, the mediator may have made this picture more relevant towards the goals of the book, mainly showing graffiti in a positive light and connecting it with the Western art narrative. The ambiguity created by this image of iconoclasm begs the question: if Fred finished the whole-car with graffiti motifs, would it still be a valuable car? Or would the pop-art reference not be as obvious and therefore would the picture still have made it into *Subway Art*?

The empty space on the subway further reveals a major component of this art, the subway as canvas. In "Merry Christmas 1980," the subway is completely covered in paint, but Fred's "Campbell's Soup whole car" has more empty space than covered space. Thus, the image reveals on the first page the importance of the subway to this art. It is not just that graffiti writers invented a beautiful art but the surface they paint on, the subway, makes this an exciting and dynamic art (more on this in the next section).

By opening with two images of iconoclasm, the inside cover shows two different ideas of what *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) can perform: a civic minded message that aims to invite and unite the people of a city around a shared holiday and, in the same image, a line going through the graffiti almost imperceptibly reveals a desire to not allow the violent in-fighting among writers to overtake the celebration of this art. The inside cover also shows a quasi-analytical piece that reflects on graffiti art, frames itself through the lens of the Western art narrative, and downplays the many obstacles and troubles that graffiti writers encounter when creating their artworks. The unfinished "Campbell's Soup whole car" piece, with the large amount of space left blank on the subway, reveals the canvas that is so important to this art, the subway. Only four of the 239 images in the book are of graffiti not written on subways; none of those images are important to the narrative. Even though both ideas are different, they are both found on the same canvas, a New York City subway car.

Unfinished and crossed over graffiti attest to the rivalry that existed in graffiti between the practitioners of graffiti art and also with anti-graffiti forces (police and TA) as well as the many obstacles and surprises that came with creating the art. Because these topics are not given much space in *Subway Art*, finding them on the first page reveals the curated decision to minimize those subjects in the book.



(Fig. 16. Half title page, *Subway Art*, 1984)

Half-title page and dedication. On the page next to the inside cover of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), the half-title page, the title of the book is written at the top in small unassuming letters with two pictures underneath it. The top picture is of a young man, a graffiti writer who will be immortalized in this book and be recognized as a king, Dondi, balancing between two parked subway cars in order to reach the top of one subway car as he applies paint to it. This picture was taken when one of the masterpieces featured in the book, “Children of the Grave Again Part 3” (pp. 34-37), was being painted. The picture serves as testament to the insider-status of the photographers and the close collaboration with the graffiti writers. The photographers who produced this book were not merely documenting from afar, they were with the actual artists when they produced some of the art.

The young man, Dondi, is completely stretched out, balancing with one foot on a subway door ledge and holding with one hand onto the open window of the conductor’s booth of the subway car parked next to the subway car he is painting. Captured by Cooper at this angle and centered in the middle of the picture, Dondi resembles the outstretched frame of DaVinci’s *Vitruvian Man*. The picture shows a heroic image of the graffiti writer, and perhaps the ideal graffiti writer. Throughout the book, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) presented images

of the actual graffiti writers when they were at their ideal—happy, pensive, and innovative. This image says that, in this book, graffiti writers will be shown at their best or at their ideal.

The picture underneath the image of Dondi in action serves as a dedication for the book. Often, on the first couple pages of a book, the author(s) place a dedication to someone special who the author(s) want to thank for whatever reason. This dedication of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) was not written by the authors/photographers; instead, it was written by graffiti writers and written on the side of a subway in spray paint. The photographed message, written in black over a white base and outlined in red with a further background of light blue, reads “Dedicated for those who run from the law to express their art...Keep Runnin!!!” It is dated 1982 and signed by Baby 168 and Crime79.

Graffiti writers themselves wrote the dedication and encouraged other writers to “keep runnin!” This outlaw art, if explained only by the young writers, could be mired in its dangerous aspects. Because of the adult supervision with regards to the framing of the text, the dedication cannot be understood until the end of the text when the police are shown to be in opposition to graffiti. Although the kids wrote the text, the adults framed it, and they didn’t allow for the alarming aspects of the practice to overtake the art.

This opening dedication was painted in 1982. The last picture in the book, that of Lee’s epitaph, says that it was painted in 1980. Chalfant and Cooper (1984) created the story in *Subway Art* with pictures. The story is not necessarily in chronological order. It might not be the complete story; it might be leaving some things out. Nonetheless, Chalfant and Cooper used the logic of a chronological narrative. They used chronology to explain the process of how graffiti went from child’s play to an art, yet many of the pictures are taken out of chronological order. This is another small hint at the invented-ness or constructed-ness of the story. The constructed-ness of the narrative is made visible by looking closely at the pictures and at clues left in the paintings.

The dedication of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) appears on the page where dedications usually go, and it helps frame the text from the beginning as something exciting. The message reaches out to the future and dedicates the book to the inspired reader-cum-graffiti writer. Vitruvian-Dondi looks like a serious artist and a piece of art himself. It is noteworthy that the graffiti writers wrote the dedication for the book. What these pictures on the title page say is that the “real” authors of this book are not the photographers who collated the images and framed them, but rather the actual practitioners, because the dedication and other messages found throughout the book are written by the “authentic” people, the artists themselves. This dedication written by practitioners says that we can trust the practitioners

and their understanding of graffiti, and that this book invests in and relies on their self-descriptions. In sum, the dedication conveys that this is not a document crafted from an authorial distance about a subculture, but one created with the “principle of multiple authorship” (Pink, 2003, p. 133) in mind.



(Fig. 17. Frontispiece, *Subway Art*, 1984)

Frontispiece (Caine-1). On the title pages, the last two pages of this portion of my analysis, another important image appears. The title page is a two-page spread mostly filled with a photo of New York City taken from the east in Queens. One can see the Empire State Building in the distance, as well as the Chrysler Building, the United Nations, and the Pan-Am Building. Before them is the 59th Street Bridge, and before the bridge are some apartment buildings in Queens. In the upper right corner, behind the apartment buildings, are three large smoke stacks, two of which are puffing out white smoke with a clear blue sky behind them that takes up the whole top third of the page. The title and the photographers’ names are printed in the blue space. Down at the bottom third of the first page, riding into an elevated train station that is just out of view, is a subway train covered in graffiti. The first car is painted in graffiti from the windows down and it reads “AA Love 67 Scoundrel 179.” It seems as if it wasn’t finished because the last word and sequence of numbers has no outline to it, but the first car is not important in this image. The car connected to this first car, seen on the second page is of major significance and is completely painted from top to bottom, left to right; it is a “whole-car top-to-bottom” and it is finished. It shows a tombstone on the lower left, which reads “Caine RIP” followed by the message in big letters “Caine 1 Free for Eternity” across the entire car with a painting of a number 7 subway car behind. Above the words “for Eternity” and on the painted number 7 train is painted an American flag. This painting is eulogizing the graffiti writer Caine 1, the same Caine who painted “The Freedom

Train,” the first painted whole train in graffiti lore, a train full of patriotic symbols of the United States on the number 7 train in 1976 (see Chapter 2).

Besides a dedication like the one written by Baby 168 and Crime 79 on the previous page, many books also begin with an epitaph to a deceased person, a person who perhaps influenced or inspired the author or the subject of the book in one way or another. *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) is no different; the title page serves as an epitaph to Caine-1. This dedication is another example of how the graffiti writers wrote this book. Midg, a graffiti writer who painted one of the more beautiful cars captured by Cooper in *Subway Art*, painted this subway as well. Chalfant and Cooper used the painted words by graffiti writers in pictures as descriptive words to help frame the narrative of *Subway Art*.

By seemingly dedicating the book to the memory of the first graffiti writer to paint a whole train, “The Freedom Train,” *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) opens with great respect to the tradition of graffiti invented in the 1970s. *Subway Art* leads with the memory of a physical death of a graffiti writer and, as I discuss later, ends with the theoretical death of graffiti, bookending a time and space for when graffiti was produced. Beyond a memorial eulogizing a graffiti writer, I look at this particular memorial train in *Subway Art* and I also read a eulogy for experimental, or rather “other,” styles or ways of performing graffiti.

The graffiti writer Caine-1 is only featured once in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), on page 40; his is one of 16 photographs of the young people who paint the trains. Caine-1 stands out for his unique style. He is a White youth with a moustache and shaggy hair; he looks like a typical late 1970s hippie. He wears an acid-dyed jean jacket with the sleeves cut off and on the back of the jacket is a painting that he did of his name (Caine-1), a scantily clad woman, and a giant snake. The style is reminiscent of 1970s heavy rock album covers or the covers of the magazine *Heavy Metal*.

In the only picture of Caine-1 in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), he is painting a skull on a wall with a Native American headdress and a city skyline. We see his different artistic style (the heavy metal style, a style that was less popular than the hip-hop aesthetic after *Subway Art*) on his jacket. But Caine-1 shows up in many graffiti texts of the period. In *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982), there is an image of a whole car by Caine-1, which reads “Welcome to Hell” (p. 39) with a large painting of a skull on one side and a character that resembles Alice Cooper on the other side. And just as Austin’s (2001) *Taking the Train* begins with the anecdote about “The Freedom Train” and Caine-1, Caine-1 also opens up the text of *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 1989, 2009). A photocopy of a short description of the first five years of graffiti, signed by some of the biggest graffiti writers from the early 1970s,

written by Caine-1 was “used as the preface to Jack Stewart’s original dissertation” (Stewart, 2009, p. 4). None of those who signed this piece of writing were informants in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984); they were too old by that time. The inclusion of Caine-1 at the beginning of many important texts about graffiti in the 1970s shows that he is someone worth contemplating; it also suggests that there were other writers and styles that were not shown in *Subway Art*.

Caine-1’s clothing and graffiti style have a heavy-metal edge to them. The other young people photographed on page 40 do not share Caine-1’s style, although a few others do have graffiti on their clothing. With *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) opening with a memorial to Caine-1, both the graffiti writers and the photographers may be signaling that other ways of graffiti existed during the time this book was being written. They could be signaling their respect and admiration for the work done on subways by many different contributors. Still, with this book they inaugurated a controlled and specific narrative about graffiti/subway art, one that is closely associated with the new hip-hop aesthetic coming out of New York City (as seen in the inclusion of Lee’s early written rap/rhymes), and not rock and roll, not heavy metal, not acid-hippie. Chalfant and Cooper preferred to show messages like “Merry Christmas” and “Happy Holiday” rather than dark messages like “Welcome to Hell” with dark characters. By dedicating *Subway Art* to Caine-1 and never showing his masterpieces as a model of subway art, Chalfant and Cooper both eulogized and buried styles that did not fit into the desired narrative, thereby connecting graffiti to writers painting in a more hip-hop aesthetic.⁴⁵

Earlier I described how Cooper’s photographs captured the graffiti imagination and I used Lee’s story to show that imagination. I want to continue to think about the graffiti imagination while looking at this image. Before I do, though, I again look to Mitchell (2005) to explain how iconoclasts view images. Mitchell wrote, “Whatever is done to the image is somehow done to what it stands for” (p. 127). He continued, “the image possesses a kind of vital, living character that makes it capable of feeling what is done to it” (p. 127). This is not only true for destroying images but also for filling images with meaning. This insight recalls Gell’s (1998) ideas on agency from his book *Art and Agency*, which I gently pointed to in the previous two chapters.

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I discussed the agency afforded to graffiti names written on walls and objects when “Taki 183 Spawn[ed] Pen Pals” (1971). I used Gell’s (1998)

⁴⁵ Hip-hop aesthetic for me means a painting that conveys community, positivity, and activism, all at the same time as being “cool.”

definition of agency in Chapter 4, identifying where Mailer gave graffiti the agency of being a calculated response to a corrupt government in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Here I use the concept once more because by this time, with graffiti being so omnipresent and perhaps omniscient, graffiti art seems to have an agency all its own painted into it. Gell (1998) wrote, “Agency is attributable to those persons (and things...) who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than mere concatenation of physical events” (p. 16). Gell continued, “The immediate ‘other’ in a social relationship does not have to be another ‘human being’” (p. 17) and therefore “‘things’ such as dolls and cars can appear as ‘agents’ in particular social situations; and so—we may argue—can ‘works of art’” (p. 19).

Graffiti is a “thing” or “work of art” that has agency. As Gell (1998) wrote, “...persons form what are evidently social relationships with ‘things’” (p.18). Earlier in the text, Gell wrote, “...*persons* or ‘social agents’ are, in certain contexts, substituted by *art objects*” (p. 5). The art object, in this case graffiti art, becomes a stand-in or representative for a human being. This is powerfully emphasized in this image of the Caine-1 memorial painting and becomes even more obvious later on in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Caine-1 was a major graffiti writer of the period and was tragically murdered in 1982 (Stewart, 2009, p.4). This graffiti in memorial to Caine-1, I argue, is a way to cope with the loss of a friend and colleague from graffiti. The agency a graffiti writer or viewer may give to this image is found in an interpretation of what may be transpiring in the image. Its movement through the city becomes a send-off to his spirit through magical ideas about images. A painting representing Caine-1 gets to ride the subways one last time through New York City after his tragic death.

The agency found in graffiti can be more fully understood using Gell’s (1998) ideas from *Art and Agency*. About the overall thesis of *Art and Agency*, Gell wrote that “works of art, images, icons, and the like have to be treated, in the context of an anthropological theory, as person-like; that is, sources of, and targets for, social agency” (p. 96). In the same work, Gell introduced the term “distributed personhood” (p. 96) to further explore artworks, idols, and the like in this anthropological light. Distributed personhood is the idea that an inanimate object, a “thing,” or an artwork can stand in to represent a person. For example, a signature, a unique way of styling one’s hair or a symbol can come to represent a person.

One way of understanding distributed personhood is by the example of a snake that sheds its skin. When a snake sheds its skin, a fragment of the snake is detached from the snake and the snake slithers away. The shed skin of the snake represents, or points to, the

snake even though the snake is no longer close by. The shed skin is a piece of the thing-ness (or in the case of humans, the personhood) of the snake, which is then distributed in different places. This is interesting because the (dead) shed skin comes to serve as a representative of a living being, the snake. Gell (1998) proposed the same about works of art, in that a particular image or style stands for the artist who produced it. For example, the Mona Lisa is filled with the distributed personhood of Leonardo da Vinci; and the self-portrait of a woman with connected eyebrows is filled with the distributed personhood of the artist Frida Kahlo. In the image at hand, by writing the artist's name, Caine-1, and referencing his greatest graffiti feat, painting the "Freedom Train," the distributed personhood of Caine-1, even after his death, is read and a powerful and mystical agency is given to the artwork. On the distributed personhood of idols, Gell wrote:

Whoever imagines that the idol is conscious, thinking, intentional, etc. is attributing 'mental states' to the idol which have implications, not just for the external relations between the idol and the devotee (and the form of life in which they co-participate), but for the 'inner structure' of the idol, that is, that it has something *inside* it 'which thinks' or 'with which it thinks'. The idol may not be biologically a 'living thing' but, if it has 'intentional psychology' attributed to it, then it has something like a spirit, a soul, an ego, lodged within it." (p. 129)

Therefore when an artwork, or thing, is read as the fragment of a person, an essence of the person is thought to exist in it. Caine-1 and his greatest artistic accomplishment, painting 11 connected subway cars entirely to create the first whole train masterpiece, are represented on the side of a subway after his death. Even though he did not paint this piece, by painting Caine-1's name and a reference to "The Freedom Train," the dead graffiti writer Caine-1 "travels" through New York City. His life is remembered through a reference to his artwork and magical thinking about his after-life.

The magical agency I read in this image is in imagining the subway moving at full speed, the words *Caine 1 Free for Eternity* rumbling by, rapidly making its way through the humble sections of Queens, where Caine-1 was raised, and over a bridge into Manhattan and back again. One can then imagine the actual person Caine-1, dead and yet kept alive through the distributed personhood in the graffiti on the side of the train, going for one last ride through New York City, a sort of "send-off." The graffiti on the subway personified the freeing in eternity that Caine-1 might feel after death by being connected to the swiftness of the moving train. Caine-1's reputation, created by the works he created in life, especially the first whole-train top-to-bottom, "The Freedom Train," rides with him through the gray clouds

and into the colorful sunset painted just above his name. This ride, one last time, because it was captured in photo, happens every time (magically) one closely looks at this image. It is one last ride infinite times over and the “soul” of the dead person Caine-1 is “free[d]” each time.

Mitchell (2005) explained that “images are one of the last bastions of magical thinking and therefore one of the most difficult things to regulate with laws and rationally constructed policies” (p. 128). There is much magical thinking found in the images in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). I highlight one example of this magical thinking, using the extreme case of Caine-1. The case is extreme because Caine-1 is physically dead and yet I imagined him to be resurrected through graffiti to ride one last time through the city.

The importance of this epitaph and the inclusion of it in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) speaks to the complexities of deciding who gets to represent a scene. This angle from Queens was not at all important to the photographers for the rest of the book (no other pictures come from that angle), but it was important to take the picture of the *Caine I Free for Eternity* piece, because Caine-1 was an important part of other (non hip-hop) subway art in the late 1970s. Opening with the dedication subway painted by the graffiti writer Midg, a dedication to Caine-1 using “The Freedom Train” acts as a statement of limitations and delimitations. The delimitations of *Subway Art* are that it will not follow every graffiti writer’s career, is limited by the photographer’s time with graffiti, and is limited by the graffiti writers who were chosen.

It is normal for a book to have a dedication page. However unintentional, in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), the authors chose a photo that transforms the page from an opening showing a city skyline that overpowers the much smaller subway with graffiti on it into a powerful dedication page. To begin with the death and remembrance of a graffiti writer brings a sense of respect and urgency to the subject and reveals yet another the lens I cut for this thesis, using Anderson’s (1983) *Imagined Communities* for investigating the graffiti phenomenon, is advantageous.

After setting up the lens for this study using Anderson’s (1983) *Imagined Communities* and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983), I re-examined the first anecdote in Austin’s (2001) *Taking the Train* about the first whole train ever painted, “The Freedom Train” by Caine-1 and friends. I found the theme of “The Freedom Train,” celebrating the Bicentennial of the USA, to line up well with those academic texts because of their focus on nationalism. Now at the beginning of *Subway Art* (1984), I bring back my lens and the graffiti writer Caine-1 once again to shed light on the similarities in the storytelling of

nations and the storytelling of graffiti lore. *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) opened with a painted subway memorializing the graffiti writer Caine-1. Caine-1's work was not shown in *Subway Art* (1984) and his work was not well-known outside of 1970's graffiti circles, but by opening the book with a memorial to an almost unknown graffiti writer, Chalfant and Cooper began their book with a subtle connection to Anderson's (1983) writing on the cultural roots of nationalism.

Anderson (1983) wrote, "No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers" (p. 9). These memorials to unknown past peoples who fought for the nation are "saturated with ghostly national imaginings" (p. 9). To complete the circle of the similarities between imagining one's nation and the imagination utilized in the graffiti community, I add "Rest in Peace" (RIP) memorials to dead graffiti writers to the list of important communal symbols, which are filled with "ghostly...imaginings" (p. 9). Anderson continued, stating that nationalist imaginings have "a strong affinity with religious imaginings" (p. 10) and "in different ways, religious thought also responds to obscure intimations of immortality, generally by transforming fatality into continuity" (p. 11).

I read these same ghostly imaginings and "affinity with religious imaginings" in the RIP memorial to Caine-1. Caine-1 was murdered in 1982. The graffiti writer Midg painted "Caine 1, Free for Eternity" with a tombstone reading "Caine RIP" and a painted image of "The Freedom Train," Caine-1's most well-known artwork. An "obscure intimation of immortality" (Anderson, 1983, p. 11) is created by this painting, which "transform(s) fatality into continuity" (p. 11) by stating that the dead young man (Caine-1) is "free for eternity," showing his most well-known artwork (The Freedom Train), and solidifying the importance of this artwork for the graffiti community. By opening with a nod to Caine-1 and *The Freedom Train*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) turned the mortality of Caine-1 into continuity for other graffiti writers by respecting his greatest accomplishment and using it as a place from which future graffiti writers could continue. "In this way," Anderson (1983) noted, the nationalist imagining (and hence the imagining of the graffiti community) "concerns itself with the links between the dead and the yet unborn" (p. 11). The death of Caine-1 marks the beginning of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) and serves as "a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning" (Anderson, 1983, p. 11). Graffiti imaginings, especially with the application of RIP memorials, are revealed to share an "affinity with religious imaginings" (p. 10) and *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) begins with such "ghostly...imaginings" (Anderson, 1983, p. 9).

In summary, much is accomplished in the first four pages of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), in just five pictures. The photographers conveyed an investment in the practice and a closeness to the practitioners. The writers of graffiti were shown as the “real” authors of the book. The authors gave a hint that the graffiti writers will be shown in the best possible light. Respect for the graffiti writers who came before the writers featured in *Subway Art*, and an image representing a dead graffiti writer, connects graffiti with “ghostly...imaginings” (Anderson, 1983, p. 9). The same image revealed the agency attributed to graffiti in 1982 and the distributed personhood accorded to the graffiti at this time. Limitations and delimitations were placed and the images of iconoclasm revealed the boundaries of the constructed narrative told by the book. And finally, graffiti on subways, subway art, was set up to be the next movement in the Western art narrative.

The Contents Page

The Contents page, because it is often used as an organizational tool that does not reveal much insight into the narrative, is usually skipped in a close reading. However, in *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) included on the Contents pages a number of small images that represent each subsection of the text, with the Contents provided beneath the image. These images do actually reveal parts of the narrative. Therefore, in this section, I examine the Contents page with a focus on the images displayed there.

Along the top of the Contents page is an image of “four-and-a-half top-to-bottom whole cars by Sizer, Paze, Midg, Fome, and Ence, 1982” (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p. 4). The “four-and-a-half” whole cars, with different styles, wild color schemes, and original characters throughout, is one of the smallest yet most impressive images in the whole book. It shows kings’ works all lined up next to one another. The styles and colors differ from one car to the next. There is not one unifying theme connecting each car beyond the larger theme of graffiti styles and the individual goal of completing a one-man whole car. The four masterpieces riding together in 1982 is evidence that graffiti writers were still going strong, perhaps stronger than ever before, in 1982. Stewart (2009) and some of his informants maintained that 1973 was the “golden age for graffiti” (p. 9), yet in all of the graffiti books about the 1970s and the private pictures that I have seen, I have never seen four connected subway cars so completely covered with such style, skill, and planning in the 1970s. This picture, one of the greatest pictures in the book, says to me that 1982 was a brilliant year for subway graffiti, perhaps a golden age.

On the Contents page for the section labeled “Introduction,” there is a picture of a subway car painted by Blade moving on elevated tracks. This is no mistake or accident. As I

have discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the graffiti writer Blade was one artist who worked after the paradigm shift in thought about graffiti, the movement from child's play to an art, and who was responsible for taking simple graffiti to new heights as conceptual art. In the small picture, the same car from Blade appears that will be used later as a centerfold in the section "Kings." The two photos of the same subway car highlight the difference between Cooper and Chalfant's methods for photographing graffiti. In the section "Kings," the Blade subway car photographed by Chalfant is devoid of context, leaving only the image of the art. In contrast, in the small image on the Contents page, taken by Cooper, Blade's masterpiece is moving through the outer boroughs, with buildings blurring in the background and the message "Blade" shining on everyone who encounters it.

For the section labeled "History," Chalfant and Cooper (1984) included a close-up image of the name "Kilroy" with the Roman numeral I above it. Kilroy is significant. In the introduction to *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009), the piece written by Caine-1 put Kilroy at the beginning of the graffiti phenomenon. In the article "Taki 183" (1971), Kilroy was also said to have been a forerunner to this graffiti. Chalfant and Cooper (1984) never mentioned Kilroy again in *Subway Art*, but by placing this graffiti name in this image, they placed graffiti in an even older, more accepted tradition.

The section titled "Train lines" has a picture of eight parked subway cars in a train yard. They almost look like model trains, as if a child could pick them up and play with them. One prominent whole-car in this picture is "IZZY" by Iz the Wiz.

The section titled "Vocabulary" is represented by a close-up picture of the derogatory term "toy" written in marker over graffiti on a subway. In this thesis, the term "toy" has arisen often. It hints at playfulness and also the need for adolescent graffiti writers to distance themselves from preadolescent child's play in graffiti terminology.

The small picture for the section "Techniques" is a close up of Dondi using his right hand and right thumb to spray the paint out of the nozzle of a spray can. This is not a common way to handle the spray can. Artists use this technique so that their pointer-finger is not too worn out to finish the final outlines. This is a secret graffiti technique unknown by most. This picture represents the didactic parts of the book by showing the secret methods, unknown tools, and physical feats needed to create this art.

For the section "Crews," there is a picture reminiscent of one of Naar's in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Naar's image is never repeated in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984); instead, it can be said to be updated. The image was of young people grouped together, smiling, and holding up their graffiti names on paper at a subway station. Young people

crowding around small works of graffiti on paper is not the same impression of graffiti and how graffiti writers show off their work in *Subway Art*. The young people found in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974) have grown up a little since that pose. The artists in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) are older and are individuals. They work with paint and would prefer to pose in front of their masterpieces on the subway rather than with their drawings on paper or in a group picture.

The section “Kings” is represented by an image of two crowns made for kings and a spray can in between them painted on a wall. The two crowns and spray can signify that in graffiti there is not only one king, but the crown is passed around and the ability to claim the title of king depends on producing work in spray paint on subways.

“Kings” is followed by the section “Style.” The image for “Style” is a close-up of a window-down style on a subway. It is not clear what the graffiti says; the image only shows carefully constructed different sized and colored dots, three-dimensional elements with multi-layers of color behind them, signifying graffiti style.

For the section “Characters,” there is an image of an original or underground character on a subway, and similar to the Naar-esque photo of the children holding up their names on paper, the character holds a piece of paper reading “Demons of Art.” The name “Henry,” for Henry Chalfant, is spray painted on the bottom right of the subway in the image.

For the section titled “Dedications,” there is a close-up image of Lee’s dedication to his mother written in the inside of his “e.” In many of Lee’s pieces he wrote a dedication to his mother. Seen often wrote his girlfriend’s name, Dana, and others accompanied their work with their friends’ names or crew names.

The final image on the Contents page is of the “Opposition.” Instead of a picture of an actual physical police officer posing, the police are represented by a cartoon caricature painted on the side of a subway. The cartoon police officer is literally blown away by the graffiti he is looking at on the subway (perhaps he is impressed with it) because his tie is flapping in the wind, and one hand holds his hat from falling off while his other hand holds a night stick in a threatening pose. The opposition to graffiti here is played down and made into a caricature of itself.

Rather than skipping over the contents page, I read the images on the page and found the difference between Cooper and Chalfant’s photographic styles with the picture of Blade’s whole car. The four-and-one-half whole cars attest to graffiti art on subways still being in a golden age in 1982. I found that graffiti is often connected to older and well-known graffiti, or a tradition. The young graffiti writers (preadolescents) who posed for Naar in 1973, holding

their tag-names on paper, are not the same as the young graffiti writers (older teenagers) found in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). I also found on the contents page that the opposition to graffiti in *Subway Art* is not taken as seriously as it is in other texts about graffiti.



(Fig. 18. "Blade, Explosion." Henry Chalfant, *Subway Art*, 1984)

The Introduction: From Blade to Midg

In this section I look at the Introduction of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). I have already addressed some of what was written in the Introduction when discussing the photographers and their different perspectives. I begin this section with a reading of Chalfant's photo-stitching of Blade's full car masterpiece, which is featured on this two-page spread.

The two-page spread for the Introduction is predominantly black, with the top half filled in with written text in white. Across the bottom half of the two pages is a full car masterpiece by Blade. At the center of the car, where the two middle doors meet, is the center of Blade's composition – the name "Blade." This masterpiece was made with the dimensions of the subway car in mind. The middle letter "A" is divided equally along where the middle doors meet. The "B" and "L" on the left and the "D" and "E" on the right get progressively bigger the further they are from the middle, creating an effect where the name "Blade" is in three dimensions and is bending on the subway surface. The large blue letters "BLADE" seem to be coming out of a star explosion, with cream, yellow, orange, and red engulfing the letters in a circular pattern. A deep black space outside of the explosion of colors evokes a supernova explosion in deep space, perhaps symbolizing the very beginning of something, maybe the beginning of graffiti as an art. *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) treated Blade as representing a major paradigm shift from the competitive sport of graffiti to the art of graffiti. To the right of the letters is a huge surprised or screaming face painted in light blue. It seems to be referencing Edward Munch's *Scream*, which was and is also a popular image representing art and could therefore be another attempt to connect the Western art canon with graffiti as an art. The screaming character may represent the supernova explosion

on a personal level, that is, instead of stars colliding and black holes forming, the man's scream inaugurates a new reality and, in this case, a new art.

To the left of the masterpiece is a Blade tag also in the grips of a painted explosion of colors. I see two different ideas in the painting here. It could be that the tag in the lower left corner is a signature of the entire piece. On the other hand, because this picture is used as an introduction to subway art, this may be offered as an image that explains how graffiti went from mere tagging to the art that covers most of the car. Perhaps the tag at the bottom left, coming out of the explosion of color, says that graffiti started with the tag and the quasi-Munch-Scream could be the "eureka" moment when graffiti writers blew the tag up, found more dimensions in the two-dimensional letter characters, and explored them in great detail, leading to the style of graffiti. A lot of graffiti lettering could be said to be tags blown up on a large scale, which turned two dimensional lines signifying names into three dimensional masterpieces signifying kings. The style of subway graffiti could be explained as coming from putting a tag under a microscope and using a kaleidoscope dial while looking up-close at the letters.

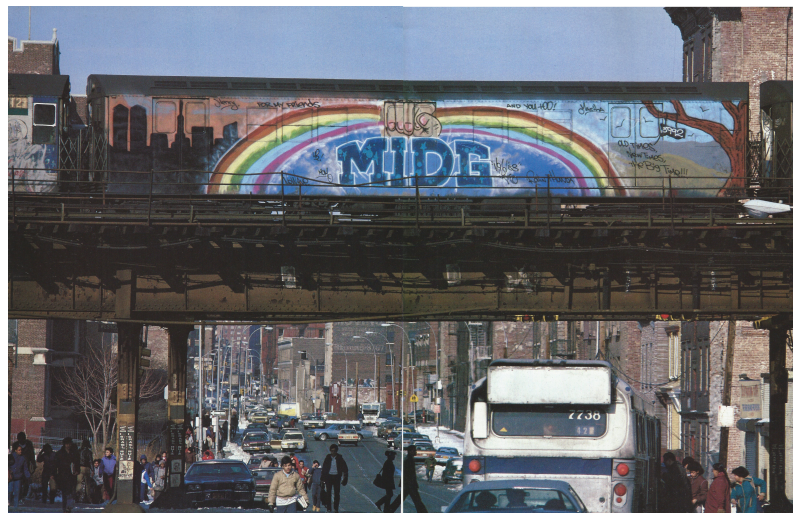
The subway car is completely painted but its features remain visible. The top of the painted screaming head ends on the roof of the subway. The conductor's window is down, moving the ear on the head, and one can discern the signs indicating the train's destination. The rectangular length of the train dominates the composition and allows for the story to be read left to right. The more one stares at the art, the more the subway makes its appearance in this art.

The picture is a Chalfant photo-stitching. It separates the work from the context it was in. How different would this piece look if captured through Cooper's lens? Would it be with people getting on or off the subway, with it moving fast past brick buildings, or with a cityscape in the background? What would it mean in that context? With this Chalfant perspective, the two most important parts of this art are put on display here at the beginning: the subway and the graffiti. Blade gets the introduction because he is one of the earliest pioneers of this kind of art. Blade's work tells a story and his painting here is another early connection to the Western art narrative.

In the Introduction to *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) noted, "While thousands of kids are writing their names on every available surface in New York City, masterpieces such as appear on these pages are relatively rare" (p. 6). They continued, "A writer can never be certain his work will ever be seen. New Yorkers who ride in subway trains daily are very likely to miss the best of the graffiti writers' work" (p. 6). In other words,

Subway Art gathered elite graffiti. The graffiti, particularly how the graffiti was shown in *Subway Art*, was not how most people saw it in their daily lives. It took talented photographers to capture the pictures in this book.

Two pages later, on a two-page spread, are two whole-cars, one above the other. These are Chalfant's photo-stitched creations. The top subway reads "Duro CIA" and the bottom "Bus Eric." In the "u" of Bus is written "Dondi." Throughout *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), the best graffiti writers prove they can write any letter, any word, and any name, and when they do that they show that they are the best. Bus is a back-up tag-name for Dondi, which the piece itself reveals in its style. The individual hand-writing style is the style graffiti writers refer to when they talk about style. Master writers, kings, can write more than just the letters in their name, they can write the entire alphabet, which they prove by writing different names and phrases in their style. Eric has "happy birthday" written next to his name; such happy and merry well-wishes appear often in pieces throughout this book.



(Fig. 19. "Midg," Martha Cooper, *Subway Art*, 1984)

On the final two pages of the Introduction is a beautiful picture of a subway with a whole-car top-to-bottom piece on it driving through the South Bronx. The graffiti in the middle of the subway car reads "Midg," with a painted clenched fist above the name and a very large rainbow shooting out of both sides of the fist covering most of the car. From the layout of this image, it is obvious that this is a Cooper picture because it has the context of the city in the scene. The subway rides the elevated tracks on the top half of the image and citizens go about their day below on the bottom half of the image. The subway and the graffiti are on another plateau, almost in a different world, as if there are two separate worlds, the one we live in and the one above us, reality and fantasy.

It seems like it was a cold day in the South Bronx when Cooper took this picture. There is snow on the sidewalk and in the street, and people are bundled up as they try to get onto a bus. One young man is walking with his school books in his hand, unaware of the subway art above him. Above him, captured in the blink of an eye by the photographer, is a huge rainbow seemingly shining brightly over the cold South Bronx street, painted onto the side of the subway passing on the elevated tracks. This image connects the graffiti with the environment and for this fleeting moment Midg really does “light up” (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p. 6) the town. Similar to the story told by Lee earlier, where everyone who came in viewing distance of the whole-car subway he and his crew painted was in awe of it, one could excuse Midg, or any viewer of this image, for giving agency to this painting on the side of the subway by viewing the graffiti as an actant which could ostensibly change the weather. The obviously cold scene below the elevated subway tracks is seemingly transformed into a spring day by the painted rainbow on the moving subway above. The artwork travels on the subway, through tunnels and on elevated tracks; that the people below the artwork don’t take notice points to the agency graffiti writers give to their creations. The public doesn’t have to look at it and it will still shine over them. Citizens do not need to take notice of the graffiti; the graffiti takes notice of them.

This graffiti masterpiece becomes that which “‘causes events to happen’ in their vicinity” (Gell, 1998, p.16) because this perfectly timed photo allows for one to imagine the artwork as doing something (positive) *to* the city. I repeat Gell’s observation on agency here: “...*persons* or ‘social agents’ are, in certain contexts, substituted by *art objects*” (p. 5). With this whole train top to bottom, the artist Midg is substituted by the artwork he created; artist and artwork are spoken of as one and the same. Midg painted Caine-1’s RIP and I mentioned distributed personhood with that example. Likewise, this masterpiece by Midg could now serve as a less extreme, yet still important, example of distributed personhood because the piece represents the person who painted it.

As already discussed, some graffiti writers would cross over other graffiti writers’ artworks in hopes of hurting the graffiti writer they were crossing, or at least to express the power of one graffiti writer over another. And as seen in the extreme case of Midg’s memorial whole-car top-to-bottom for Caine-1, the painting of one artist’s name (even in death) can be seen as a magical event, which can bring the artist back to life momentarily. Schacter (2008) pointed out that “the images are truly seen and believed to be ‘alive’ by the artists...and...are seen to create both actions and reactions in a way more similar to our traditional conceptions of human *subjects*, than to inanimate objects” (p. 38). The agency that

graffiti writers and viewers of graffiti give to graffiti “works of art” opens up the discussion to distributed personhood. On distributed personhood, Gell (1998) wrote, “...persons may be ‘distributed’, i.e. all their ‘parts’ are not physically attached, but are distributed around the ambience, like the discarded ‘gossamer coats of cicadas’ in Lucretius’ memorable instance’ which are both images and parts of the living creature” (p. 106).

Therefore, the work of art understood as a social agent, which moves all over the city on the sides of subways, also can be understood as pieces that make up the artist. With that understanding, the more pieces one has (the larger body of work), the greater the artist is regarded. In the image by Midg, the artist Midg “lights up the line” (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p. 6). But upon closer inspection it seems that it is the collaboration of Midg and Cooper that creates this effect. Now I have located the difference between “graffiti” and “subway art:” “graffiti” is what the graffiti writers paint whereas “subway art” is the imaginative and dramatic photography of the graffiti on the subways. The graffiti writers did not create “subway art;” the two photographers made “subway art” with their framing of the graffiti.

Mitchell (2005) wrote, “Images come alive...in two basic forms that vacillate between figurative and literal senses of vitality or animation. That is, they come alive because viewers believe they are alive” (p. 295). This photograph of the moving subway with Midg painted on it comes alive in this image. Sitting above everybody like a real rainbow in the sky, seemingly changing the weather and the mood on a cold day, the whole-car graffiti and subway are centered perfectly above the scene below with the sun shining on it. The graffiti art and the work that went into making it are both worthy of praise. The perfectly timed photograph captured the imagined effect the graffiti had in the city from the perspective of the graffiti writers. The photograph affords an understanding of what graffiti writers imagine regarding the reception of their work. It is alive - it represents a person and it seems to cause events to happen.

Along the top of the painting and subway it reads “Henry,” “for my friends and you too!,” and “Martha.” This is the painting that allowed me to narrow down my corpus to collaborative texts. I saw Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper’s names in the painting and realized just how close the writers were with the photographers. Even though Chalfant and Cooper (1984) were working separately, at some point they were introduced to each other “by the writers” (p. 6). Here, Midg showed the coordination between him and the two photographers. This same Midg is the graffiti writer who painted the “Caine-1, free for

eternity” memorial piece and was part of the incredible four-and-one-half whole-car picture on the Contents pages.

Mitchell (2005) wrote that images “come alive because a clever artist/technician has engineered them to appear alive, as when the puppeteer/ventriloquist animates his puppet with motion and voice” (p. 295). This idea of animation is important for understanding subway art. Although I maintain that both photographers together engineered the graffiti on subways “to appear alive,” Cooper’s pictures animated the images. She gave insight into the living imagination of the graffiti writers and how they believed their work traveled and came to life. She gave insight into the agency graffiti writers gave to graffiti by showing the graffiti in motion, in context, and seemingly interacting with the city. Through Cooper’s pictures, the viewer can tap into the imagination of the writer regarding how the work might be observed. Writers imagine that most of the city is impressed with their work and Cooper’s photos support that idea. Cooper, as photographer, was close to the “puppeteer/ventriloquist” with subway graffiti because her pictures, from unknown angles and mixed in with city scenes, captured a moment of the movement of the painted subway that brought the work to life.

Cooper captured a still frame of the moving image of the painted subway cars as they traveled over the outdoor tracks, but the context that they together went through, confronted, and were confronted by constantly changed. If one couples that movement with the distributed personhood of the tag-name as a representative of the person who painted it, the imagined idea of a tag/person flying through the city and conversing with the city becomes more intelligible. Cooper’s pictures captured the split second of the moving artwork and upheld the imagined effect of people taking note of this incredible art. The one image (the graffiti) stays the same, but the background and people interacting with the subways and the graffiti all change constantly, making the unmoved image appear to move or change or at least be confronted by new scenarios. Thus, Cooper’s angles and patience made her something of a “puppeteer/ventriloquist” for subway art and captured and added to the imagination of the graffiti writer by bringing the art to life.

History

In *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), the section devoted to the “History” of this graffiti phenomenon is six pages long. In the six pages, the authors recounted graffiti’s early stages, recent past, and how far graffiti had come since the early 1970s. Just as certain representations of art history “depict a classical narrative of art history as the progress of visual representation from the ancients to the present day” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 43), *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) depicted the growth of graffiti as beginning with the tag, the

improvement of style in the tag, and the stylized tag being “blown-up” into stylized masterpieces and growing and improving to become art pieces on the sides of subways. In this section, Chalfant and Cooper also showed the history of graffiti through the progression of styles, from the tags that were least aesthetically pleasing to improved tags, also showing the earliest examples of masterpieces on subways which served as a baseline for the improvement in style and technique in graffiti depicted in the rest of the book.

The earliest graffiti in this narrative is represented by the article “Taki 183” (1971). Chalfant and Cooper (1984) dedicated half of the first page of *History* to the reproduction of the article. The picture of graffiti in that article is of tag-names written in marker on an apartment door, a far cry from the masterpieces on the sides of subways. The other half of the page shows a picture of spray-painted tags on a wall. Above the photograph is the caption, “Tags in the early 70s. Note Barbara and Eva 62” (p. 14). “Eva 62” and “Barbara 62” stand out on that wall because they are mentioned as examples of female graffiti writers who have been part of this practice throughout the years. In fact, there is a focus on the female writers Barbara 62, Eva 62, and Lady Pink throughout *Subway Art*. This focus adds weight to the argument that graffiti was an open and inclusive practice, which did not discriminate based on gender, race, or class. Chalfant and Cooper really tried to show graffiti as egalitarian and meritocratic.

In the same image where Barbara 62 and Eva 62 appear are also the tags “Evil Eddy” and “Rat.” Those two tags stand out to me because two-page large-format photos of their tags appeared in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974). The styles they used in their tags showed the movement taking place in graffiti from crude tags to stylized tags to large scale masterpieces. Evil Eddy, both here in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) and in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), used one capital letter “E” for both the “Evil” and the “Eddy.” This use of one large “E” for both words made Evil Eddy stand out because the reader had to invest more time and effort to figure out what the message said. The same is true for Rat because he added a crown to his tag. That tiny bit of individual flair with his name highlighted the connection between this tag in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) and the same Rat tag with a crown that appeared in red on a tree in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974).

Small adjustments signaling individuality in a tag would open up eventual experimentation with letters by adding colors, elements, and sheer size to the letters when those tags became masterpieces. The graffiti phenomenon in its earliest stage was only tag-names in marker or spray paint, nothing fancy, as exemplified by Taki 183. Evil Eddy showed the growth of the style of the tag after Taki 183. Where Taki 183’s tag looked like it was

quickly stabbed with a marker onto the door, Evil Eddy looks planned out, stylized, and skilled. The letters have squared off ends and the sharing of the capital “E” by both words is a stylistic improvement on Taki 183’s crude tagging.

The most notable stylistic improvement for tags from this early period is seen on the next page, where Stay High 149 has a tag with a character and a halo, an arrow in his “S,” the “H” smoking a cigarette, and quotation marks around the 149. It seems stylized tagging was taken to its limits with Stay High 149; his tag letters come to life. The next stage of graffiti progression was blowing those tag letters up into a masterpiece. That “blowing up” of the tag is shown in Stay High 149’s large scale subway piece, which is on the cover of the re-released *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 2009). Early attempts by Spin and Robin at making tag letters larger also appear on this page. Both are rather naïve when compared with the later graffiti found in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). A large picture of a naïve piece of graffiti on a subway that reads “Spin” is said to have won the “Taki Award,” a mock award in the 1973 *New York Magazine*. The work is very early graffiti, which has simple letters and simple elements—polka dots and curvy lines. There are no three-dimensional effects, no shadows, and the letters do not overlap or connect. Underneath the photo of “Spin” is a “Robin” piece with shadows and highlights. As Chalfant and Cooper (1984) explained, “by the mid-70s, writers used highlights, overlapping letters, and three dimensional effects in their pieces” (p. 15). This is the progression from tag to masterpiece that I read in Blade’s whole-car in the introduction. Large, colorful, bending three-dimensional masterpieces might be understood better as tags held under a microscope with an extra kaleidoscope dial. In two pages of *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) showed the progression of early graffiti styles from what they were to what graffiti writers should aspire to achieve.

In the History section, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) gave a nod to two whole-trains in writing (not images⁴⁶): Caine-1’s Freedom Train and the Fabulous Five’s Merry Christmas train. Both of these whole-trains were written about in further detail in *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982), *Taking the Train* (Austin, 2001) and *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009).

The last paragraph of the History section (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) reads:

Graffiti writing has already acquired a tradition, built on the contributions of generations of writers. The upcoming artist finds himself in a situation in which the forms and conventions of his craft are well established. The esthetic parameters within

⁴⁶ By doing so, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) showed the importance of telling the stories of certain graffiti (as opposed to only understanding graffiti through images), which reinforces the idea put forth in this thesis that textual evidence (that is, writing about graffiti) is important to the study of graffiti.

which he will work for the next few years as a practicing graffiti artist are fairly narrow. (p. 17)

The parameters in graffiti that *Subway Art* elucidates are that writers must work with letters, characters, themes, colors, and the subway.

At the end of the paragraph, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) mentioned once again the legendary status of “Phase-2, Stitch-1, Barbara and Eva 62, and Stay High 149” (p. 17). With that, these names were etched into the (newly invented) history books of graffiti. The authors conveyed that a tradition has been invented. The history of graffiti has innovators like Taki 183, Evil Eddy, and Stay High 149, as well as women like Eva 62 and Barbara 62.

In conclusion, in this opening section of *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) told the story of how the book was created and the carefully framed narrative that would follow. The authors’ desire to represent the practice and the practitioners in the best possible light is evidenced by happy messages written in graffiti, graffiti writers framed in Vitruvian-pose, and minimizing of in-fighting. By showcasing a definite improvement of style, material, and production in graffiti, coupled with not so subtle hints that graffiti is the next in line in the Western art narrative, the authors framed this practice at this moment (late 1970s and early 1980s) as the golden age of graffiti art and showed that, with the collaboration of talented photographers, subway art can be captured.

The introduction also provided information about the two photographers and their different approaches to documenting subway graffiti. Chalfant and Cooper spent years with the subject, were close to the writers, and even used the writers’ words in spray paint to guide the narrative. With one image, the “Caine-1 free for eternity” whole-car by Midg on the title page, they gave a nod to other styles and graffiti writers who were not featured in the book but who were important to the practice. Another whole-car by Midg, photographed by Cooper, revealed the imagination of graffiti writers regarding the effect their graffiti had, the agency the graffiti writers give to graffiti, and opened the discussion to distributed personhood, revealing the personal and human qualities attributed to graffiti by graffiti writers and viewers. By capturing the movement of the subway at a perfect angle and moment, Cooper brought about this effect. Accordingly, the importance of the subway as an integral part of this art began to make itself felt. The status of the subway in this art is the starting point for the next section.

The Didactic Guide to Graffiti Art

The Subway as Found Object

In this section, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) shifted their focus from the development of the art to a close look at the elements of the art, the young people who painted the art, and the best examples of the art. Chalfant and Cooper shared valuable information about how to create graffiti art on subways along with images that served as studies in style, application, and best practices of subway graffiti. The section concludes with uplifting, thoughtful, and loving messages painted on subways.

Train Lines. The section titled “Train Lines” begins with a two-page spread showing four images.⁴⁷ On the left is a New York City Subway map from the inside of a subway car, next to an image of a close-up detail of a crossed out PJay window-down straight letter with the words “off my line” and a red line underneath crossing out his work. Next to that is an image of a subway with a painted character of a bare-chested woman from a Vaughn Bode comic on the outside and a real woman holding a book and newspaper just barely squeezing into the subway car. The woman on the subway is looking at the photographer, smirking as she balances her belongings. Is she aware that her image is being captured next to a large painting of a bare-chested cartoon woman on the outside of the subway?

Beneath this image, which takes up most of the two pages, is a photo of a man in a three-piece suit sitting on the subway reading a Spanish language newspaper. Only one door is open on the subway, which points to the rundown and ruinous condition of the subways at the time because both doors should open at the same time. On the same subway where the man sits inside, there is on the outside a painted version of a subway that is part of a graffiti piece. With only one door open, it feels as if the viewer is spying on this man; he sits on this train without knowing that he is inside of a work of art. In this photo, he becomes part of the artwork as he sits and reads inside of the artwork. The broken door that doesn't open is completely painted. This is part of the “Style Wars” car by Noc 167 that Chalfant and Cooper (1984) showed in its full glory on pages 66-67. The painting that was on the door is a little bit scratched off the window, as if someone was using their key to take the paint off the window. The scratch on the window is visible in this image as well as in Chalfant's picture of the same whole-car. This points to the dialogue that the passengers were in with the graffiti. Maybe someone was waiting at the station with the one door open and, while they were waiting, decided to scratch off some of the paint so that they could see out the window when the other

⁴⁷ This section was represented on the Contents Page by a picture which made the subways look like small toy trains.

door was closed. The subway is alive; this artwork is lived in and always in dialogue with the city.

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) began the written section by stating that the subway connected “the far-flung boroughs of New York City” (p. 20). They wrote that “Graffiti writers have a knowledge of the system which rivals that of any train buff or transit worker” (p. 20). They also stated that the graffiti writers had nicknames for the subways. One nickname was “ding dong” based on the sound the train makes. Two other nicknames were “flat” and “ridgie,” based on the description of the sides of the subway cars (p. 23). The graffiti writers classified subway cars in a hierarchy of which was best to write on. The authors also explained that it took four hours to ride the subway from the end of the Bronx to the end of Brooklyn.

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) wrote:

A youngster starting out finds a new community, focused on the subway, which brings together kids from all over the city. He gets a new name and a new identity in a group which has its own values and rules. He finds the particular subway stations where other writers congregate and where they form new alliances that transcend the old parochial neighborhood and traditional gang territory. (p. 23)

This last claim was an exciting and freeing one for a kid from New York City. Simply by joining the subway graffiti phenomenon, one could work in a network outside of “traditional gang territory” (p. 23). The traditional gang territory was based on segregation. Therefore, the graffiti writer understood that by working outside of traditional gang territory one helped to desegregate their city. I don’t think this was a far-fetched claim. I agree that writing graffiti on subways disrupted conventional understandings of territory in a racially and financially segregated city.



(Fig. 20. Boy running on top of parked subways, *Subway Art*, 1984)

The final image in this section takes up a full two-page spread. On pages 24-25 is a picture of seven subway cars parked in a subway yard, with a young person jogging on top of a parked subway car. There is not much graffiti in this picture, at least nothing artistic of note. The center of the image is the young person running on top of the subway cars, perhaps denoting that young people were using the subway system as a playground and that this art overlapped with child's play. Themes of playfulness, like this image and photos of smiling young people, and suggestions of the imagination involved in understanding how the graffiti interacts with the city, betray the idea of graffiti being mainly an art. There is play in this phenomenon. But now it is not child's play any longer; it is a more aggressive teenage play where teenagers run on dangerous machines.

The teenager in the picture is physically running on top of the subway cars. There is a double meaning to be read here. He runs on top of the subway cars and he "runs" them the way a transit official "runs" the transit system. He plays on them and he plays with them. Instead of a basketball court located on one street, subway graffiti is a game played on a moving playground connecting the "far-flung boroughs of New York City" (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p. 20).

What is made apparent in this section is the overwhelming importance of the subway to this art. The movement of the subway, the dimensions of the subway as canvas, and the new network that the subway allows all point to the subway being an important object in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). The subway becomes a found object. About the "found object," Mitchell (2005) wrote:

There are just two criteria for a found object: (1) it must be ordinary, unimportant, neglected, and (until its finding) overlooked; it cannot be beautiful, sublime, wonderful, astonishing, or remarkable in any obvious way, or it would have already been singled out, and therefore would not be a good candidate for "finding"; and (2) its finding must be accidental, not deliberate or planned. One doesn't seek the found object, as Picasso famously remarked. One *finds* it. (p. 114)

In "Taki 183" (1971) and even in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), the subway does not play a central role in the praxis of graffiti. In "Taki 183" (1971), graffiti was about writing all-over. In *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), the focus was on the name, amongst other topics Mailer found interesting. It wasn't until after *The Faith* that the most important part of graffiti at this moment was "found"—the forgotten, dilapidated, and uncared for subways of New York City, which were given new life by the graffiti writers in the 1970s. As Mitchell

(2005) wrote, “the secret of the found object is thus the most intractable kind: it is hidden in plain sight” (p. 114). Mitchell noted that the first forgotten and later found object is picturesque: “the picturesque object is typically a ‘poor thing,’ a figure of ‘destitution’ like the gypsy, the beggar, the rustic, or the ruin” (p. 116). The subways in New York City were in horrible disrepair in the 1970s. Austin (2001) discussed the “crisis” of the subway system in detail in his Chapter 5. He wrote that the “fragile physical structure of the system began to fall apart” (p. 135) and that “the system could not meet the service levels of 1974 with any consistency again until after 1986” (p. 135).

On the subject of found objects as ruins, Mitchell (2005) continued, As ruins, “they are already sacrificed, they cannot be sacrificed again and can thus constitute an ideal safe from the threat of violence. As ‘attractive’ objects, they do not invite (or threaten) possession, except in the picturesque sketch or photograph. (p. 117)

The subways in the 1970s were decrepit and in ruins. The painting of graffiti art on the dilapidated subways was made “attractive” in the photographs in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). The combination of Cooper and Chalfant’s approaches to the newly refashioned ruins culminated in a happy accident. As Mitchell (2005) noted, “[T]he ‘happy accident’ is one that artists have always prepared themselves to recognize” (p. 124). The graffiti writers, prepared or not, came across a “happy accident” by mixing their colorful and meaningful graffiti with the run-down subways, and later Chalfant and Cooper (1984) captured it, brought it to life, and made it available for pirating through their images. This collaboration is the definition of the classification of “subway art.”

The ruined subway was of central importance to this art. It brought motion to the artwork, allowing for imagination, and served as a way to live and work outside of “traditional gang territory” (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p. 23) created during a segregated past. The graffiti writers used the subway differently than how it was intended; there was a game taking place on the subway. It was a ruin and, by the middle 1970s, the dilapidated subway became a found object. Graffiti did not start on the subways. It began with markers on doors, lampposts, and benches. Although it could be painted anywhere one chose, it came to life on the side of the moving subway in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984).

Vocabulary and Techniques

On pages 26-39 of *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) offered key words, goals, and rules for understanding the practice. They showed various tools, such as spray paint, interchangeable caps, keys to the subway cars, and sketches of the graffiti to be necessary.

Chalfant and Cooper provided a photographic walk-through of Dondi creating a whole-car, with a final photo of it moving through the city with apartment buildings behind it.

The first two pages presented graffiti slang of the day. Most of these terms have stuck in graffiti circles and traveled (e.g., “king,” “toy,” “bomb”). That most of them are still common parlance today points to *Subway Art's* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) fixing of graffiti in many ways. In contrast, the slang term Mailer (1974) pointed out, “inventing,” was never heard of again after *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974).

On the next page is the section “Going over,” which is only given one half of a page. When compared to the complete subsections given to the topic of “going over” other graffiti writers and the many stories of disputes that appeared in *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982, pp. 56-61, 91-107) and *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009, pp. 171-178), it seems that Chalfant and Cooper (1984), in *Subway Art*, were purposely not focusing on the violent in-fighting. Chalfant and Cooper also gave one half of a page to “biting,” that is, using other writer’s unique style. As they noted, “Writers prize originality above all else” (p. 29). On these four pages, the authors shared information that a practitioner could appreciate and also explained certain rules and framings of graffiti, but there was no art on these pages.

On the next two-page spread are two “burners” that Chalfant photographed and stitched together. In the introduction to *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) stated that, for the photographers, the greatest feeling was “the exhilaration felt at the successful capture of a ‘fresh burner’” (p. 7). The photos of the burners are placed one above the other. The image above is a “two-man window-down wildstyle burner by Shy 147 and Kel, 1980” (p. 30). Two aspects stand out about this subway car: the windows are hardly painted, as if the graffiti writers purposefully avoided them, and the colors of the burners match the subway and hardly call attention to themselves. These two observations lead me to think these were strategic choices by the graffiti writers so that Shy 147 and Kel’s work would last longer on the subway. The windows are often the first part of a painting that is cleaned, scratched, or opened up, all of which disrupt a full whole-car that covers the windows. By not covering the windows, the writers ensured that the integrity of the piece would remain intact longer because there were not so many ways passengers can disrupt the work. With their use of colors that almost blend into the subway, I wonder if the graffiti writers thought their work was more camouflaged than a bright piece and would therefore not be chosen for cleaning.

In the image, the burner below shares some design overlap with Shy 147 and Kel’s burner above. Raul, Wayne, and Sach, who painted this subway car, also did not paint over most of the windows of the car. They too made the size of their pieces fit into the dimensions

of the subway car below the window. But on the left side of the subway car, the writers covered the whole car to the top, over the first set of doors and up until the first window, with paint. On this space, the writers created a scene of two subways parked next to a graveyard with tombstones and two large skulls. Raul and Wayne can be assumed to be the real names of the graffiti writers Duro and Min. I say this because they put their tags inside the names and the styles resemble their unique styles. Wayne is Min, the same one who gave his name as NE to *The New York Times* in 1980 and who Stern and Stock (1980) called a “white-middle class toy” (p. 2) in the article “Graffiti: The Plague Years.” Again, a graffiti master, a king, proves it by writing many different names and phrases. Min, by writing “NE” and “Wayne” as well as “Min,” was a king, a point that was repeated throughout *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984).

Painting a subway on a subway is self-referential. It points to the importance of subways to this art form and shows the found object status of the subway in this art. The writers chose not to paint the windows or the spaces between the windows above their burners, but instead each of the three wrote their tag name over the three throw-ups by JN in the spaces between the windows. This is an aggressive move; it says the art goes hand in hand with the artists’ reputation. In *The New York Times* article, NE was quoted as saying, “You write you fight!” (Stern & Stock, 1980, p. 4). Going over JN in this painting was part of the final masterpiece and revealed more of the story of this art and these artists. Min’s graffiti was backed up by proven artistic skill on subways and his willingness to fight for his graffiti.

In this section, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) shared vocabulary, rules, and framings in graffiti. They also showed that, by working with the dimensions of the train, and taking into account that the windows were cleaned quickly, graffiti writers adapted and invented new approaches to painting. Understanding the importance of the subway, graffiti writers painted the subway on the subway. Moreover, they did not hide their in-fighting; they made it part of their art.

From Techniques to a Completed Subway

The two-page spread titled “Techniques” has eight images. Chalfant and Cooper (1984) explained in the first sentence that “It takes a great deal of preparation to create a piece” (p. 32). The pictures and information on these pages were invaluable for conveying what one needs to do first in order to create a piece on a subway. The images of going to the train yard, painting a train, and the train moving served as didactic tools for performing this art.

A quote by a graffiti writer in this section showed the growth of graffiti over the 1970s:

According to Dez, a sixteen-year old master, there is no easy way to learn the complicated wildstyle, and no substitute for time. Rather, the best way to learn is through recapitulating the entire history of graffiti art, from the simple to the complex: “When you’re first starting and an up writer gives you style, it ain’t easy to do it, so it be better to start from throw-ups to straight letters to semi-wildstyle to wildstyle. Then you can do anything you want after that. Rather than try to make your first piece be a burner and it looks wak, just work your way up. The trains ain’t goin’ nowhere.” (p. 32)

The entire history of graffiti art is reflected in this quote. The speaker states that letters and the way one designs them and colors them in, and where they place them, is what makes the art.

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) presented a tutorial scaffolding of how to write graffiti in this section. In this spread are images of graffiti writers practicing graffiti, looking at pictures of graffiti, and looking over designs on paper. These images attested to the intention, the planning, and a way of reading graffiti, as well as the different tools (caps and keys) that were important to the growth of graffiti styles: paint, specialty caps, keys for the subway, and a sketch (requiring practice). They also attested to the importance of photography and collaboration with a photographer in order to create subway art. On the next page, they showed all of these in use to make a piece, setting up the reader to see Dondi in action. On the next page, there is an image of three teens with large full shopping bags walking at night, followed by another image of two teens going through a cut section of a fence. Another image is of a graffiti writer reaching from one parked subway car to another, applying paint while two friends look on. The graffiti writer balancing between the two subway cars is Dondi. Over the next four pages are photos of Dondi, applying the techniques shown in the images and described in print on the preceding pages.

On page 35, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) placed a photograph taken from inside a parked subway car, showing Dondi using the parked subway car as a platform for the materials he needed to complete the masterpiece behind him on the other subway car. The open subway door attests to the graffiti writers having keys for the subways. Different caps are on different color cans. A sketch book lays open for Dondi to refer to. On the next page is a small image of the “source for Dondi’s character, a Vaughn Bode cartoon” (p. 36) next to a larger image of Dondi painting that same character on the subway. There is also an image of

Dondi holding a can in one hand and a sketch book in the other, looking over his work and deciding what next to do. Across both pages, along the bottom half, is the full Dondi whole-train in motion with apartment buildings behind it. Cooper photographed Dondi in the early hours when he was painting it and he wrote her initials “M.C.” in his first letter “D.”

The next page has twelve close-up images of graffiti writer’s excuses for their poor work: “Sorry about the drips;” “Sorry no more blue;” “Too late, Too tired;” “it’s cold;” “Chased;” and “PJay turned off the lights” (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p. 37). Again PJay is making trouble for graffiti writers, maybe even his own friends. After Dondi’s documented work, graffiti doesn’t look so easy. This page shows an honesty about self-appraisal and the willingness to admit that one’s work is not up to standard, which reveals an understanding that some graffiti writers aimed to make aesthetically pleasing art work.

The next page shows more young graffiti writers at play. Skeme lays down on the wooden cover of the third rail in a reclining position in front of one of his pieces as it stops in an outdoor station. Two other young graffiti writers play in the image below on a broken-down subway. This is very different from Naar’s pictures of young innocent kids holding up pieces of paper (Mailer & Naar, 1974). Those little kids in Naar’s photos are toys; subway art is for older teens who have the courage and know-how to use the subways. The young people in these pictures are older than Naar’s subjects, braver, and have found the object, the subway, with which they are today obsessed.

Writers, Names, and Crews

On pages 40-41, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) presented a two-page spread of 16 images of graffiti writers in various scenes and poses. For the most part, everyone is smiling in these pictures. This section was represented on the Contents page by a Naar-esque picture of young people crowded together holding up drawings on paper of their graffiti. The images on pages 40-41 showed some graffiti writers hard at work and others playing hard.

With one of the first images in this section, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) showed meritocracy in graffiti and a generation-spanning tradition. The older king Blade (with a razor blade piece of jewelry on a gold chain around his neck) respectfully and smilingly points to the younger king Lee (wearing a shirt that says “Leo” on it). Blade’s painting was used for the introduction, and Lee’s was used as the final image of the book. This image says one can earn the praise of one’s hero if one works hard enough. The picture represents meritocracy. It is evidence that there is meritocracy in graffiti because the old king Blade is happily pointing to the newer king Lee. One can earn respect with enough hard work.

The image of an older king standing with a younger king denotes a lineage of graffiti writers, a feature of inventing a tradition. Works by both Blade and Lee are highlighted in the section titled “Kings.” Lee’s work can be said to pick up from where Blade’s work leaves off. The two kings photographed together epitomize Hobsbawm’s (1983a) term invented tradition for graffiti by being the proof of a tradition emerging. Hobsbawm wrote of invented traditions forming “within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (p. 1). Through this lens, Blade and Lee standing together in this book represents a torch being passed down from one generation to the next, spanning maybe five years, thereby showing proof of a tradition of graffiti. After this image, all serious graffiti writers with the desire of being a king of subway graffiti would imagine themselves as being connected through (an invented) graffiti lineage and (the invented) tradition of graffiti with these two early kings.

I have already touched on the image of Caine-1 and his jacket and how it tells of other styles not covered in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). There are two other images in this spread that tell of yet another avenue *Subway Art* decidedly did not go down. That is the attempt of graffiti writers to break into the downtown gallery art scene in New York City in the early 1980s. The two photos I point to show graffiti writers dressed up nicely and smiling in front of graffiti art on canvas hung on a wall of a gallery. Chalfant and Cooper never brought up the flirtation of art collectors in the early 1980s with graffiti, which is mentioned whenever the artists Keith Haring and Jean Michel Basquiat are discussed. Austin (2001) wrote in detail about this period, noting that “many of the writers who participated in the galleried art world interlude of the early 1980s felt that they had been ripped off in some way” (p. 201). Instead of dwelling on how the young graffiti writers felt cheated and used by the downtown gallery scene of New York City, on the next page of *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) presented an inspirational two-page spread of seven graffiti writers jumping off of the stage of a band-shell in a city park with the word “Dream” painted in big yellow graffiti style letters under them. The graffiti writers in this image are all in their late teens and are all smiling as they jump into this “Dream.” The seven are all jumping into their own futures and are being encouraged (and at the same time encouraging others through the photograph) to “Dream.” There is something very uplifting and positive about this image. It takes up the full two pages. The focus is on youth, fun, friendliness, play, and dedication to art. There is no subway here. The graffiti reads “Dream”- the young people and their dreams are the true main characters of this book along with their art. They discovered the found object that was the dilapidated subways. They created the style and the rules. They, the good

young people, have created beauty in their lives and can go forward with their dreams. In *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper did not dwell on the limitations placed on graffiti by outside groups but rather believed in graffiti and graffiti writers enough to give them space to imagine and invent life and art on their own terms.



(Fig. 21. "Dream," *Subway Art*, 1984)

With this image, the imagined community starts to become less informed by imagination and more seemingly concrete. Six boys and one girl are all moving at the same time, going in the same direction, into the graffiti "Dream." Their being on a stage points to the scripted narrative the book follows, yet seeing these graffiti writers working together in harmony adds to the impression of there being a like-minded community of graffiti writers working in unison towards a common goal. That a community of graffiti writers exists can no longer be doubted; the imagined community has been given a happy young face.

Names. The next six pages of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) are titled "Names," and the first two pages are the same images shown on the front and back covers. Chalfant and Cooper wrote, "The name is at the center of all graffiti art. The writer usually drops his given name and adopts a new one - a new identity" (p. 45). What is not said in the writing, but is shown in the images, is that almost half of every picture is of a subway car. The name written on a subway is important but the pictures reveal again that the windows, panels, and the entire subway in the image are just as important as the graffiti for subway art. Through traveling on the subway, the "new identity" Chalfant and Cooper wrote about is given agency and is usually that which represents the graffiti writer, filling each tag to masterpiece with distributed personhood (Gell, 1998, p. 96).

This dual identity is seen in the pictures of Seen and Quik on the next four pages. One image is of a smiling youth; the other is the graffiti they painted, which represents them. The new identity becomes a new identity by proxy. The juxtaposition of the name on the subway with a picture of the artist allows the view of the distributed personhood and the agency that

the distributed personhood graffiti can conjure in the imagination. The graffiti is not just paint on subway, from this layout the graffiti *is* the person who painted it; that is, it stands for the graffiti writer. Whatever is done to the painting on the subway is, by proxy, done to the person. Graffiti becomes very personal; being painted on public transportation sets the personal up to have many encounters in the public forum.

On the two-page spread, there are two pictures, one of graffiti that reads “Seen” and the other of the person Seen. Both images are the same height but the first one on the left is three times longer than the picture on the right. The longer picture on the left is a close-up image of a one-color Seen “throw-up” with arrows, clouds, and a representation of blood-shot eyes in the holes inside of his lowercase letter “e’s”. The clean windows are visible above the graffiti, reminding the viewer of the subway surface on which this graffiti is found. The second picture shows the actual person of Seen, a young-looking man, perhaps in his early 20s, with a moustache and a large smile on his face. He is an Italian-American from the Bronx.

The intense distributed personhood by which graffiti writers consider their graffiti as themselves or their doubles becomes more apparent here. There is something about Seen as a human and the name “Seen” painted on the subway with animal qualities and human-looking blood shot eyes, a quality that allows one to imagine the graffiti as a double or representative of the painter. Do the eyes point to the meaning of his name, “seen,” as in “to see”? Are the red eyes from all the viewers of his art who are straining their eyes seeing his name so much on the sides of subways? Or is it that people can’t close their eyes when his work comes by on the subway, so they have to keep their eyes open because his work is that good? Or are the bloodshot eyes his own exhausted eyes from looking at so much graffiti? The graffiti is given human qualities and starts to take on qualities of the person writing it. Seen animates his graffiti by painting eyes in his “e’s” suggesting the name or the painting is alive, or that a homunculus (or “inner person” [Gell, 1998, p. 136]) lives inside of the graffiti.



(Fig. 22. Quik, *Subway Art*, 1984)

The next page has a similar layout in that there are two pictures, one of graffiti on a subway and one of the person's face who wrote the graffiti. The writer is Quik. Under the subway with his graffiti is a picture of the artist, Quik, posing with a painted hand purposefully placed by his face, a moustache, thick-rimmed glasses, a fresh afro, and also a big smile. Quik is an African-American from Queens. The picture of Quik's graffiti takes up the length of both pages and is a Chalfant photo-stitching. With Chalfant's perspective here, the graffiti only on the subway, removed from the context of the city, we can take the whole piece in all of its glory and then investigate the details.⁴⁸

By placing the pictures of the young people's graffiti art and the young people smiling onto the same page, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) showed the friendly young people who painted this art, along with the easy step of connecting one's physical life with the life of the graffiti and taking it all very personally. Because the graffiti writers in these pictures were of different ethnicities, graffiti does not look like an essentially race-based phenomenon where "white, middle class toys" were ruining it (Stern & Stock, 1980, p.2). Chalfant and Cooper (1984) conveyed their egalitarian and meritocratic ideal by showing the faces of the graffiti writers along with their creations, again suggesting that anybody could do this if they worked hard enough.

Crews. Chalfant and Cooper (1984) dedicated the next four pages to showing crew-graffiti and the crews who painted it. The first picture at the top of the page is a close-up image of words a graffiti writer wrote on a subway inside of a piece. It reads, "Extra Extra/ TNT takes over/ New York City" and underneath it reads, "TNT: 5 MTA: 0" (p. 50). Next to

⁴⁸ Quik's piece takes up two pages and is a fascinating study in graffiti design and style. The name "Quik" stretches out across the subway car, reaching from one doorway past three windows, another doorway, and three more windows up past a third doorway, almost the length of the entire subway car. It has a red, orange, and pink bottom blend with a light blue blend at the top, all outlined in thin black. All of the letters connect to each other along the bottom of the subway, and the letters "Q", "u", and "i" all connect at the top as well with thin connecting lines. The letter "Q" has a thin arrow coming out of the top of its left side and points downward. A dividing line in the shape of a lightning bolt divides the top of the "Q" from the bottom. The letter "u" has a thin connector line, which adds a balancing element to the usually empty space at the top of the "u." The "u" then connects through a small wave coming out of it to the top of the lower case "i." The bottom of the "i" has a connector piece which wraps around the bottom of the "k," holding it in place with the other letters. The top of the "k" balances with the weight at the top of the "u," giving a feel of symmetry in the word and letters. The bottom of the "k" juts out long and has a bent arrow that comes back under the "k" and points downwards. The "k" is followed by a large five-pointed star and a large crooked exclamation point. After that, a white cloud is painted in the corner and in it Quik signs "QK" and writes underneath "E=MC2." The entire piece has thin white lines sprayed through, which resemble shining star effects, swirls, arrows, and a heart. He writes his real name "Lin," his girlfriend's name "Jaime," and his crew, "Rolling Thunder Writers," in thin black paint throughout. This piece is a painting by the young man pictured below and it represents him and the people he loves as it travels through the city.

this image are five of the young members of TNT (The Nation's Top), all smiling, one holding a baseball bat and another holding up the peace sign with his fingers in a subway yard in between two parked subway cars at night. Of course, the baseball bat is meant to intimidate and show how TNT protects its members when they are painting a subway. But the scorecard of "TNT: 5 MTA: 0" and the baseball bat with the smiling members of TNT also evokes the play that I find in graffiti as well as the aspects of competition, being part of a team, and the framing of graffiti more as a sport amongst practitioners than an art. Baseball is traditionally known as America's sport, and graffiti was said to be "America's newest folk art" (back cover). Even at their most intimidating, being a group of teens at night carrying a baseball bat, these teens look like they are playing a game and others are invited to play. A "crew" or "gang" becomes a "team."

The openness of graffiti, as Chalfant and Cooper (1984) conveyed it in *Subway Art*, is expressed in the description of "Crews:"

Because of the mobility of writers, crews transcend traditional neighborhood gang turf and draw upon the whole city for membership, often reflecting the interracial character of the graffiti world. The Vamp Squad, for instance, counts among its members kids of Peruvian, Scottish, Italian, African, Jordanian, Puerto Rican, and Albanian descent, and they live in Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Staten Island, and Yonkers. (p. 50)

Grffiti here is representative of the melting pot and immigrant stories that make up New York City. Again, this framing can be seen as a direct response to articles that constantly harped on graffiti being essentially about race, class, and gender.

On the next page, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) presented a young Trap holding on to the hand of his smiling mentor, Dez (p. 51). Next to them are two close-up images of crew graffiti, graffiti that stands for a group of graffiti writers. Along the bottom of both pages are two subways, which have large crew graffiti pieces on them. The first is from 1976 and reads "Fabulous Five" with a chrome inside, outlined in black, and a light blue cloud behind it. Inside a few of the letters are the names of the members of the crew. Crew-graffiti seems more concerned with the competitive sport that is graffiti and the imagined strength and power that a united crew of graffiti writers magically demonstrates to other graffiti writers than with ideas of art. Crew-graffiti's simplicity and its attempt to claim territory or act as a threatening message works to differentiate it from being solely about art.

On the bottom of the next page is another example of crew-graffiti from 1977, which reads "The Magnificent Team." It too has the names of the members of the crew in the letters. This section on Crews ends with a gorgeous picture by Cooper of crew-graffiti attributed to

Seen in 1982, a whole-car that reads “United Artists,” with a Smurf character holding a present. Most of the two-page image is of the South Bronx with the George Washington Bridge faintly in the background. This long shot of mostly a city-scape with an immaculate piece by Seen in very readable letters, with a happy Smurf character and bright colors, cleans the palate of the reader for the next section of the book. The play of crew-graffiti with its difficult to decipher messages is separated from the seriousness of king graffiti by Seen’s crew piece, “United Artists.”

Kings

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) showed four Kings in this section. They are all male. Their pictures have appeared throughout the book already. When my friends and I painted the Subway Art History Project, we re-painted these four “King” works with other names. By doing so, I have gained a close understanding of how the pieces were painted and what elements are important to pay attention to. All of these images are original. None can be said to be “biting” another graffiti writer’s style. Each one tells numerous stories and each one is a work of art on its own. All of these images follow graffiti shadowing techniques, with white lines painted inside the letters, and all are from 1979-1980.

All of the images in the section “Kings” are Chalfant photo-stitchings. Each shows the entire subway car, from the safety gates on each end to the roof of the subway down to the top of the wheels. All of the pieces in this section share common elements. None of the letters in the “Kings” section are wildstyle or even traditional graffiti letterings. What makes these pieces stand out amongst all other graffiti is the use of space, the overall theme of the painting, and originality. These exact king styles are usually not copied or even evoked by other graffiti writers because the originality of each piece is on display. One thing a graffiti writer could learn and use from these pieces is to come up with their own themes and styles, and to tell an original story in their work.

In the written part of this section, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) commented that Graffiti writers often top their tags and pieces with a crown, symbolizing one of their goals - to be “king” ...the writers who are the most respected and widely acknowledged to be kings are invariably the best artists...The greatest achievement of a writer is to be up a lot and to be at the same time a master of style. Still, an artist, no matter how good he is, cannot be king on the basis of only a few beautiful cars. He must succeed over and over again in order to maintain his position. (p. 54)

The kings in this section are all masters of style⁴⁹ and their works are shown often throughout the book.

⁴⁹ Lee

Next to the written information about “Kings” is a close-up picture of a cartoon character representation of a king with a crown and cape, holding a proclamation on a large piece of parchment, which reads “Kings Arrive.” Above, taking up most of the top half of the two-page layout, is a top to bottom “Lee” with an original character. The character resembles a devilish clown or a wizard, with a top-hat that reaches all the way onto the roof of the subway, red hair, dark painted-on raccoon eyes, sharp teeth with a sinister smile, and white stars and big dots decorating the purple outfit and top-hat. The name “LEE” is painted in letters so large that the tops of the letters are painted onto the roof of the subway. The letters are thick with swirls ending in sharp points coming from each edge of the letter. The color scheme inside the letters is a blend, from deep red at the top, down to a lighter red and then orange, to a cream and yellow bottom. The letters are outlined in black with a shadow effect going towards the left. There are thick black dots at the bottom of the three letters, recalling the old-fashioned polka dots that writers used to use, yet Lee’s polka dots are more skillfully applied as seen in their various sizes. There are large painted cracks in the letters making them look like they are made of stone, perhaps evoking forms from antiquity.

The background is filled in solid in forest green with a brown bottom background all outlined in waves of white. The letters are given shine-effects by spraying white lines of depth inside the edge of the letters opposite the shadow-effect. Throughout the piece, Lee wrote in white the following messages: “MOM:101,” “1979 Lee,” “I Onced Loved,” and “Love Sick Bomber.” This picture, as with all of the pictures in the “kings” section, is a Chalfant photo-stitching, which shows no city context. In these pictures the artistry of the graffiti writer is on full display. The art is at the forefront, and allows for detailed observations of the skill.

The next six pages could be said to be the main exposition of the book. These pages are technically special because they are the only pages that fold out into a centerpiece, which affords room for two large images behind the centerfold. Along with Lee, the next three graffiti writers are considered “Kings” in this story: Seen, Blade, and Dondi.

Seen

On the first of the fold-out pages is Seen’s masterpiece. Whereas the other kings are represented by their names, Seen’s masterpiece stands out by foregoing his name and painting instead the title of a song, “Hand of Doom.” As I have already mentioned, by writing letters beyond one’s own tag name, a writer proves their flexibility and dexterity in being able to write every letter in the alphabet; by doing so, one stands out from other graffiti writers.

“Hand of Doom” is taken from the title of a Black Sabbath song from the 1970 album *Paranoid*. The song’s heavy rock guitar riffs and loud drums are accompanied by lyrics about U.S. G.I.’s who served in Vietnam and went on to using heroin and finally committing suicide. The hand is used to shoot people, inject drugs intravenously, and take one’s own life. I can imagine Seen connecting those violent uses of the hand to using a can of spray paint. This subway’s theme, choice of content, and violent imagery remind me of Caine-1’s work “Welcome to Hell” (Castleman, 1982, p. 39), and yet its cartoon imagery of a hooded executioner and the well balanced letters make it a less threatening composition. The hooded executioner is not scary in the way Caine’s skull and Alice Cooper character were, and the letters have a soft feel to them because of how round and even they are.

The whole-train, top-to-bottom, is painted and the song title “Hand of Doom” takes up most of the car. To the left of the song title is a drawing of a hooded executioner with an axe standing in front of a large sun with bats flying and the words “Big time” written in black on the sun. Between the words “hand” and “of” is a drawing of a large right hand clutching a large knife in a stabbing downward motion. The knife blade covers parts of the letters “n” and “d” in “hand.” Above the knife and the blocked parts of the “n” and “d” is a small explosion of red, yellow, and orange, which is balanced by the same effect between “of” and “doom.” Behind “doom” is a large bomb closing off the letter “m” with five tombstones, two of which are crosses, which serves as a balance to the executioner character on the left side. One tombstone reads Seen’s crew, “United Artists 1980.” The inside of the “Hand of Doom” is a dark green to light green fade from top to bottom with red blobs of blood throughout. Seen wrote the names of his friends and his own name throughout. The background is a dark blue to light blue fade of a night sky with many bats flying in the sky.

Seen is aware of the way the windows are cleaned and doesn’t place the important parts of the image on the windows. In a later picture of the same subway, after it had been buffed with chemicals and the windows were cleaned, the knife and enough of the hand remained along with the title “Hand of Doom,” and enough of the executioner as well, to be recognizable and still respected by other graffiti writers so as not to be painted over. Even the flame on the bomb was painted in between the windows on the door; when those windows were cleaned, the flame remained.

Blade

The next piece is the centerfold of the book. It consists of two pages, which each have a fold-out flap. When unfolded, the image of the subway is the largest image in the book, taking up three pages. The artist is Blade, the same Blade who was featured in the introduction and in the History section. Blade is one of the earliest graffiti artists who painted art on subways. This masterpiece, the centerpiece of the book, has a light blue background with white clouds along the top. The whole painting seems to take place in the sky. The letters of his name, BLADE, are all very fat and round and share the same colors (red, yellow, and green), yet they are distributed differently. All of the letters are outlined in black with a shadow effect going off to the right and thick white lines inside the letters, which make the shadow effect pop.

Again, these letters are not technically difficult in the same way a wildstyle is, but it is the large choppy solid chrome robotic legs holding each letter in-situ away from the other letters as they all seem to be walking which makes this piece stand out from all others. I can imagine these letters moving with the movement of the subway and how these letter robots could come to life with that movement. Each letter might be its own futuristic robot because the large name BLADE is being greeted on its right side by smaller robots on similar legs or perhaps these robots are out in the distance. They are four

In this section on “Kings,” it becomes apparent what makes the work of kings so good. These kings are not merely living in a fantasy where they imagine they are artists; these kings are artists. There are real reasons for calling their works masterpieces, which make them stand out and ultimately make these young writers kings. The works attributed to kings are all whole-cars, top-to-bottom, and cover the windows. Each subway car was approached as a canvas. Knowledge of how the subways are maintained and used by passengers is shown as being important. Beyond only letters or only the name, the themes and the binding elements show the writers envisioned these pieces as individual pieces of art. These pieces are not focused primarily on the difficulty of the letter, the way wildstyle pieces are created, but the focus is more on complete canvasses with more elements than only letter work or only names. This might be the writers’ attempts to properly silence critics of graffiti when they say there is no art in graffiti by creating subway masterpieces which share commonality with art. In a way, the kings give cover for the thousands of toys who can’t do this kind of work and allow for graffiti to still be called an art when maybe a lot of it is not art.

smiling robots on tall mechanical legs. Maybe they represent other happy graffiti writers painting subways. The bright colors, the bizarre sci-fi story of robotic letters walking on machine stilts in the sky in the painting, and its coverage of the entire car make this one of the greatest graffiti art pieces on a subway ever. This piece shows that a unifying theme over the whole car for one graffiti writer is the height of subway art.

But this piece also points to the magic of the photographers. This same train is shown to be connected to the Campbell’s Soup whole-car on the first page. I would argue that seeing many of these works of art, one after the other with no unifying thread, would take away from the individual experience of focusing on one work of art. Chalfant’s photo-stitchings allow for individual appreciation of skill in a confusing sea of fast-moving names and images.

In Cooper’s picture of this subway on the Contents Page, the windows are cleaned but the letters are still readable. Blade knew the dimensions of the subway and knew the windows would be cleaned quickly. For his piece to last long and be understood, he put the parts of his “B” “A” and “E” in that negative space on the windows so, when they were cleaned, the details around the windows would remain and help give the letters the shapes needed to comprehend the letters. The “L” and “D” are painted below the windows and the robotic legs for the most part all remain; they were painted on spaces in between the windows. In planning for the windows to be cleaned, Blade showed his understanding of the layout of the surface and how it is maintained.

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) mentioned the dimensions of the subway when discussing how Chalfant came to create his photo-stitching technique: “A subway car is sixty feet long” (p. 7). The dimensions of the subway, the placement of the windows, and spacing at the doors all influence the conceptual design of the whole-car masterpiece. Important names and words are put beneath the windows. The space on each end of the car asks for balancing elements. The guaranteed cleaning or opening of the windows forces graffiti writers to get creative regarding what they paint on the windows and next to the windows. If a writer keeps all factors of the layout of the subway in mind, a whole-car can remain legible even after the windows have been cleaned.

Dondi

The last piece in the “kings” section is represented in the same size as Seen’s “Hand of Doom.” It is a two-and-a-half-page fold-out painted by Dondi. Before the name “Dondi” starts, to the left of it and overlapping the letter “D” is a large painting of a left hand reaching outwards. It always reminded me of Michelangelo’s Adam reaching out towards God in one of the early scenes in the Sistine Chapel. Upon closer inspection, though, the hand might belong to a body coming out of a grave. The title of the piece, written in red in the second “D,” is “Children of the Grave Part 2.” This title and work are original, a bit sinister, and also technically stunning.

The letters are all very large and proportionately complement each other with the middle capital “N” taking up the most space on the car and the final “I” taking the least space. The hand and the letter “I” are the same size and balance the composition on the subway. The letters cover most of the subway car with blends of browns, creams, dull yellow, beige, some pink, and light blue. The letters are outlined in black with shadow effects going off to the right. The small space left as background is a blend of dark and light blues outlined in red with a second purple/pink background. Dondi signs his “O” with a tag. The “N” has “mafia” written inside and the “I” has “CIA INC.” written in it. The black shadow effects have shiny white lines that serve as shine flares, giving the letters more depth and glow.

With “Kings,” Chalfant and Cooper (1984) showed the best graffiti art based on factors beyond adhering to a particular way of constructing letters or the centrality of the name. Blade is one of the oldest kings and is given the most respect in the book by being featured on the centerfold. His smiling face, his work, his years of dedication are all shown and a cult around his person and art is begun. However, by leaving out any piece in “Kings” that has sophisticated wildstyle lettering, one of the most important elements of graffiti is muted, the stylization and creation of letters. This critique is answered immediately in the next section.

Style

Just after the section “Kings” is a section on “Style.” Chalfant and Cooper (1984) showed various different styles of graffiti at its best. The first two-page spread is of two subway whole-cars, both framed as Chalfant photo-stitchings: the painting “Style Wars” by Noc 167 in 1981 and a whole-car by Sab and Kaze in 1982.

I begin by reading the Noc 167 “Style Wars” piece. Similar to king work, this subway has a unifying theme, underground characters, and the whole subway car is painted. What is different is that there are two different styles of graffiti lettering shown, wild and straight letters. No other work by Noc 167 appears in the book nor is his face shown. The artist Noc 167 is aware of the status of the subway in this art and reproduces an image of a subway with his tag on it to accompany his letters. The title “Style Wars” was the name of a film about graffiti in 1983, as I have already mentioned. One question that arises after seeing this piece is how did the title for the movie come about? Did the producers of the film tell Noc 167 the title of the movie or did they take it from this piece? The title *Style Wars* is a reference to the popularity of the film *Star Wars* at the time. The earlier image of a man reading a newspaper inside of this subway car (pp. 20-21) serves as the cover image for the film on VHS and DVD cases, similar to how the many subway pieces serve as the cover for *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Both titles tell what the work is about. *Style Wars* (1983) is focused on the in-fighting (war) of graffiti whereas *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) is focused on the art. I wonder out loud how much of the subway artwork in this book and in the film was spontaneous and actually being documented and how much was done in coordination with the adult producers’ input? Again, this is not so much a critique as an inquiry, because these incredible pieces, which seem random and brilliant because of their randomness, also have an aura to them of outside production and coordination with the photographers and producers. The “Style Wars” subway is a meta-painting about subway graffiti; it has many elements which I have already discussed in this chapter. It shows different styles, colors, and

characters, and even has a reproduction of the found object, the subway in it. A dedication reads, “I love you Heartist” and the crew “CIA.”

Another image, which has many of the elements discussed, is the subway car painted by Sab and Kaze. A short look at the piece on the bottom reveals that Kaze dedicated his piece “To Henry,” showing the coordination and friendship between the producers of the book and the producers of the graffiti.⁵⁰ Sab wrote “Merry Christmas” next to his work, dampening ideas of senseless or violent vandalism and highlighting the (imagined) community that some graffiti writers were attempting to build. The characters on both ends of the subway (one looks like a shark with hands and the other a cartoon man with a shot gun) complement each other, balance the piece, and are either original or from an underground comic.

On the next two pages, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) presented nine pictures with titles and a few sentences to explain tagging, throw-ups, and panel pieces. A lot of information is crammed onto these two pages. In the middle of all of the pictures is a large image of Lady Pink sitting on a subway seat wearing a scarf and hat. She is posing next to a freshly painted tag she wrote. There is an aura of the sacred in this image. She is holding the can at the center of her body, almost like the Sacred Heart. Her legs cross each other and her feet are leaning on their edges making her resemble something of a mermaid, or a siren. She is the only female whose graffiti and face we see in the book, but we only see her tag, not her masterpieces. A hat and scarf veil her hair as she holds the sacred can of paint at her center. The spray can has the words “Red Devil” written on it. What religion is this? Behind her is a background of a saturated subway car wall with many tags. The tags are hard to read because they’re all on top of each other. Her freshly painted tag stands out for a couple of reasons. She used white paint while everybody else on the wall used dark ink, and she took a space that no one else has touched, closer to the seat on the metal surface that is easily cleaned. Lady Pink appeared in the book earlier with a lot of paint and here she is using it and holding the can. The spray can is an important actant for graffiti. She may be a king, because her face is featured three times in the book, but since she is a woman she would maybe be called a “queen”? Yet that word doesn’t come up in the book. As much as egalitarianism is pushed to the forefront in *Subway Art*, the comparative lack of pictures of Lady Pink’s masterpieces, or any female subway art, or any “queen,” betrays that framing as more hopeful than actual. Yet still the openness to all comers is expressed by Lady Pink’s presence.

⁵⁰ On a personal note, this Kaze piece is one of my favorites for its lettering. Each letter is in proportion, has arrows and choppy endings where necessary, broken pieces at the end, a three-dimensional blend, computer coloring, and white highlights.

Lady Pink shares credit with Iz the Wiz on page 94 (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) for a married two-whole-car piece memorializing John Lennon just after he was murdered in New York City, The Beatles, and nine famous musicians who died. I see the steady use of images of Lady Pink's person and not her graffiti, as well as references to Eva 62 and Barbara 62, as revealing some desire to answer those who said "graffiti is not for girls" (Stern & Stock, 1980), which was used in Austin's (2001) Chapter 5. It could also attest to the close relationship that Cooper may have had with Lady Pink while documenting graffiti on subways.

There are four pictures of tags along the side of the page. Two of them are of Futura 2000, one from 1973 and one from 1983. In his tag from 1973, the paint was not sprayed evenly, as if Futura 2000 did not yet know how to use the spray can. The tag Futura 2000 has four arrows, three stars, two quotation marks and, copying from Stay High 149, there is a trail of smoke coming out of one of his letters. In the 1983 tag, Futura 2000 has learned how to hold the can of spray paint and has come up with his own style. He only uses one star shine (not all those arrows and stars) and the work looks mature, not like child's work anymore. The improvement over 10 years in the style of Futura 2000's tag attests to the overall improvement of graffiti in those 10 years as well.

"Throw-ups" get less than half of a page and are only represented by one graffiti writer, Quik. Quik's "QK" serves as a small representation of what was a major part of this graffiti phenomenon. The throw-up is said to have been what both "destroyed" graffiti, in Co-Co 144's opinion (Stewart, 2009, p. 158) and the better way to get up and win the game, according to IN (Stewart, 2009, p. 174). The "Q" in Quik, just like the picture of the actual person Quik, has a big toothy smile in the face drawn in the "Q."



(Fig. 23. Kase 2, *Subway Art*, 1984)

On the next page, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) presented the “window-down whole-car” two-page spread, which has a similar set-up as the pages given to Seen and Quik earlier. There is an image of the artist Kase-2 and a Chalfant photo-stitching of his artwork on a subway, but here Kase-2 gets to describe his unique graffiti style:

Wildstyle was the coordinate style and then computer. That’s what I brought out. Nobody else can get down with it ‘cause it’s too fifth dimensional. I call it the fifth-dimensional step parallel staircase, ‘cause it’s like computer style in a step-formulated way. It’s just sectioned off the way I want. Like if I take a knife and cut it, and slice, you know, I’ll slice it to my own section and I’ll call it computer style. (p. 71)

Computer style, cut with a knife, can be better understood by looking for his description in the image of the window-down whole-car. This image is the picture from the cover of *Taking the Train* (Austin, 2001). The subway has original characters and original lettering; the theme and the use of the canvas do not overpower the letters. The letters on the subway are the art here. One can learn how to pirate graffiti style by looking at this piece.

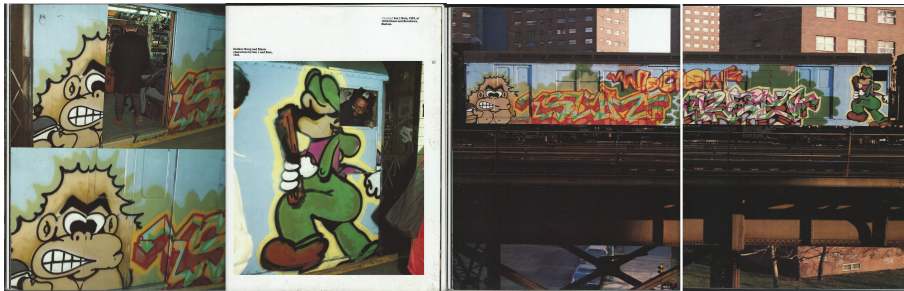
With this image of the masterpiece by Kase-2, I have finally arrived at the style in the question posed in Chapter 1: how did a child’s game develop into an original art reaching the crescendo of Kase-2’s style? In this thesis, I am interested in how graffiti went from the tagging of Taki 183 to the development of Kase-2’s style. We just saw it above with the improvement in style of Futura 2000’s tags; we read how the various framings throughout the 1970s raised the stakes of this practice; and now here we are with a prime example of the original art.⁵¹

⁵¹ The letters and three-dimensional effects of “Kase 2 El Kay” are brilliant and often pirated by those trying to create graffiti. Even though there are two names, it seems to me that the same artist, Kase-2, painted both names, because so many of the exact same elements, cuts and slices, and ways of linking the letters are found in both names. It was normal during this time that a few graffiti writers would attempt to paint on a subway and the one with the better skills for graffiti would do the difficult parts of the piece for the others, while the others helped paint the inside colors and look out for police. The first piece on the left reads “Kase” and the second piece on the right side of the subway reads “El Kay.” The letters are as Kase-2 described: “sectioned off,” “cut,” and slice[d]” (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p. 71). The beginning vertical line that makes up the first “k” is repeated two times, represented in rectangular shapes, which could point to the Roman numeral two (II), having the Kase piece start with the Roman numeral II. The bottom sectioned off part of the “k” blends with turquoise blue elements behind the Roman numeral II, connecting to a star on the left. The top part of the “k” is cut up, but through the straight lines of the computer style, the top of the “k” connects with the middle line of the “A.” That line connects to the left side of the “A” but the right line is detached. The “S” here is truly a study in how to make an “S” and has been copied by many graffiti writers since. The top chops of the “S” match other parts of the piece and the straight line of the middle of the “S” matches up with the straight line going through the name, holding it all in place. The bottom of the “S” has an ending on the right side that connects with the bottom of the upper case “E.” The other parts that make up the “E” are cut and separated, yet blend with the form of the “S.” The whole piece has a deep red three-dimensional effect and the letters are colored in with light blues, greens, and crème colors.

Two characters begin the subway car to the left, and both are facing each other. They could be representations of the two artists themselves. The first character has one left hand and an empty sleeve where his right arm should be. Kase-2 lost his right arm when he was young because of an accident he suffered while playing on a gate that came in contact with live electric wires (Style Wars, 1983). The two characters on the left of the subway are in conversation. If the first is meant to be Kase-2, the second might be El Kay because this character is offering his outstretched right hand, almost saying, “I will help you.” As I already noted, both pieces were probably created and outlined by the same writer, Kase-2, and therefore El Kay may have been helpful painting the insides of the letters and characters. On the right side of the subway, in an easier to read piece, Kase-2 employed his computer style for “El Kay” but did not cut it up as much. It shares the same colors and

In his photo, Kase-2 is not smiling. His face and pose are serious. He is looking off in the distance. The picture of Kase-2 is a close-up of his upper torso. His left arm is visible, but not the empty space where his right arm used to be. The photo does not focus on Kase-2's disability but rather on his ability as a thinking and talented artist. Similarly, in *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) did not exploit the graffiti writers or try to talk about the most salacious details of their lives and practice; instead, they showed them as good people and talented artists.

The Moving Image, the Moving Imagination



(Fig. 24. Donkey Kong and Mario, *Subway Art*, 1984)

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) placed a focus on one subway in the middle of the section on “Characters,” and by doing so they showed the movement of one particular graffiti piece on subways. The first two pages show close up images of two cartoon characters, Donkey Kong and Mario, painted on a whole-car subway as part of a piece (pp. 82-83). Donkey Kong is holding a can of spray paint on the left side of the car, and Mario looks like he is walking towards Donkey Kong, holding a night stick on the right side. Perhaps the painting is meant to look like Donkey Kong painted the graffiti and Mario is trying to stop him. When in motion, Mario painted in mid-stride on one side of the subway looks like he will walk past the graffiti and put a stop to Donkey Kong's activity. Half of Donkey Kong is painted on a subway door so that every time the subway stops and the doors open Donkey Kong is cut in half, giving the

three-dimensional effects with the Kase-2 piece and has many cuts and slices as well. What makes each letter stand out is that an extra flourish is given to the letters, turning them into shapes that go beyond mere letters, allowing each letter to tell its own story. Cuts and slices make the “El” seem sharper and more squared than the other letters in “Kay.” The bottom of the “K” swoops down making room for the lower case “a” to balance and then connects with the bottom of the “y.” The “y” ends with small arrows above it and a sharp jagged line coming out of the bottom, ending by the third character on the right side of the subway, a sinister looking man holding a very large gun. The three characters could be telling a story. Perhaps the story is Kase-2 and El Kay work together on their artwork and people try to hurt them to make them stop.

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) offered this piece as an example of a “window-down whole-car” because it is painted below the windows and covers all the space from left to right. The window-down is a wise space to take for a graffiti writer who wants his work in full to be seen for a long time because there are no missing pieces from cleaned windows later on. This is why we see windows left alone on subways throughout the book. Only half of one window is painted; the rest of the windows were left clean. Above “El Kay” are two scrolls: one reads “Happy Birthday El Kay,” seemingly as a message from Kase-2 to El Kay, and the other reads “Today, Halloween was my birthday- Keith” perhaps giving away El Kay's real name “Keith.” “Today, Halloween was my Birthday” could be pointing to this scary encounter with the sinister man with the large gun shown in the piece. Both writers use the space between the windows and the doors to write their messages. They offer well wishes for a holiday. Graffiti writers enjoy celebrating holidays in paint and the graffiti bringing those well wishes is imagined by graffiti writers as making most viewers feel happy because they are being given a happy message.

painting motion and almost making it look like he is opening his mouth when the doors open. The subway moves, but Mario actually never makes it to the other end of the subway; he is always stuck on the right side painted in mid-stride. But the background moves.

The first page has two pictures of Donkey Kong. One picture is of a door open and man getting on the subway (almost walking into Donkey Kong's mouth), and the next is of the door closed (did Donkey Kong eat the man?). Donkey Kong "moves" every time the doors open and close with half of his mouth staying open when the doors are open and his mouth closing when the doors close. The painting on this surface resembles a roller coaster ride in an amusement park, where one walks into the mouth of a fun house. The open door of the whole-train shows a different reality inside the subway than what is painted outside. One can almost hear the "ding-dong" of the doors closing between the pictures. The conductor cranes his neck out the window to see that the doors are clear and his head is just beside Mario's painted head, transferring some of the authority of the conductor onto the cartoon of an angry Mario with the night stick. The three pictures tell the story of the process of the subway stopping at one station, picking up and dropping off passengers, and the conductor leaning his head out of the window to make sure all passengers have cleared the doors so he can close them and continue the subway's journey. Ding-dong. Turn the page and the whole-train piece is moving through the Bronx in a picture Cooper captured.

There is an animated effect with these freeze-framed pictures of people getting on the subway, the doors closing, the conductor checking the doors, and the subway flying by on the tracks. It is a small moment in the life of graffiti. The graffiti seems to move. It's a real moving piece of art that people get inside of. It is machine art. All windows are closed and the senses of the passengers inside are altered. The whole-car graffiti transforms the subway to have no windows on one side. That must make the subway rather dark, but on a sunny day that could produce a unique effect on the subway similar to glass stained windows, depending on the colors covering the windows. These photos capture fleeting moments but put together tell a story and capture the graffiti imagination.

There are four more pages of characters after Donkey Kong and Mario. The first two-page spread has 18 close-up pictures of characters on subways. All of the characters are original or from underground comics, except for Seen's "Pink Panther" character. One of the pictures is of an open subway door with a graffiti character next to it and a subway passenger smiling and posing for the camera. The passenger posing next to the character makes it seem like the graffiti and the subway riders do interact and do know each other, whether or not he was aware that he was posing next to the graffiti character.

The next spread shows graffiti names that use characters in place of letters, usually vowels. The graffiti writers Sonic, Tkid, Quik, and Spin all have characters replacing the letter “I” in their names. The letters “O” and “I” are rather simple shapes, which don’t lend themselves to much wildstyle elevation and they can be replaced by or enhanced with characters. Disco has a small smoking character in the top of his “i.” Because the letter “I” is just a straight line, it is not easy to make it look different. Characters serve as a good stand-in for the letter “I,” showing more skills by the writer and making the piece seem more complicated.

In this section, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) commented, “Often the character expresses the writer’s own self-image” (p. 80). I have found that all painted characters in *Subway Art* are male. The only female characters are naked women from Vaughn Bode comics. This is another point where the aspirations of the graffiti writers and the photographers to state that subway art was open to all, that it was not only a young man’s club, are betrayed by no female character representation. The most well-known graffiti characters are of cool guys in sunglasses and naked women from Vaughn Bode. Those are not characters that express a female’s self-image but are rather closer to teenage boy fantasies.

Dedications

Throughout *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) seem to suggest that graffiti writers write happy messages in graffiti. In this final section, showing the brilliance of the subway graffiti and the messages conveyed in the work, more happy messages and well wishes appear.

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) opened the section with a picture of the person Blade and his girlfriend Dolores smiling and posing for a picture. They both look older than the other graffiti writers and we know that Blade has been painting since at least 1975, putting him in his mid-20s by this point. The two pictures underneath the picture of the smiling couple are two whole-car trains painted by Blade, both reading “Blade” and “Dolores.” Blade wrote “Happy birthday to Dolores” on one and “I love you” on the other. On the other side of the two-page spread is a picture of another happy couple, Duster and Lizzie, who appeared earlier in the book, smiling and posing on page 40. They are a younger couple than Blade and Dolores, in their teens still, and Lizzie poses with her arms wrapped around Duster. Beneath them is an incredible shot, a Cooper angle, probably from one of those abandoned rooftops in the Bronx that she mentioned. It is a picture of two married cars, both of which read “Duster” and “Lizzie,” one car in simple straight letter style and the other in wildstyle with an original character. “Married cars” refers to cars that usually travel together and are not broken up or

switched with other subway cars by the subway workers. “Duster Lizzie” and “Duster Lizzie” on married cars signifies love on a grand scale for imaginative graffiti writers. Cooper went on a roof to get this picture. The subway looks miniature from this angle, as does the bridge behind it. The messages radiate off of the subway for the city to see. Duster and Lizzie are in love and all will know. This picture captures the dreams of graffiti writers, that the graffiti will speedily traverse the whole city and somehow most people will stop and stare at the graffiti and appreciate it.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes (1980) wrote about the “punctum” found in certain photographs, which is appropriate to mention regarding an image in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) on the next page. Barthes (1980) explained that the punctum is an element “which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me”(p. 26); it is not something the viewer “seek(s) out” (p. 26). He continued, “A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (p. 27). A punctum in a photo is a detail which “overwhelms the entirety of my reading” (p. 49).



(Fig. 25. “Deli” with punctum, *Subway Art*, 1984)

There is a photo on page 92 that is part of a two-page spread showing graffiti writers’ dedications to their mothers. In that spread there are four “mom” pieces, and one image that shows the final “I” of the graffiti writer Deli’s graffiti with some words about his own mother’s advice written next to it. Inside the cleaned windows of the subway door, Deli’s “I” has a window with the back of a person leaning on it and in the next window stands a woman with her middle finger pointing at the photographer on the other platform. The middle finger pointed at the photographer is the punctum in this image. One of the photographers was taking a picture of the graffiti on the subway and the passenger inside the subway, who is fashioned in a manner which reminds me of my own mother in the 1980s, oblivious as to what is being recorded perhaps, sticks her middle finger at the camera. The passenger becomes a character in the graffiti because of the window and her pose. Her pointed and deliberate middle finger replaces the graffiti letter “I” with a real-life character making an “I”

with her middle finger. What makes her middle finger even more powerful is what is written on the outside of the subway that she is inside of. Deli wrote next to his “I,” just under this woman, “My mother told me to stay home...But...Did I listen...Hell No...”. The woman-cum-character in the graffiti art sticks her middle finger up and under her it reads “Hell No” as if the woman was supposed to be there, bringing the graffiti to life, giving emphasis to the phrase “Hell No!” The hostile woman with a raised middle finger was not a planned part of the picture, not staged like other pictures in the book. Barthes (1980) wrote that the punctum was “not, or at least not strictly, intentional” (p. 47) and “it does not necessarily attest to the photographer’s art; it says only that the photographer was there, or else, still more simply, that he could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object” (p. 47).

The woman in the window most likely knows nothing about the graffiti or what the photographers were photographing – she is annoyed simply by the presence of the photographer and decides to be rude towards the photographer. As Barthes (1980) noted, “once there is a punctum, a blind field is created (is divined)” (p. 57). Although up to this point in the book we have not yet met the “opposition,” we are reminded with the punctum in this photograph that New York City at this time (and perhaps still today) was a city filled with aggressive people. The punctum in this photograph betrays the carefully constructed narrative of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) in that it shows, even though the photographers maintained a professional and positive narrative throughout the book, the wild city beyond the graffiti makes its presence known. Barthes (1980) wrote, “The punctum, then, is a kind of subtle beyond---as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see” (p. 59). The woman and her middle finger take us out of only thinking about happy graffiti and friendly writers and allows us to think about the hostile city and the hostile environment in which graffiti grew. Beyond textual evidence and the inner workings of graffiti circles, graffiti was perhaps influenced, for better or worse, as well by the angry and aggressive residents of the city during the time.

New York City is full of aggressive people, but the graffiti writers in *Subway Art* are seemingly not so aggressive. They all smile, and not one was shown making an obscene gesture in the book. On that same two-page spread is a picture of the smiling king Lee with his mother. Lee’s mother is smiling, too; perhaps she is proud of her son the king. In contrast to the aggressive city and the citizens who make it up, the authors did not portray the graffiti writers as criminal. In fact, they are shown as rather respectful of adults, especially towards their mothers.

There are two “mom” pieces by Seen on the same page. Seen’s MOM whole-car is a full car with three colors, solid chrome insides, red outside, and white highlights, with a written dedication to all mothers and his own mother. Credit for taking the photos and stitching them together is attributed to Seen here, but his style is the same as Chalfant’s photo-stitchings. It looks like Seen learned his photographic style from Chalfant. The photographers learned from the graffiti writers and the graffiti writers learned from the photographers.

Conclusion

The last page of this section, the didactic guide to subway art, is a two-page picture by Cooper of a whole-car, which reads in the middle in big letters “Happy Holiday.” On the left is a “JSON” burner and on the right is a “Richie” burner, both obviously done by Seen. As noted earlier, using one’s own name was not the most important feat. Having a recognizable and original style, so that when one wrote any letter combination other graffiti writers would recognize who wrote it, added to one’s imagined status as a king.

On this “Happy Holiday” whole-car by Seen is a painted cartoon of Santa Claus holding a bag of presents. It is a masterpiece, which the whole city should enjoy because it is so festive, friendly, and colorful. This reminds me of Midg and his rainbow at the start of the book. Just as Midg and his rainbow were timed perfectly coming down the track and captured for that split-second rolling through the South Bronx, Cooper captured the moving image of the subway reading “Happy Holiday” with Santa Claus painted on it. In a fleeting moment, a chance that may never come again (if Cooper waited too long, this graffiti could be damaged by the time it comes back to the Bronx), a moment of an ephemeral art is captured becoming “subway art.” Did anybody actually see it pass by? This brilliantly captured image is an answer to those who say graffiti is ugly and threatening. I conclude this subchapter by using this final image; although I find most of what I wrote about in this subchapter, I find no punctum in this image. In my reading of this section, I drew out the importance of the found object, the dilapidated subway. “Happy Holiday” is a perfect example of a masterpiece of subway art: painted on a subway and captured in motion and in context. This image serves as a balance in the book, with the image of Midg’s whole-car with the rainbow at the beginning of the book, and it has a similar composition.

In this closely framed image, the subway car and tracks take up most of the space, putting the found object on display. The tools one needs to paint a masterpiece (paint, caps, sketchbook, keys for the subway, and camera) were highlighted in this section, and in Seen’s meticulous piece the skills, planning, colors, and theme can all be recognized. Finally,

because subway graffiti can be a team sport, this piece has two graffiti names on it, showing the importance of helping hands and friends for this art/sport.

The main exposition of the book, the section on “Kings,” showed that the theme, composition, letter styles, colors, and one’s individual style are the traits which make one a king. Seen is a king. The Christmas theme, with Santa and a bag of presents on one side and “Happy Holiday” in the middle, shows an understanding of composition. Seen’s particular style is recognized in both names, and the all-important burners are painted below the windows, ensuring they will last longer.

Dondi’s whole car was maybe the most important part of this section, illustrating the process of painting a subway, with a photographer, which culminated in the best possible picture of the subway in its environment, directly after it was completed and in motion. A picture of Seen painting the “Happy Holiday” piece on page 41 (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) attests to this because in that photograph Seen was painting his whole-car masterpiece, while one of the photographers ensured the “Happy Holiday” whole-car would be filmed just after completion and in motion. Here, in this last picture of the section, Seen’s meticulous and pristine whole car, which carries the distributed personhood of his friend and himself, is moving through the South Bronx in a perfectly timed and framed composition that is the definition of “subway art.”

The Opposition and The End of an Era

In the last part of this chapter, I look at the last seven pages of the book. On these last seven pages, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) brought the authoritative forces united against this art into view, highlighting the “cops and robbers game” (p. 99) between the police and the graffiti writers, how the art was destroyed, and how graffiti writers responded to the destruction. Chalfant and Cooper pronounced the “death” of subway art and a challenge to others to bring it back to “life.”

The Opposition

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) began the section devoted to the forces opposed to subway art with two images of playful messages written by graffiti writers on subways and directed at the authorities. The messages read, “To the boys in blue, catch me if you can” and “caught ya sleepin. Ha, Ha. MTA” (pp. 98-99). The latter quote was directed at the Metropolitan Transit Authority, the authority that controls all of the subways and the group that made it their mission to eradicate graffiti on subways. The first quote was directed at the police department and just below the image of the message written on a subway is a picture of two police officers standing inside of a subway with graffiti tags all over the walls and doors

behind them. The writing above the image reads “The boys in blue.” Just like the cartoon caricature representing the opposition on the Contents Page, the police and their task to stop subway art are diminished here by being titled “the boys in blue.” This is the first time that an image in the book lends weight to what Baby 168 and Crime 79 were referring to in their dedication, “To those who run from the law to express their art...Keep Runnin!!!” (p. 2). It turns out graffiti on subways was not just art; it was also a crime.

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) noted that “this elaborate cops and robbers game contributes to one incentive for writing graffiti: to enhance the prestige of the writer in the eyes of his peers” (p. 99). Throughout *Subway Art*, there is no explicit mention of this “elaborate cops and robbers game,” but there are a couple of hints. By focusing on young people, the authors gave graffiti the aura of an exciting new phenomenon, but they did not focus on or exploit the potential excitement of running away from police or of being a wanted criminal for their art. The older people who were set against the innovative, fresh, and exciting new art were given no voice. They had their platform in *The New York Times* in the early 1980s. *Subway Art* was a constructive and curated platform for the graffiti writers.

Getting Up (Castleman, 1982) and *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 2009) devoted many pages to the fight between the graffiti writers and the authorities. In *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) diminished the involvement of the authorities by giving them only two pages and by framing the police as a comical force tasked with the fool’s errand of stopping a brilliant art. This framing, and an answer to this framing, can be read in the up-close image of a portion of the whole-car by Lee in this spread. Lee painted a large Sherlock Holmes character holding a ridiculously gigantic magnifying glass fixed on Lee’s graffiti. Inside of his final letter “E,” Lee wrote “Stop Real Crime.” Lee made the focus on graffiti by the police absurd by the very large magnifying glass and the message that Sherlock Holmes was reading. “Stop Real Crime” reflected the opinion of Lee and graffiti writers that those who were concerned with graffiti as a crime were losing sight of the “real crime” all around the city. The message was magnified for Sherlock and by extension all police.

The close-up picture of this Sherlock Holmes character reveals even more dialogue between the passengers and the graffiti writers. A closer look reveals that, perhaps by using a bunched-up newspaper, someone was able to scratch a message into the silver paint Lee used to cover the windows, writing “Stop the Balony.” This was most likely a passenger who was upset with the whole car and window being painted. This message could be answering “Stop Real Crime” with “Stop the Balony,” which shows that someone was reading the writing on the subway and answering it. Maybe passengers could and did read the graffiti after all. One

thing to notice about Lee's Sherlock subway is that the windows were all painted, which was a nuisance for riders. Although Lee's framing of police assigned to stopping graffiti shows the police as unintelligent officers looking at insignificant crimes, the subway rider's response of "Stop the Balony" talks to the annoyance felt by riders when graffiti writers covered the windows. The small "outsider graffiti" on the window takes away the heroism of the young underdog-graffiti-writers against the irrational iconoclastic police force and allows for more nuance in the understanding of the reception and interaction with the art to be identified. Not everybody liked this art.

The Buff

The next and last two-page spread before the final painted subway in the book was titled "The Buff." Chalfant and Cooper (1984) presented three images: one of the shower-like machine that cleans the spray paint off the sides of subways and two images of graffiti painted on subways by Seen. To buff means to polish, but the cleaning process shown does not polish the subways. In fact, it dulls them. The term "buff" is a cynical term for "cleaning graffiti" because of this dulling effect and is still the slang word in graffiti circles for "to clean graffiti" today, which points to how much of what Chalfant and Cooper wrote in *Subway Art* became fixed into the growing graffiti culture.



(Fig. 26. The Buff, *Subway Art*, 1984)

A close-up image of painted tombstones on a subway with the old-fashioned names of the subways "IRT's," "BMT's," "IND's," along with the proclamation "Graffiti Died" on them takes up most of the two pages. Above that is the last Chalfant photo-stitching in the book, a small image of a window-down whole-car by Seen, which reads "Fuck the Buff." The letters "F" "U" and "K" have been painted over with red bucket paint, censoring the curse word, maybe by a transit worker. The whole subway with the message is so dull it seems to have already gone through a chemical wash, yet the letters all still have white spray paint star

shines making the message sparkle, which adds to the message, as if the buff couldn't stop that message or the writers behind it.⁵²

Seen's message can be read in two ways: (a) the buff destroyed subway graffiti; and (b) graffiti is stronger than the buff and graffiti will find a way. Subway graffiti is now "dead." "Graffiti Died," the tombstone reads. But how could letters painted on a subway die if they were never alive to begin with? As already shown with Cooper's pictures, the graffiti came to life through perfectly timed photos that tapped into the imagination. The photos revealed how graffiti writers filled each tag and masterpiece with agency and distributed personhood. With Chalfant's photo-stitchings, there was a formula and blueprint to create this work that could come to life. In fact, graffiti did not "die" here, in these messages by Seen. It was only the found object, the dilapidated subway of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which was being taken out of the equation. The lament is for the subway being taken away from the art, which highlights the dependence of the art on the found object in the narrative told by *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984).

The opposition forces are at the end of the iconoclast cycle. They destroy the icons of others. As Mitchell (2005) wrote, "What is it about images that gives them such remarkable power to offend people" (p. 125). Mitchell continued, "And why is the response to the offensive image so often a reciprocal act of violence, an 'offending of the image' by destroying, vandalizing, or banning it from view? Iconoclasm, the defacement or destruction of images..." (p. 125). The Buff becomes a faceless iconoclast machine destroying the images that represented the identities of the graffiti writers. The machine is programmed to wipe out the art. No one person, like the mayor, is the actual iconoclast because it is the machine that uses the acid to wash away the graffiti and destroy the images (and the outside of the subways as well). Seen talks to the faceless machine and tells the iconoclast machine what he thinks about it. As Seen wrote on the bottom right, "MTA system we owe you one pay back a bitch." Seen and other graffiti writers have an enemy in common, the faceless non-human MTA, which buffs subway graffiti.

This late introduction to an enemy or an opposition to graffiti, allows for a neat ending to the story told in the book, at once locking the practice and art in a time period and giving it future life by connecting an enemy (iconoclast machines and the adults with no vision) and a cause: urging readers to avenge the young graffiti writers who were forgotten and abused by

⁵² The "B" in "Buff" is designed beautifully. The letter begins to look like a frowning face. I always felt there were facial expressions in many graffiti letters, for example the smiley lower case "e."

taking up this practice in their towns or time periods, initiating a challenge to other young people taken with this art.

Lee's Epitaph (and Challenge)

The final two page spread in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) was Cooper's picture of a Lee whole-car top-to-bottom taken from a subway station platform, with four passengers waiting for their train and partially blocking the view of Lee's whole-car. The station is 180th Street in the Bronx and the buildings behind have been the background of quite a few of the images in the book. In none of those images were people blocking the art. The "Lee" window-down piece is visible in the middle of the subway along with a painted background of grey rocks to cover the whole car. All of the windows are painted but the MTA symbol on the subway is not painted over. Lee thus reminds the viewer of the collaboration with the subways that is needed to make his art. When the windows are buffed, the "Lee" will remain, because it is a window-down piece, but when the doors open, one walks into the "Lee" because it is painted on the doors.

Regarding images, Mitchell (2005) wrote:

But images are also, notoriously, a drink that fails to satisfy our thirst. Their main function is to awaken desire; to create, not gratify thirst; to provoke a sense of lack and craving by giving us the apparent presence of something and taking it away in the same gesture. (p. 80)

This image does fail to satisfy our thirst because the four bodies block our view of the subway. Yet, as the final image of the book, it "awakens desire" by "giving us the apparent presence of something and taking it away in the same gesture" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 80).

Graffiti is dead. The people won't have it anymore.



(Fig. 27. Lee's epitaph, *Subway Art*, 1984)

The tag “Fred” is slightly visible in the piece on the left. The same Fab Five Fred who attempted to paint the Campbell’s Soup whole-car, the same Fab-Five-Freddy who was name-dropped by the group Blondie in the hit song “Rapture” during the early days of hip-hop, was with Lee when he painted this whole-car. Just as Fred opened *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) with a reference and deliberate connection to the Western art narrative, Lee has a message about this art and where it is going. A message written on the subway takes up the bottom right panel. In this Cooper picture, the written message is blocked, but on the next page, the last page in the book, a close-up image of the early hip-hop rap/rhyme written on the side of a 1980 New York City subway, with the MTA symbol left unpainted, is shown. Under the image is written “Epitaph by Lee 1980.” The epitaph reads:

There was once a time/ when the Lexington was a beautiful line/ when children of the ghetto expressed/ with art, Not with crime. But then as/ evolution past, the transits buffing did its/ Blast. And now the trains look like rusted/ trash. Now we wonder if graffiti will/ EVER LAST...????????

That this was written in 1980 points to the idea that graffiti art on the subways had a long drawn out death. If the death of graffiti on subways began in 1980, it may actually have been in the throes of death for much of this book. Knowing that graffiti on subways was a dying art may have inspired some of the writers in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) to make some final brilliant pieces for posterity. If the best images of *Subway Art* are from the late 1970s and early 1980s, then the best of subway art may have been made as it was dying.

Graffiti is dead. Chalfant and Cooper (1984) preserved an image of it with a message asking for graffiti to stay alive, this lament in Lee’s epigraph, “Now we wonder if graffiti will ever last?” (p. 104). This is similar to Austin’s (2001) lament at the end of his book. Austin wrote “I remain convinced that writing manifests the greatest art of the late twentieth century” (p. 271). This book, too, ended on a nostalgic note about this brilliant art.

In Lee’s epigraph, the narrative of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) is voiced, “children of the ghetto expressed with art, not crime...” and “We wonder if graffiti will ever last?” (p. 104). The narrative offers hope to readers of *Subway Art*: If you, too, saw the beauty, the skill, the determination, the egalitarianism amongst the youth, and if you were also upset by the opposition and the faceless machine that destroyed the art in this book, then you can do something to keep graffiti alive. You, too, can be an artist. This book shows you how you, too, can recapitulate the entire history of graffiti art in your city. Chalfant and Cooper said this brilliant art, created and nurtured by young people, was unfairly stopped; but by

capturing this phenomenon and the lessons it taught, they would ensure that it could and would be pirated around the world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in order to closely read *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), I applied Mitchell's (2005) advice and compared the images in *Subway Art* with other images of the same phenomenon from *Getting Up* (Castleman, 1982) and *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart, 1989, 2009). I applied Mirzoeff's (2009) style of reading images to reading the images in the book. I believe *Subway Art* has a vested narrative which lined up against the media stories of the early 1980s about graffiti, as exemplified in Chapter 5 of *Taking the Train* (Austin, 2001). The narrative of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) is supported by texts which came before and after it. The story told in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) is that a pre-adolescent name-writing game played by some young people uptown in the early 1970s was given much attention in the media and became so popular in New York City that, over time, the gamesmanship turned into an art.

In the first 19 pages of the book, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) gave important background information about the life of the art and how it had changed over 10 years. This included information about the two photographers who captured and collated the images in the book and their different approaches to photographing subway graffiti. Their unique approaches brought graffiti to life and allowed for it to be followed to the letter and pirated. They also signaled the limits and delimits of the book - that only certain elite writers would be used to describe the art, other writers and styles would be left out, and no ancillary topics or childish beef would be allowed to control the narrative. The premise of the book was made clear: subway graffiti is art. The simple tag of Taki 183's cohort in the early 1970s was put under a microscope with a kaleidoscope setting and blown up to create the psychedelic graffiti work placed on the sides of subways by such artists as Blade in the mid 1970s. The whole-car top-to-bottom by Midg, caught by Cooper in the South Bronx, captured a frame of the graffiti imagination, which, along with Lee's story and the image of a whole-train driving through the city, helped the graffiti imagination be better understood.

In the didactic parts of the book, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) highlighted the subway as a found object, which was essential to this art. Through photos and text, they taught the ins and outs of how to create graffiti on subways and shared some of the personal and public significations of the graffiti. It became apparent that graffiti was what the graffiti writers created and subway art was an art created through the collaboration between graffiti writers and photographers. The greatest graffiti writers were called kings and they painted the entire

subway from top to bottom. Chalfant and Cooper were invested in portraying graffiti art and the graffiti writers in the best possible light. This is not to say they told a false story or imposed a false understanding of graffiti; rather, they proposed an imaginative new possibility. Chalfant and Cooper invented the tradition of graffiti and showed graffiti and graffiti writers at their best, setting the bar high for other young people who might choose this venture: they, too, should be respectful, friendly, and hardworking individuals.

Chalfant and Cooper (1984) wanted to show in *Subway Art* that graffiti was not essentially about race, class, or gender, and that amongst young people there did exist meritocracy. The book was not called “Subway Sport” or “Subway Fight” or “Subway Dialogue”—but all of these could have been titles of a book about graffiti on the subways in the 1970s. But Chalfant and Cooper did not want to frame graffiti from those perspectives, and so they focused *Subway Art* on the art and did not allow these other ideas about graffiti to monopolize the space in their narrative. By doing so, they created an art called “subway art.”

The end of graffiti art on subways came when the subways were taken out of the equation. The MTA set up washing stations and buffed graffiti. Graffiti on subways was over in New York City because it would not be possible to paint the subways anymore. Lee’s words at the end of *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) became both a eulogy and a challenge to other young people. Because authorities destroyed this art and stopped it from being seen in New York City, the final pages make the audience think about continuing the tradition on their own. One question that arises after reading the end of the book this way is “who will carry the baton of the youthful tradition of writing graffiti?” That unappreciative authorities put an end to this art, and that this art deserves recognition, carries a subtext that the unfair crackdown by adults on young people’s worthy art brings a challenge to have this art reproduced, both for this tradition to continue and for the young artists to get the last laugh.

The art in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) points obviously to the graffiti but also to the framing of the graffiti with the city and its inhabitants and buildings, which is art on top of art on top of art on the subway. The subway is a found object; the people interact; the graffiti is on the subway; there are viewers all over the city.

Both photographers brought a perspective to graffiti which very few had, the technical details of Henry Chalfant and the imaginative perspectives of the graffiti in the environment of Martha Cooper’s choosing. The photographers’ close collaboration with the graffiti writers, and their curating how the graffiti would be presented, inspired others and allowed for the pirating of this graffiti all over the world. It wasn’t just because young people saw images and

wanted to copy those images. The story Chalfant and Cooper (1984) told was a captivating and tightly curated one, which left the door open for adding one's own name to the newly formed tradition of graffiti.

Chapter 6: Conclusion of Thesis

And the sign said “the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls,
and tenement halls...”

-- Simon and Garfunkel (1965), “The Sound of Silence,” *Wednesday Morning, 3 a.m.*

Very superstitious, writing on the wall

Very superstitious, ladders bout' to fall

Thirteen month old baby, broke the lookin' glass

Seven years of bad luck, the good things in your past

-- Stevie Wonder (1972), “Superstitious,” *Talking Book*

“The writing on the wall” is a potent statement, as evinced by Simon and Garfunkel’s interpretation of signs and Stevie Wonder’s connection of interpreting WoWO (or the invention and imagination that the phrase refers to) with other well-known superstitions, above. The phrase “the writing on the wall” carries superstitious, subjective readings, and sometimes factual ideas about writings found on walls and objects, as well as how various cultures at various periods have interpreted them and other signs. What a curious place to write, *on the wall*. Words on walls (and objects) bring an urgency to the meanings of the words (as well as the idea that the words do not mean what they say) in a way that words on paper do not. Yet the meanings recorded in the words written on walls (and objects) are only preserved by being written on paper.

Writings on paper, or text, about WoWO help maintain the meanings assigned to particular WoWO, and, as I have shown in this thesis, can help elucidate how these meanings come to be fixed in the consensus reality. There are no powerfully different rules for writing on paper and writing on walls and objects. In this thesis, I showed how one way of performing WoWO was invented, grew, and was fixed. One could perhaps do the same for other forms of WoWO by using the methods and lessons learned in this thesis. “Street Art” is one form of WoWO, which has become quite popular over the last 20 years, and I’m certain a thesis on how that came to be can also be written, connecting with this thesis.

The story line I followed in this thesis, which is also part of the most well-known story about graffiti, was that of the growth of graffiti from child’s play to an original art, based on collaborative and constructive texts. I identified three key moments of change in the story: the

inauguration of the game; the elevation of graffiti to an art; and the fixity of graffiti as an original art. Each moment was represented by the text which best spoke to that moment of change. I found that adult attention, as established in newspapers and literature, was a major actant for the newly invented youth tradition of writing graffiti in the 1970s to become seemingly very popular. Thoughtful adult and youth collaboration showed that, just as words on paper can tell a story and evoke the imagination of the reader, names on walls and subways also tell stories and evoke the imagination of both writers and readers.

As I suggested in my literature review, Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Communities* and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) *The Invention of Tradition* are valuable analytic tools for looking closely at graffiti. Anderson (1983) emphasized the importance of the printed word for a nation to imagine itself. I found the same to be true for the graffiti phenomenon. I used *The New York Times* article, "Taki 183" (1971), as a foundational text because it was the first printed text discussing graffiti and because it was printed in a popular newspaper. Through the printed word, "Taki 183" allowed for a community of graffiti writers to imagine itself: "hundreds of youngsters, emulating Taki 183, began to 'tag' trains and public buildings all over town" (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984, p. 14), joining the (imagined) community of graffiti writers. The adolescent name-writing game Taki 183 played was captured in print, became a model for reproduction, and was repeated by others.

The discourse around graffiti was elevated to a fever pitch in New York City media in the 1970s and 1980s. Just as it worked towards helping citizens imagine their nation (Anderson, 1983), print capitalism, as seen in both negative and positive writing about graffiti in the 1970s and 1980s, helped graffiti writers to imagine they were part of a community, one that shared similar stories and similar goals. Print capitalism also solidified how graffiti would be read by outsiders. Austin (2001), in *Taking the Train*, reported on the negative media coverage of graffiti, which drew a line with concerns to graffiti in the consensus reality. Austin noted that, per the media, graffiti should be understood as an illegal and menacing act. This polarization of opinion about graffiti created two camps: those who read graffiti as a crime and those who read it as an art.

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), in *The Invention of Tradition*, explained that one way to invent traditions is by connecting them with older recorded happenings. By 1984, the popular story about graffiti found in *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) showed graffiti as part of a tradition by connecting it with the years of controversy around graffiti in New York City, dating back to "Taki 183" (1971). Chalfant and Cooper (1984) used the history of graffiti as represented in the media to place subway graffiti in a tradition. The history helped

strengthen the imagined community of graffiti writers. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) explained that the most successful invented traditions are ones that “established social cohesion, membership of groups, real and artificial communities” (p. 9). For graffiti writers, “Taki 183” (1971), *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), and *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) were major texts, each one adding to the idea of a community of graffiti writers and each one adding to the invention of the tradition of graffiti.

Taking the Train (Austin, 2001) is the most comprehensive academic text on the subject of graffiti and a valuable text for understanding the story of how “graffiti art became an urban crisis in New York City” (front cover). Austin reported on how the negative articles, framings, local sociological facts about New York City, the media at the time, and adult (mis)-management of young people all influenced graffiti to be read as an urban crisis. His thesis prompted an important question that I took up in this thesis, namely, “How did child’s play become an original art?” I framed my thesis in conversation with *Taking the Train*, that is, as a scholarly way of expanding upon the story of the growth of graffiti. The larger story, in which the media framed graffiti as an urban crisis, is interconnected with and augmented by the story of how graffiti became its own original art form, as framed in the three texts I analyzed.

“Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals”

My close reading of the text that inaugurated the graffiti game into the consensus reality, “Taki 183” (1971), showed that graffiti began as child’s play but was recast into a higher stakes game the moment adults became involved. Adult actants, just by being interested in it, shaped graffiti. I found that it is impossible to locate an exact “first name” for graffiti. There were years when the game was being played and only young people were paying attention. The moment adults took constructive and collaborative interest in the game was with the first newspaper article/piece, “Taki 183.” In that article, early names were introduced (e.g., Julio 204 and Taki 183) and the early rules, goals, and ideas about graffiti (e.g., writing all-over, kings, and imagined impact of graffiti) were captured in print.

I found the framing of “Taki 183” (1971) as a Bildungsroman brought the character Taki 183 to realize a powerful individual use for the game: it could help keep him out of the draft for the Vietnam war. The Bildungsroman frame for (the young person’s game of) graffiti works well and allows for graffiti to be imagined as something from which lessons can be learned and rewards can be reaped. Graffiti then becomes part of the Bildung of many graffiti writers, allowing each individual a chance to realize their individual growth and have an individual fantasy about their graffiti. Graffiti has an origin centered in play, which is central

to the appeal of the graffiti phenomenon to young people in cities across the world. Graffiti is a popular youth activity because it is a game created by young people with play at its core.

The Faith of Graffiti

I found that Mailer and Naar's (1974) intervention with *The Faith* was important. With this text, they elevated the child's game of graffiti to an art, connected graffiti with Mailer's paramount philosophy of Hip, and encouraged photographers and graffiti artists alike to take the practice seriously. Even though Mailer and Naar were invested in capturing graffiti in an artistic pose of their own making, based on their understanding of art, Naar still captured meaningful moments of graffiti's growth in styles and Mailer did give valuable reporter-like information about graffiti in 1974. Thus, *The Faith* was highly influential in establishing graffiti as a "thing" and in raising the stakes of graffiti.

In his essay in *The Faith* (Mailer & Naar, 1974), Mailer made various attempts to contextualize graffiti and to frame it in more sophisticated terms than mere child's play. Mailer tried (and failed) to link graffiti to a story about the Great Tradition of art. Instead, he wound up creating a belief in graffiti as art, which would be one impetus of many that pushed graffiti to become its own original art form, as later captured and displayed by Chalfant and Cooper (1984) in *Subway Art*. Thus, Mailer aided in the invention of the tradition of graffiti. With *The Faith*, Mailer and Naar (1974) set the conditions for *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper 1984) to be made.

Subway Art

In *Subway Art*, Chalfant and Cooper (1984) captured, expressed, and fixed graffiti in a particular way. *Subway Art* can be understood as being in dialogue with the negative press about graffiti at the time. Two photographers, along with a select group of graffiti writers, created this book. Along with the important and groundbreaking work all of the graffiti writers of the time created, Chalfant and Cooper emerged as more than mere photographers of graffiti; they were creators and (graffiti) artists in their own right. Their framing, attention to detail, and different artistic approaches to graffiti brought graffiti to life and made it pleasurable for graffiti writers to attempt to recreate the images.

Chalfant's pictures and his method of photo-stitching are instructive for the study of graffiti. Cooper's photographs of graffiti on subways in the context of the city captured the graffiti imagination. Together, Chalfant and Cooper took pictures of the graffiti writers, took their input seriously, and framed graffiti in a mature and respectable light. The images, styles, and methods for grasping graffiti found in their photo essay were pirated across the world. Even in New York City, after the subways were made off-limits for graffiti, with the same

understanding of graffiti and using the imagination, later generations of graffiti writers followed the template of graffiti as it was fixed in *Subway Art*.

The story of graffiti becoming an art is not only about the name or the letters or the style, but also the found object. In *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), that found object was the subway. When imagining the future of graffiti, it is likely that there are still other found objects to be written on. Graffiti moves, ever hip, knowing circumstances change and the hip swing with the times. The story of graffiti includes young people thumbing their noses at adult authority and also the collaboration with and guidance of some artistic adults and young people. Most interesting is that the story of graffiti is not only about graffiti, per se, but is a much larger story, with many fascinating characters, different interpretations, and meanings beyond only one static idea or binary.

Those fascinating characters, different interpretations, and various meanings have led to the proliferation of books and magazines about graffiti, academic conferences, as well as graffiti art fairs. As a scholar and graffiti writer, I try to attend lectures on graffiti or go to graffiti festivals that I find interesting. At these events in New York City, I sometimes spot Henry Chalfant in the crowd or show up to see him as an invited guest, always flanked by graffiti writers trying to talk with him or take a picture with him. In Europe, I have found that Martha Cooper is often billed as the main invited guest. I met Martha Cooper at a conference in London in 2015. We have shared a few emails since then. In one correspondence I asked her for quantitative evidence of *Subway Art's* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) influence. She replied:

Unfortunately I don't have any proof of *Subway Art's* influence. I don't have any information about languages, numbers and facts. Thames and Hudson would have to give you that. I only know that I am now traveling around the world because of it and everywhere I go, writers make a point of telling me how the book changed their lives. I don't think there is any country in the world that doesn't have NY style name/letter graffiti and this includes many places where you would never expect graffiti to be found. For example, I've been to Tahiti to the Ono'u Festival 4 times. It's partly supported by the Tahitian travel bureau. Who could have ever imagined that people might travel to Tahiti to see graffiti? I've also been to Senegal for Festigraff. I've been to festivals in Estonia, Mexico, Columbia, Brazil, the Azores, Portugal, Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Norway, England, Denmark, Ecuador, Italy, France, South Africa, Thailand, Spain, Russia, Georgia (Tbilisi), Scotland, Finland etc. etc. I was invited to the Green Panda graffiti festival in China but wasn't able to go—maybe this year. The

only reason I'm being invited to all these places is because of Subway Art. But I have no hard proof to point to. (M. Cooper, personal communication, Dec 9, 2018)

After Martha Cooper wrote me that information, I looked into these festivals and saw her dressed in similar attire at each one. As a graffiti writer and scholar, I find it fascinating and rather respectful that Cooper is often seen at these festivals wearing a jacket made for her by Caine-1. The same Caine-1 who painted the first whole-train, "The Freedom Train," was referenced in almost every major text about graffiti, and was used as an opening epitaph in *Subway Art* (1984), had a small shop in Queens, NY, where he painted unique artwork onto jackets. Caine-1 gave Martha Cooper a one-of-a-kind masterpiece of a jacket, with her name on the bottom, before his untimely death. Martha Cooper keeps his memory alive (and evokes thoughts of tradition) every time she goes to a graffiti festival or conference wearing that jacket.

When I met Cooper in London, she was not wearing that jacket. She was presenting her other photographs, that is, photographs of subjects other than graffiti, which she has covered over the years. Still, the crowd she drew that evening was there because they knew and respected her work from *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). A fascinating point she made in her presentation, which aided in my reading of graffiti in this thesis, was that all of her many photographic subjects share the common theme of play.

There were three speakers at this lecture. One of them was a barrister from London who was there to explain how he got his graffiti client out of legal trouble. His client was a young man who created a graffiti magazine and he was being charged with creating a product which influenced others to damage the subways of London. The barrister described his argument that the magazine his client made could not be something that influenced others, somehow saying that books and magazines of these types do not influence others. I felt that, in the defense of his client, the barrister took away from Cooper's (the headliner's) major work *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) and did not speak to my experience as one who was heavily influenced by a book, namely *Subway Art*. In the Q&A, I told the barrister I felt he was lying, or at least bending the truth, in order to get his client out of the charges. I told him that *Subway Art* influenced my life and other graffiti writers' lives in ways he minimized when presenting his defense. Cooper seconded my opinion on theoretical terms, and at the same time expressed relief that the barrister's client did not have to go to prison as so many other graffiti writers have. I later apologized to the barrister for being so blunt and rude to call him a liar and that I too prefer graffiti writers staying out of prison as opposed to going to prison based on a theoretical idea.

From my disappointment in the barrister's explanation of how books about graffiti do not influence graffiti writers grew my desire to curate my own conference on graffiti. I organized the Tag Conference in September 2017 at JFKI and the lessons I learned there shaped this thesis.

All of the written text the presenters at the Tag Conference used as evidence for their claims reinforced my understanding that the use of text about graffiti was the best way to academically approach the growth of graffiti from child's play to an original art. (Until then, I had stubbornly, and romantically, always felt that the "text" of graffiti could only be found in the actual graffiti). There were presentations about the tag, or what I label WoWO in this thesis, over thousands of years and throughout many different cultures. Rather than just limiting the discussion to graffiti tags and New York City 1970s culture, WoWO came to be shown as a practice found almost everywhere and throughout time over the last 20,000 years. Thus, I realized how important it was to be specific about my topic for this thesis and not allow it to magically drift off into other times and spaces. Although Cooper could not make it to the Tag Conference, many presenters made reference to *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) in their presentations about the tag.

The initial graffiti project which led to this thesis, the Subway Art History Project, which my friends and I painted in New York City in 2010, connected famous graffiti names and styles with famous people, phrases and movements, opening up ideas of tradition, which led to the question that forms the subtext of this entire thesis:

"What/how/who/where/when/why is the graffiti tradition?" I feel confident that I answered that multi-layered question with this thesis.

While I initially (philosophically) disagreed with the barrister in London about the argument he used to defend his client, now that I have finished this research I tend to think he was not wholly wrong. Not that his argument that books and magazines do not influence their readers was correct, but that the magazine he defended would not have the same influence on the wider proliferation of graffiti as *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) did because subway art is not merely quick snaps of graffiti on subways but an art made in collaboration between graffiti writers, talented photographers, and precise storytellers.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Based on my analysis in this thesis, I have three recommendations for future scholars who will investigate graffiti. As I have defined it and traced its growth over 15 years, graffiti is not simply writing on walls and objects towards a goal easily recognizable and relatable to the consensus reality; it also exists largely in the individual imagination. Therefore, my first

recommendation is to understand that *graffiti evokes the imagination*. It does so in three ways: (a) by creating an imagined community similar to what Anderson (1983) described; (b) by the potential impact that a graffiti writer imagines about their work; and (c) by the use of imagination when viewing images of graffiti, as shown in Cooper's images (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984), where the inanimate object comes to life via movement in a framed context. Even though the found object of the dilapidated subway has been taken out of the equation, and has become more of a white whale for modern graffiti writers in New York City and elsewhere, graffiti writers still look to place their work in spaces that bring the inanimate graffiti to life. They put their names in places that evoke imagination. In addition to trucks and other vehicles that traverse the city, they put the graffiti in places where the visual Doppler-effect can be seen, most notably on highways where viewers pass by the image at fast speeds or sit in traffic and watch the graffiti move by slowly. Some graffiti writers write on rooftops that people can see from subways. The subway still brings graffiti to life, but this time it is the vehicle from which it is viewed rather than the found object on which it is written.

A second recommendation that grows from this study is the understanding that graffiti, for graffiti writers, is not only an art, but is also a sport, a challenge, and/or a different realm of presence. Graffiti viewed as an art is a popular reading, and serves as an impetus to want to create it, especially when the art is found to be part of a tradition. Graffiti is not solely an art, however, because only the best graffiti writers are known as artists based on strict guidelines. Therefore, my second recommendation about graffiti is to recognize *graffiti as part of an invented tradition*. It is only around fifty years old, after all. By studying its emergence and asking questions about the phenomenon, followers and observers of graffiti get a better understanding of the forging of graffiti in the cauldron of the 1970s and 1980s, amidst both angry public opinion expressed in newspapers and non-conformist texts that contested the negative opinion of graffiti by portraying it in respectable and far-reaching ways.

Understanding this also opens up the possibilities for graffiti to go beyond the meanings, styles, and the (by now) stale binary graffiti has been beholden to since "Taki 183" (1971). Graffiti doesn't have to stay static; it is malleable and new traditions can be created from it.

The third recommendation is related to the second, in that graffiti can refer to many different ideas and not all graffiti writers are artists. If one wants to put graffiti art in the context of a great tradition of art, I recommend that scholars *study individual graffiti artists/writers*. If one is interested in discussing the art of graffiti, then one should choose to speak about individual graffiti artists and not the entire world around graffiti in order to find a

connection to art. Research the oeuvre of one particular artist, rather than lumping all graffiti into one category. Graffiti changes. After subways, writers took it different ways and on to different spaces. It is an individualist endeavor, and even though there is a subculture that spans the globe, each graffiti writer is judged upon his or her own merit. The study of graffiti can be expanded. Although New York City was the birthplace of graffiti, graffiti has traveled all-over and so there are also other cities, styles, and stories that deserve to be examined. Close readings of individual graffiti artists and moments will be fruitful and can offer greater insight into what graffiti and WoWO mean at particular times and places. This thesis gives a solid ground to future graffiti and graffiti related studies. Modern street art is often said to take cues from graffiti. This study, along with Austin's *Taking the Train* (2001), serve as a grounding basis for the actual connections modern street art has to graffiti. This thesis points out the imagined and invented in graffiti; at the same time, it reinforces the old traditional and invented expression, "to read the writing on the wall," in the sense that each individual writing on the wall can be closely read, and meaning can be found in unanticipated places.

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Abstract in English

The same style of graffiti, with the same traditional understanding, application, and interpretation, is found in many cities throughout the world. Most, if not all, of this graffiti shares a common point of reference: the 1970s New York City graffiti phenomenon. In this thesis, I examine three framing texts about the 1970s New York City graffiti phenomenon, which transformed the hermeneutics of graffiti and opened it up to becoming the quasi-worldwide phenomenon it has since become. My goal is to present a distinct story of how graffiti became an art.

Each of the three framing texts I examine represents a paradigm shift in the interpretation of the 1970s New York City graffiti phenomenon. These texts located ("Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals," 1971), elevated (*The Faith of Graffiti* [Mailer, 1974]), and fixed (*Subway Art* [Chalfant & Cooper, 1984]) graffiti as a practice and an object. I will approach these seminal texts by looking at the 1970s New York City graffiti phenomenon not as something that has always been defined, but as a growing practice (and later an object), which was filled with imagination and was forged both on walls and objects and in a public dialogue captured in texts.

The primary question for this thesis is: What does a close reading of three paradigmatic texts for graffiti reveal about the process of the construction of graffiti? To cut a lens to re-view graffiti in this study, I bring together two texts: Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Communities* and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*.

This dissertation should be understood as being in-dialogue with the only deep academic study of the New York City graffiti phenomenon, Austin's (2001) *Taking the Train*, asking what might be found if one highlights the imaginative aspects of graffiti instead of the "real" context. What if, instead of seeing graffiti as an "it" already there with emotional energy, one sees a "thing" that was invented. One could then ask what role certain texts had in the invention of this "thing" graffiti and the mostly imagined community it conjures.

Abstract in German

Die gleiche Art von Graffiti mit dem gleichen traditionellen Verständnis, der gleichen Anwendung und Interpretation findet sich in vielen Städten der Welt. Die meisten, wenn nicht sogar alle dieser Graffiti, haben einen gemeinsamen Bezugspunkt: das New Yorker Graffiti-Phänomen der 1970er Jahre. In dieser Arbeit untersuche ich drei Rahmentexte über das Graffiti-Phänomen der 70er Jahre in New York City, das die Hermeneutik von Graffiti verändert und es zu dem weltweiten Phänomen gemacht hat, das es seitdem ist. Mein Ziel ist es, klar anhand der Geschichte nachzuweisen, wie aus Graffiti eine Kunst geworden ist.

Jeder der drei Rahmentexte, die ich untersuche, repräsentiert einen Paradigmenwechsel in der Interpretation des New Yorker Graffiti-Phänomens der 70er Jahre. In *Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals* (1971) wurde Graffiti als Praxis und Gegenstand erstmals wahrgenommen. In *The Faith of Graffiti* (1974) hat Norman Mailer Graffiti zu Kunst erhoben. Und schlussendlich etablierte *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984) das heutige Kunstverständnis von Graffiti.

Um diese Texte zu analysieren, werde ich das New Yorker Graffiti-Phänomen der 1970er Jahre betrachten; und zwar nicht als etwas, das damals schon definiert war, sondern als eine wachsende Praxis, erfüllt mit starker Vorstellungskraft, die an Wänden sowie auf diversen Objekten in der Öffentlichkeit Aufmerksamkeit erzielte, wie diese Texte zeigen.

Die Hauptfrage dieser Dissertation lautet: Was sagt die genaue Lektüre der drei paradigmatischen Texte über den Entwicklungsprozess des Graffitikonstrukts aus? Meine Argumentation ist durch zwei weitere Texte gestützt: Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Communities* und Hobsbawm und Ranger's (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*.

Diese Dissertation sollte als Dialog mit der einzigen eingehenden akademischen Forschung über das Graffiti-Phänomen in New York, Austin's *Taking the Train* (2001) verstanden werden. Im Zuge dessen wird die Frage aufgeworfen, was man herausfinden würde, wenn man die fantasievollen Aspekte von Graffiti anstelle von „realem“ Kontext setzt. Was wäre, wenn man Graffiti nicht als etwas Emotionales sieht, sondern als etwas Konstruiertes. Man könnte folglich fragen, welche Rolle diese Texte in der Entwicklung eines Graffitikonstrukts und in einer vorgestellten Gemeinschaft hatten.

Hiermit versichere ich, alle Hilfsmittel und Hilfen angegeben zu haben und auf dieser Grundlage die Arbeit selbständig verfasst zu haben. Die Arbeit wurde nicht schon einmal in einem früheren Promotionsverfahren angenommen oder abgelehnt.

Februar 28, 2019

Edward Birzin

